SPHINX FINE ART

Willem van de Velde the Younger (Leiden 1633 - London 1707)

A Dutch Flagship at Anchor attended by Small Boats, the Fleet seen Beyond

black chalk, pen and black ink, grey wash
27.4 x 51.5 cm (10¾ x 20¼ in)

This finely executed pen and ink sketch with grey wash by Willem van de Velde II, depicts a Dutch fleet off the coast of Holland. The flagship dominates the composition, while in the foreground many smaller vessels are seen swaying in the swell of the sea. In the distance, the ghostly figures of the other ships are just distinguishable. According to the sale catalogue of 1911, this scene might depict the Dutch war council on board the flagship the 'Gouden Leeuw' under the command of Admiral Cornelis Tromp, who served in the Anglo-Dutch Wars throughout his naval career.

Although van de Velde's reputation rests on his highly regarded representations of coastal scenes and ships in the medium of oil, such as his *The Gouden Leeuwbefore Amsterdam,* the present work nevertheless demonstrates his technical expertise, executed with apparent ease and freedom of touch. His best productions remained faithful to a vessel's structure and rigging and here, despite its fleeting impression, neither proportion nor accuracy is compromised. Closer inspection reveals a mastery of form and detail, evident in the flagship's ornamentation, its guns and sails, as well as the movement of figures and oars aboard the smaller boats. The delicately drawn ships, careful placing of each vessel, and soft tones achieve a satisfying composition and serene atmosphere - trademark qualities of van de Velde that led to his fame as an artist. Successful in his renderings of the sea, painting calm and storm with equal ability, he proved more than adept at capturing the rich and evocative atmospheres of seascapes, whether in a subtle, refined work such as this, or in a large-scale oil painting.

Van de Velde was born in the Netherlands in a family of artists. He received his training from his father Willem van de Velde I (1611-1693), and from Simon de Vlieger (c.1600/1-1653), both accomplished marine artists. He learnt the qualities of detailed realism from the former, who provided extraordinarily comprehensive records of ships. From de Vlieger he adopted atmospheric effects from the latter and his influence can be seen in van de Velde's oil paintings.

In 1673, van de Velde and his father settled in England where they became a formidable team, producing a vast amount of work, now of historical significance. He was commissioned by Charles II, at a salary of £100, to aid his father in 'taking and making draughts of sea-fights'. Van de Velde I, provided eyewitness drawings of warships and naval actions, which van de Velde II then used to inform his paintings. After his father's death, it became necessary for van de Velde to be present himself at

maritime events; his works began to show a freer approach, being unbound by his father's scrupulous attention to detail. Demand for the van de Velde's work was considerable, and they received commissions from the Duke of York and other members of the nobility. The influence of their studio established the van de Veldes, to all intents, as the founders of the English school of marine painting.

Provenance:

Anonymous sale (possibly M.O. Brenner, Berlin); Amsterdam, R.W.P. de Vries, 14 December 1911, lot 1502, perhaps bought by de Vries for Dfl. 150;
with R.W.P. de Vries, Amsterdam, 1917;
property of an important Dutch collector.

Exhibitions

R.W.P. de Vries, Amsterdam, 1917, *Dessins anciens et modernes: marines et paysages rivérains*, p. 24, no. 1509 (offered for Dfl. 300,-).

Artist description:

A son of Willem van de Velde, the elder, also a painter of sea-pieces, Willem van de Velde, the younger, was instructed by his father, and afterwards by Simon de Vlieger, a marine painter of repute at the time, and had achieved great celebrity by his art before he came to London. In 1673 he moved to England, where he was engaged by Charles II, at a salary of £100, to aid his father in "taking and making draughts of sea-fights", his part of the work being to reproduce in color the drawings of the elder van de Velde. He was also patronized by the Duke of York and by various members of the nobility. He died in London.

Most of Van de Velde's finest works represent views off the coast of Holland, with Dutch shipping. His best productions are delicate, spirited and finished in handling, and correct in the drawing of the vessels and their rigging. The numerous figures are tellingly introduced, and the artist is successful in his renderings of sea, whether in calm or storm.

Collections

Van de Velde the Younger is represented in the following collections: Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan; Hermitage, St Petersburg; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna; Mauritshuis Royal Picture Gallery, The Hague; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Royal Academy of Arts, London; The Royal Collection, London; Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, UK; Boughton House, Northamptonshire, UK; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Dulwich Picture Gallery, London; Harvard University Art Museums, Massachusetts; Irkutsk Regional Art Museum, Russia; Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig; National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK; Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA; The Wallace Collection, London; Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, amongst others.