SPHINX FINE ART

Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten (Amsterdam 1622 - Amsterdam 1666)

A Mediterranean Harbour with Men-o'War, Shipping and Merchants on a Quay by a Tower

signed and dated on a stone 'J. Beerstraaten 1664' (lower centre)
oil on panel
48 x 65 cm (18⅞ x 25½ in)

This delightful Mediterranean port, filled with Men o'War gallantly displaying the red, white and blue stripes of the Dutch flag, epitomises the mercantile success of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. On the right, a resplendent Man o'War leaves the harbour with full sails, whilst to the left, three further Men o'War are anchored in the harbour, their cargo presumably being tended to. In the foreground, figures standing on the quayside are seen gesturing towards the moored vessels. Two figures, most likely Dutch merchants, distinctively dressed with wide brimmed black hats and white ruffs are in discussion under an arch. The arch forms part of a tower, a bell perched on the top, clearly in a state of disrepair as creeping plants grow within the stonework. In the right foreground, a small wooden vessel is seen unloading wares via a wooden plank. On the bow end of the boat, a man wearing a white turban and tunic converses with another man, suggesting that this port is a hub of international trade.

The background is dominated by an urban Mediterranean landscape. Though the location is not revealed by Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten, the fortifications visible in the harbour and towering mountain in the distance allude to Naples.

It is not known whether Beerstraten went to Italy during his career, though his portrayal of dappled, southern light is noticeably accurate. He also may have copied drawings from Johannes Lingelbach, an Italianate painter who had visited the Mediterranean. The so-called 'Golden Age' of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century was, in part, associated with the significant mercantile wealth accrued from their dominance in world maritime trade. The Mediterranean was the gateway between European and Eastern trade, and *A Mediterranean Harbour with Men o'War, Shipping and Merchants on a Quay by a Tower* portrays the considerable presence of Dutch shipping on the trade route.

Artist description:

Beerstraten may have been a pupil of Claes Claesz. Wou (1592–1665), a marine painter in the Flemish tradition, who seems to have influenced his paintings of sea battles. His southern ports and seashores were influenced by the works of such Dutch Italianate painters as Nicolaes Berchem and Jan Baptist Weenix. Unlike his townscapes, Beerstraten's ports were totally imaginary, sometimes with a well-known northern European building incorporated on the seashore. It is not known whether he went to Italy, although in his paintings the southern light seems to be accurately conveyed, as in the *Imaginary View of a Port with the Façade of Santa Maria Maggiore of Rome* (formerly known as the 'Port of Genoa', 1662, Paris, Louvre). For his Italian subjects he may have copied drawings given to him by Johannes Lingelbach, an Italianate painter who had been to Italy. Lingelbach occasionally painted the figures in Beerstraten's compositions. His drawings represent themes similar to those of his paintings.

His townscapes were mostly winter scenes, as in the first known topographical painting by him: *View of Oude Kerk in the Winter* (1659; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). Although his work reflects the increased public interest in topography in mid-seventeenth-century Amsterdam, there is also a somewhat romantic atmosphere pervading his winter landscapes. His colours are generally tonal and his style soft by comparison with the clearly defined townscapes by Jan van der Heyden. His subjects were also romanticised, as in the *Ruins of the Old Town Hall of Amsterdam after the Fire of 7 July 1652* (1653; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). Shortly before his death Jan Beerstraten painted the *Church of Nieuwkoop* (Hamburg, Kunsthalle), depicting the church under a dark, cloudy sky, with a funeral procession emerging from behind it.

Collections

Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten is represented in the following collections: Hermitage, St. Petersburg; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Louvre, Paris; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, amongst others.