

## GALLERY NOTES\*

from

# JOHN MITCHELL FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

# JOHN MITCHELL FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

17 AVERY ROW, BROOK STREET, LONDON W1K 4BF TEL: +44 (0)20 7493 7567

WWW.JOHNMITCHELL.NET ENQUIRIES@JOHNMITCHELL.NET



ADRIAEN VAN DE VELDE (1636-1672)

An extensive coastal Landscape, with a shepherd, horseman and other figures oil on canvas, 113/8 x 211/4 ins. (29 x 54 cm.)

Provenance:
E. Rhone, Paris, 1861;
L.Perire, Paris, 1872:
with Nieuwenhuys, Holland, 1912;
with Leonard Koetser, London, 1972.

### erature:

Hofstede de Groot, Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Painters of the Seventeenth Century, Vol. IV, p. 469, no. 47, as 'An excellent work, according to W. Bürger [Théophile Thoré-Burger (1807-1869)]'; Bart Cornelis & Marijn Schapelhouman, Adriaen Van de Velde – Dutch Master of Landscape (London 2016), pp. 70 & 72, fig. 88.

t first sight there seems to be little connection between the two pictures offered in this edition of *Gallery Notes*, one a pen and wash drawing of an English warship and the other an oil of an expanse of lowlying, sandy country. In pointing seawards, however, does the barefooted shepherd not only help the horseman on his way but also draw our attention to the link between the painting and the drawing? For, to quote from the poem by Arthur Hugh Clough, 'Far back through creeks and inlets making/ Comes silent, flooding in, the main' – in this instance the North Sea, domain of Willem Van de Velde the Elder, the Dutch *zeeschilder* ('sea painter') and father of the two artists featured here.

Whereas the marine paintings of both the Willems, father and son, are no strangers to Gallery Notes, the distinctive landscapes and historical subjects of the younger brother, Adriaen (or 'Van de Velde the Youngest' as he might be dubbed), are less familiar to us, with the last one being published in Gallery Notes as long ago as 1951 (see illus below.). However a major exhibition of his work held at Dulwich and at the Rijksmusem in 2016-17 not only revived general appreciation of this extraordinarily versatile artist but also reminded connoisseurs of Dutch art of Adriaen's exalted stature in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At a time when Vermeer and Frans Hals were still relatively unknown, pictures by Adriaen Van de Velde, with their warm sunlight and Italianate motifs, were very much part of the syllabus for aspiring collectors, and it was never in doubt that Adriaen should be included with brother Willem in the nine-volume Catalogue raisonné of the most eminent Dutch,

Flemish and French painters compiled between 1828 and 1842 by the London art dealer John Smith (1781-1855). This magnum opus in turn formed the basis of Hofstede de Groot's equally monumental inventory of paintings of the Dutch masters marshalled between 1907 and 1928. Hofstede's fourth volume is shared between Jacob Ruisdael, Hobbema, Adriaen Van de Velde and Paulus Potter, a grouping which for reasons outlined below was not unintentional.

Painting in early modern Europe was often a family business, particularly in the Low Countries, and so Adriaen, who was according to his earliest biographer Houbraken 'impelled by an inherited natural passion for the arts of drawing and painting', grew up in the flourishing Van de Velde studio in Amsterdam. It seems, however, that the endless canvas, cordage and canons of his father's and brother's ships may not have been to this gifted young man's taste, and a spell working in Haarlem in the 1650s with a master of Dutch Italianate landscape painting, Jan Wijnants, seems to have determined his future direction. Over the next twenty years or so he produced an extensive body of paintings, drawings and prints of sunlit views with herdsmen and cattle, beaches, dunes, forests, winter scenes, portraits in landscapes and historical pictures. Moreover, a handful of religious subjects, most notably his large Annunciation of 1667 (Rijksmuseum), attests to a further break with his upbringing and his leaning towards the Roman Catholic faith. In 1657 he married Maria van Ouderkerk, herself a Catholic, and managed to have all five of their children baptised as Catholics in resolutely protestant Amsterdam.



Adriaen Van de Velde, *The Piping Herdsman*; with John Mitchell, 1951.

As acknowledged by Hofstede de Groot in the sequence of his fourth volume, Adriaen not only fell under the influence of the great Ruisdael but also added the figures, or 'staffage', in a handful of his pictures, while Paulus Potter seems to have set the example for Van de Velde's forest scenes, his sensitive and detailed rendering of animals and the sharp, clear light of his pictures from the 1650s. The time Adriaen spent working with Wijnants must account for the similarities in his mature landscapes to those of his teacher, and their superficial resemblance to the work of Philips Wouwerman, another Haarlem painter noted for his equestrian figure groups.

In spite of these considerable external influences, however, it seems that Adriaen continued to work out of the family studio, and he collaborated with his brother incidentally between 1652 and 1661, with the resulting pictures – nearly all beach scenes – being signed off with the workshop's signature W.V.V. In the Wallace Collection, in the same room as Adriaen's best essay in the Italianate idiom, *The Migration of Jacob* (1663), hangs Willem's Embarkation of Charles II at Scheveningen, in which it is clear that a number of the characters on the foreshore and in the surf are by Adriaen, as his 'people' are always rather more convincing and less stiff than his brother's. Indeed it was as a superb painter of figure groups on a small scale that Adriaen's services were sought by some of the other afore-mentioned artists. It is also recorded that in 1667 his father sold Cosimo de Medici a Jan Van der Heyden view of Amsterdam with figures by Adriaen. Without ever quite braving the waters himself and producing a true seascape like his father and brother, he did pick up on their studies of fishermen at the water's edge, and alone painted a series of views of the beach at Scheveningen between 1658 and 1670. With comparable examples in The Mauritshuis (1665) and Carter Collection, Los Angeles (1670), one his most celebrated pictures is the 1658 Beach at Scheveningen in the museum in Kassel and seen in the 2016-17 show, with the memorable figure of a man at the right-hand edge in a broad-brimmed hat and with his trousers rolled up, gazing out to sea. Furthermore, from its recent emergence on the market, at least one true marine painting is known to be signed by both Willem and Adriaen, The yacht 'Mary' and other vessels off Amsterdam (Sotheby's London, 4th July 2007, lot 28).

Our painting belongs to a group of relatively empty, heathland or dune landscapes, some of which were illustrated on the same page of the excellent monograph by Bart Cornelisz. accompanying the Dulwich exhibition (see <u>Literature</u>.) Among them is a small black-and-white reproduction (marked as '..early 1660s. Present whereabouts unknown') which is almost certainly the present canvas before the recent removal by our conservator of a later addition to its top edge, and without the figures lower right which were once over-painted. There is

also a later, French engraving derived from our composition (Witt Library, -039341 in 'Landscapes with figs., with horses/or donkeys, with mounted figs. (65) Both the figure groups in our picture - the rider and shepherd, and the woman on the path with a younger companion - appear in various guises in a number of known Van de Veldes, most closely and both together in Panoramic summer landscape with a horseman and a post wagon, 1661 (Dulwich, cat. 9, pp.70-71). Although more inland in feel, with its sparse, open terrain and sandy tracks, our painting resembles his Dune crossing with fishing pinks, possibly at Zandvoort (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans) in the proportion of land and sea to sky, and in the way the small-scale staffage is dispersed across the lowest third of the composition. In evoking the wide skies and distant horizons of the Low Countries, and with its assorted travellers and animals, this small but engaging picture is a welcome addition to the known 'oeuvre' of one of the best Dutch landscape painters, and reminds us how, a century later, English artists like Gainsborough and Julius Caesar Ibbetson, with their sandy tracks, horsemen and carters, continued to look to this kind of Dutch painting for inspiration.

Various theories abound in explaining the Van de Veldes' seminal and definitive removal from Amsterdam to London in the winter of 1672/3. No doubt the turbulent events of what the Dutch called the *rampjaar* ('year of disaster') and the collapse in the market for their paintings was a major factor, as was the invitation to the people of the United Provinces to settle in England in a proclamation issued by King Charles II in June 1672. A further consideration was perhaps their prior acquaintance with Charles and his brother, James, Duke of York (for almost certainly both Willems and Adriaen were present at the event on the beach at Scheveningen commemorated in the Wallace Collection Embarkation), and certainly a keen instinct for the preservation and continuation in London of their business. Often overlooked as a reason, though, is the unfortunate fact of Adriaen's death in January 1672 at the age of only thirty-five. On top of the marital difficulties experienced by both Willems, the loss of a cherished son and brother must have been a further incentive to leave Holland.

As is well known, almost as soon as they landed in England the Van de Veldes found favour with the royal brothers and their circle, and by the summer of 1673 they were already at work. Willem the Elder clearly had as shrewd an eye for business as he did for naval architecture, and not only did he ensure that the work of the studio now promoted the Restoration navy, but he must also have overseen the pronounced change of direction in his son's oil paintings. Gone now were the limpid 'calms' and peaceful scenes of ships and fishing boats at anchor of his Dutch period, which are among his most prized works

5



### WILLEM VAN DE VELDE THE YOUNGER (1633-1707)

An English Two-Decker firing a Salute, with Longboats and other warships

pencil, pen and ink, and wash over stylus indications, a 30mm. strip added by the artist on the left, watermark, 11% x 16% in. (295 x 423 mm.); with fine French Louis XIII antique frame with laurel and berry ornament.

<u>Provenance:</u> Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester (1697-1759), Holkham Hall, Norfolk, England, until 1991; Christie's London, 2nd July 1991, *Old Master Drawings from Holkham*, lot 66;

Eberhard W. Kornfeld, Bern, Switzerland, (Lugt 913b) until 2024.

Literature:

A. E. Popham and C. Lloyd, *Old Master Drawings at Holkham Hall* (Chicago 1986), no. 320.

today. Instead, the move to London seemed to usher in livelier seas, and the vessels of his new masters were shown riding out storms and prevailing in heavy seas, purposefully echoing perhaps the travails of the Stuart ascendancy.

This sea change in the son's paintings from the English period did not, however, extend to their work on paper, which was carried on by both men as vigorously and as profusely – if not more so - and in the same style as when they were still in Holland. There remain in existence today several thousand drawings by the Willems Van de Velde, with approximately fifteen hundred alone in the National Maritime Museum and a corpus of several hundred in the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam (the large majority there being by the father). Gallery Notes is not the right forum for a more thorough discussion of the Van de Velde drawings and their relationship to the paintings, but it will suffice here to say, firstly that they are richly varied in subject, composition and technique, ranging from the merest suggestion of shipping far off in a few strokes of pale wash, to large, full-bodied, three-dimensional technical studies of 100-gun ships of the line in pen and ink, and wash, so detailed and precise that they have proved indispensable as documentary evidence to historians of the navy of Samuel Pepys. No book on the Anglo-Dutch Wars or the navy of the later Stuart period is without numerous reproductions of Van de Velde drawings, even though little credit is given to the remarkable story of the lives of the Dutchmen who left these almost photographic records of the ships involved. In between these two extremes - the slightest wash sketches of billowing sails on the horizon and the closeup, technical studies - lies a vast number of drawings which are a combination of both. Among the most celebrated are the father's rapid sketches of naval engagements on the high seas, made up close and in the heat of battle, an achievement making him not only a true 'plein air' marine painter more than a century and a half before Turner, but perhaps one of the first ever war artists. In many of the drawings not of specific events (in which the father excelled), however, firm attribution to father or son remains in my view very difficult, or 'problematic', to use a fashionable academic term! This opinion is echoed by the art historian Sir Christopher White in his catalogue of their drawings in the Victoria & Albert Museum: 'The connoisseurship of drawings by the elder and younger Willem van de Velde is an imprecise science.' (Jane Shoaf Turner and Christopher White, Dutch & Flemish drawings in the Victorian and Albert Museum (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 2014).

Not only does our example belong to that category of drawings which are indisputably by the Younger (as confirmed by the great scholar of the Van de Veldes, Michael Robinson, when he saw it at Christie's in 1991) but it is also one of his more exceptional later ones. Unlike many of the drawings by

both men, this one is not necessarily intended to portray a particular ship. Van de Velde has not, for example, detailed the stern of the principal warship to the extent that it can be firmly identified, even though he was capable – and often did – in drawings of this scale. To assert that it was intended to be a compositional study for an oil, however, would also be misleading; there is no known painting with which the drawing can be paired, and, given the level of detail in the hull of the principal vessel, it was probably intended to be a finished work of art in its own right, even though the set of the sails seems to have been left unresolved judging by the re-workings which Van de Velde has left in evidence. Robinson's suggested date of around 1685 accords with the class of ship, probably one of twenty seventy-gun ships built to the establishment of 1677, and which were launched in the period leading up to the accession of King James II. The ship envisaged here closely resembles the English 2nd and 3rd rates seen in his drawings of the same period at the National Maritime Museum (accession numbers PAH4119, PAH6259, PAH6260 and PAH6261). All the two-deckers had two rows of large stern windows, and some had open stern galleries, while the Stuart arms were usually to be found in the intervening row of panelled decoration between the windows. Ours may be weighing anchor and setting sail, since there is no anchor visible at the bow yet, and the main foresail might be filling; the longboats carry away visitors from the ship, while a salute is fired on the starboard side (away from the viewer.) This can only be conjecture, of course, and the ship might just as easily be coming to anchor; one of the joys of studying these drawings is the inevitable speculation as to what is really happening. It pays to study this sheet with a magnifying glass, for it reveals Van de Velde's extraordinarily rich technique; for example, the gun ports on these ships had carved laurel surrounds, and it seems that first the correct washes were applied for each one and the attendant shadows caused by itself and the canon, and then each port was further worked over with pen for highlighting. The pen and ink, and wash work in the stern is wonderfully loose and artistic, but all the time confident and, with hatching to enhance the shadows, highly effective. (There are faint grooves over the outlines of some parts of the drawing which suggest Van de Velde may have used it for an offset, meaning that he himself was more than satisfied with it.)

This looser, spirited style is characteristic of Willem Van de Velde the Younger at his mature best, and it is hard to find a comparable sheet in public collections. We are especially pleased that we have been able to find the antique Louis XIII frame, as it would be hard to think of a better complement to the drawing.

James Mitchell March 2025

8



A famous boxwood model of a first-rate from around the same period as our drawing. ©Science Museum Group Collection

### GALLERY NOTES°

is published to acquaint readers with the paintings offered for sale at John Mitchell Fine Paintings. We hope that in receiving them you will share the interest and enjoyment which they have brought to collectors throughout the world for over sixty years.

## JOHN MITCHELL FINE PAINTINGS

EST 1931

17 AVERY ROW, BROOK STREET, LONDON W1K 4BF TEL: +44 (0)20 7493 7567

WWW.JOHNMITCHELL.NET ENQUIRIES@JOHNMITCHELL.NET

