SPHINX FINE ART

Ludolph Backhuysen (Emden 1631 - Amsterdam 1708)

Shipping by the Dutch Coast

monogrammed on the barrel 'L.B.' (lower right)
oil on canvas
48 x 62 cm (18¾ x 24⅜ in)

The present work shows a fishing fleet off the Dutch coast navigating choppy waters. In the far background, a Dutch man-o'war can be seen. In the rough water a wooden barrel floats on top of a wave, evidently lost from one of the nearby sailboats, and the underside of the cask is monogrammed with Ludolph Backhuysen's initials, 'L.B.'. The sky is dominated by low lying, thick dark clouds, intimating an approaching storm, which is further indicated by the full sails of the fleet, white capped waves and broken water. Backhuysen was an ardent student of nature, and frequently worked from an open boat in order to study the effects of storms. In *Shipping by the Dutch Coast*, one imagines the artist to be perched on the quayside, from which the broken wooden stilts of an earlier structure still visible, deftly recording the movement and fragility of the ships in the whipped and stormy waters.

Backhuysen was a Dutch painter, draughtsman, calligrapher and printmaker of German origin, though he was primarily active in Amsterdam. Backhuysen was from Emden in north-west Germany and he trained as a clerk in his native town. Shortly before 1650 he went to Amsterdam to work for a wealthy merchant, and it was while working there that his fine calligraphy attracted attention. He also displayed skilled use of the pen in drawings, mainly of marine scenes, completed in black ink on prepared canvas, panel or parchment. He probably derived this technique and subject matter from Willem van de Velde the Elder's (1611-1693) pen drawings of the 1650s.

According to the Dutch engraver Arnold Houbraken (1660-1719), Backhuysen learnt to paint using oils from the marine painters Hendrick Dubbels (1621-1707) and Allaert van Everdingen (1621-1675). His earliest paintings utilise a silvery palate and are simply composed, echoing the work of his forerunner, Simon de Vlieger (c.1600-1653). The present work, believed to have been completed c.1660-1665, demonstrates the features characteristic of Backhuysen's early works, such as the more subdued and limited colour palette in comparison to his later, more vibrantly colourful and charged works. Backhuysen did not join the Amsterdam guild of painters until 1663, after which his fame as a marine

specialist rapidly grew. In 1665 he was commissioned by the burgomaster of Amsterdam to paint View of Amsterdam and the IJ (now in the Louvre, Paris), intended as a diplomatic gift for Hugues de Lionne, Louis XIV's Foreign Minister. After van de Velde the Elder and Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707)moved to England in 1672, Backhuysen became the leading marine painter in the Dutch Republic. Unlike the van de Veldes, who were more concerned with representing the technical aspects of sailing vessels and naval battles, Backhuysen concentrated on the ever changing climate and the magnificent skies of the Netherlands. Much of his work venerates Amsterdam and the mercantile trade that had epitomised its Golden Age.

Backhuysen's success won him important commissions from Cosimo III de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany, Frederick I of Prussia, Elector of Saxony, and Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia. The artist exerted great influence upon a number of younger artists, including Abraham Storck (1644-1708). The latter was particularly inspired by Backhuysen's pictorial treatment of sea and sky, as is clealy demonstrated in *Reviewof the Dutch Yachts before Peter the Great* (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London).

Provenance:

Rev. Elborough Woodcock (1801-1877);
by descent to his son-in-law, Edmund C. Johnson (1821-1895) (according to label on the reverse);
by descent to his son, Stuart Henry James Johnson (b.1869), 4 Eaton Place, London SW1;
sale, Christie's, London, 13 December 1996, lot 220;
with Rafael Valls Ltd., London, 1997.

Literature:

Rafael Valls: Recent Acquisitions, 1997, no. 1.

Artist description:

Dutch painter, draughtsman, calligrapher and printmaker of German origin. He was the son of Gerhard Backhusz (Bakhuizen) of Emden, and he trained as a clerk in his native town. Shortly before 1650 he joined the Bartolotti trading house in Amsterdam, where his fine handwriting attracted attention. He practised calligraphy throughout his life, and during his early years in Amsterdam he also displayed his skilled use of the pen in drawings, mainly marine scenes, done in black ink on prepared canvas, panel or parchment. He probably derived this technique and subject matter from Willem van de Velde the elder's pen drawings of the 1650s. Bakhuizen continued to produce pen drawings until the 1660s, some depicting recognisable ships and existing views, such as his *Ships Leaving Amsterdam Harbour* (Amsterdam, Zeemanschoop), others depicting unidentified locations, as in the *Viewof a Dutch Waterway*.

According to Houbraken, Bakhuizen learnt to paint in oils from the marine painters Hendrick Dubbels and Allaert van Everdingen. His earliest known paintings, among them *Ships in a Gathering Storm* (1658, Leipzig), have a silvery-grey tonality and simple composition and resemble the work of his presumed teachers and also that of Simon de Vlieger. A new element, frequently repeated in Bakhuizen's later work, is a brightly lit strip of sea, forming the transition between the dark foreground and the sky. He was a recognized marine painter by 1658, the year in which he painted the background with ships for Bartholomeus van der Helst's *Portrait of a Lady* (Brussels). He painted the backgrounds for van der Helst's pendant portraits of *Lieutenant-Admiral Aert van Nes* and his wife *Geertruida den Dubbelde* and also for *Vice-Admiral Johan de Liefde* (all 1668, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum).

Still referred to in 1656 as a calligrapher and in 1657 and 1660 as a draughtsman ('teyckenaer'), Bakhuizen did not declare his profession as painter until his third marriage in 1664 to Alida Greffet. He painted a portrait of *Alida* wearing sumptuous fabrics, alluding to the fact that she ran a silk business (of which he was the nominal owner). On her death in 1678 she left him a considerable fortune. Two years later Bakhuizen married again, his fourth wife being Anna de Hooghe, a prosperous merchant's daughter.

Bakhuizen did not join the Amsterdam guild of painters until 1663; thereafter his fame as a marine specialist was rapidly established. In 1665 the burgomaster of Amsterdam commissioned him to paint a *Viewof Amsterdam and the IJ* (Paris, Louvre), intended as a diplomatic gift for Hugues de Lionne, Louis XIV's Foreign Minister. With the resumption of hostilities between the Netherlands and England in 1672, Willem van de Velde the elder and Willem van de Velde the younger moved to England, and Bakhuizen became the leading marine painter in the Netherlands. His success brought him commissions from high places: according to Houbraken, Cosimo III de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany (1610–1723), Frederick I of Prussia, Elector of Saxony, and Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia, visited his studio. (Peter the Great was reputed to have taken drawing lessons from him).

After 1665 Bakhuizen's compositions became more daring, his colours brighter and the atmosphere more dramatic, with ominous cloudy skies. His subject matter was often inspired by historical or military events, as in the *Return of the 'Hollandia' to the Landsdiep in 1665*, the *First Day of the Four Days' Battle*, *Soldiers Embarking at the Montelbaanstoren* (1685, London, Apsley House), and the *'Brielle' on the Maas near Rotterdam* (1689, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum). Paintings such as the *Arrival of Stadholder King William III in the Orange Polder in 1691* (1692, The Hague, Mauritshuis), and the preliminary sketches for it (Paris, Petit Palais; London, National Maritime Museum), demonstrate that decorative effect was thought more important than historical accuracy. Unlike the van de Veldes, who were more concerned with representing the technical aspects of sailing vessels and naval battles, Bakhuizen depicted the perpetually changing climate and the magnificent skies of the Netherlands. Much of his work, moreover, glorifies Amsterdam and the mercantile trade that had made it great. With this in mind he made his first etchings in 1701, at the age of 71 as he proudly stated on the title page of *D'Y stroom en zeegezichten* (*Views of the River IJ and the sea*), a series of harbour scenes preceded by a representation of the Maid of Amsterdam in a triumphal chariot.

The portraits Bakhuizen painted of numerous friends are of less value artistically than as a record of his good relations with contemporary scholars and literary figures. His drawings are less well-known, although they were much sought after in his own day due to their fine depiction of atmosphere and meticulous rendering. His steady hand is evident in the precision with which he drew intricate ship's rigging, while he could also sketch fluently with an almost Rembrandtesque virtuosity. The finest examples of his drawings are in the print rooms of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam and the British Museum, London, amongst others. None of Bakhuizen's children by any of his marriages became artists, but one of his grandsons, Ludolf Bakhuizen the younger (1717–82), did become a painter and imitated the work of his grandfather.