



TERTIUS
GALLERY

JAN ABRAHAMSZ. BEERSTRATEN

Amsterdam, 1622 - 1666

A Dutch Three-master and other Shipping off a Rocky Swedish Coast



Additional Information:

Oil on panel

Signed with initials bottom, to left of centre 'I B'

Size:

35.4 by 48.4 in. | 89.8 by 123 cm.

Provenance:

By descent in an English Noble Family

Description:

Under a sunny sky with towering clouds a Dutch ship sails. More Dutch vessels are seen in the middle zone and further distance. A Swedish three-master under full sail approaches from the right middle ground. Between the two coastlines a stiff breeze makes the waves go up. The torn flags tell us the ships have survived even heavier weather. The long shadows on the choppy water add another dramatic note.

The scene takes place off the Swedish coast on the Sound (T'Sondt), a narrow strait between present day Denmark and Sweden where Dutch mercantile ships sailing to the Baltic had to pass through. The Dutch called their trade with countries bordering on the East Sea their "moedernegotie" (mother-trade). As the backbone of their economy this trade was of fundamental importance to the Dutch Republic.

The Dutch had to pay the Danish toll to pass through the Sound. In 1644 the Danish king dramatically increased the charges. The Dutch replied with adding war ships to their trade convoys thus making the Danish rethink their decision. In 1658 Sweden threatened to annex Denmark in order to control both sides control the Sound. To prevent Sweden from achieving this, the Dutch state sent a war fleet under the command of Lieutenant-Admiral Jacob van Wassenaer Obdam to secure their passage to the Baltic and to aid the Danish. The Dutch won this *Battle of the Sound*, also depicted by Jan Beerstraten (Scheepvaartmuseum in Amsterdam), and the Swedish fleet had to abandon their siege. The sudden death of the Swedish king Charles X in 1660 brought a definite end to the threatening situation and only then could the Dutch ships again sail to the Baltic undisturbed.

Beerstraten's preserved oeuvre consists of paintings and drawings with dated works from 1642 to 1666, the year of his death. He probably started his career painting landscapes before focusing more and more on seascapes and harbour views from the early 1650s onwards. Interestingly, Beerstraten regularly depicted subjects relating to the trade with the Baltic and beyond.

Apparently he dwelled in circles where he could recruit clients for this specific subject matter. The already mentioned gigantic canvas with the *Battle of the Sound* is one example. Recently a sizable panel was sold at Christie's in Amsterdam showing a view of a bay with rocks, possibly Smeerenburg; one of the settlements on Amsterdam, a small island north of Spitsbergen bordering on the Arctic Ocean used for whale fishery.¹

Beerstraten travelled extensively through the Netherlands, documenting his visits to the many towns in still-preserved drawings. The artist is also known to have travelled to Norway and Sweden. This of course begs the question whether the present harbour view could be topographically accurate and based on drawing made *sur le motif*. This does not seem to be the case: The castle on the left bank cannot be identified as one of the castles on the Swedish coast along the trade route of the Dutch ships. The same fortified structure appears, albeit in slightly altered form, in another, Mediterranean harbour views.² In many of his coastal scenes Beerstraten displays a penchant for fanciful and exotic architecture while also painting city views that are topographically faithful, of his native Amsterdam and its environs in particular. It is nonetheless very likely that we are looking at the Sound through Beerstraten's imaginative eyes, given the two coastlines facing each other.

This sweeping view constitutes one of the artist's finest works. Given its large dimensions and the use of an excellent quality oak wood panel it will have been a commission, one would think possibly from an admiral of a Baltic convoy or an investor in the Baltic trade.³ The ship in the centre of the composition could very well be a ship's portrait.⁴ It flies the flag of the Zeeland admiralty from its main mast so it is conceivable that Beerstraten's patron was a member of this body.⁵ Another Dutch three-master moored at the coast also appears to fly the Zeeland flag. Both Dutch and Swedish ships fly red flags from their sterns but Beerstraten did not include any recognizable emblem on them. From the 1660s onwards the coat-of-arms and flag of the Dutch States General was a golden lion on a red background. But since both parties fly red flags Beerstraten could have represented the blood flag, indicated a heightened state of vigilance between the Dutch and Swedish vessels. Beerstraten thus probably depicted this scene against the backdrop of the tense political situation between the Republic and Sweden during the 1650s. Typical for Beerstraten is the decidedly un-Dutch fall of light

on the water and the imposing cloudscape. This quality is often praised in his work and he is often compared for it to the famous French landscape and harbour view painter Claude Gellée (1604/05 - 1682).⁶

Jan was the son of Abraham Danielsz from Emden. He married in Amsterdam Magdalena Bronckhorst, the daughter of an ebony worker, in 1642. From his first marriage he had eleven children, eight of which still alive

at the time of their mother's death, among whom Abraham (born 1643 or early 1644) and Johannes (baptized 8 August 1652) also became painters. Jan remarried shortly after his first wife died in 1665 but he himself died the next summer. Jan lived all his life in Amsterdam, first in the Elandstraat but after he married, he moved to a house near the Haarlemmerpoort, where he had a shop sign hung out with the name 'De schipbreuk' (The shipwreck). In 1651 he bought a house opposite the Nieuwe Doolhof on Rozengracht and here hung that same sign. An inventory of his estate drawn up after his death includes painting by fellow painters such as Jan Porcellis, Jan van der Heyden, Philips Wouwerman and Pieter de Hooch.

Condition Report:

The following condition report has been provided by Martin Bijl of Bijl Restauratie - Art Conservation, Kennemerstraatweg 174, 1815 LE, Alkmaar, The Netherlands, martin@bijlrestauratie.nl, an independent restorer (former head of restoration department Rijksmuseum) who is not an employee of TERTIUS GALLERY.

This painting is in extremely good condition overall. This work is painted on a panel made from five pieces of wood. The panel is flat, and the paint layer is crisp and stable. The lowest joint runs about 12 cm. above the underside and 8 cm. under the horizon. The upper joint runs through the billowing clouds and second top joint 4 cm. above the top of the flag of the royal castle.

As one would expect, a few minor retouches have been added throughout the sky to address some of the woodgrain pattern that developed over time. There are minor retouches in the darker sails of the vessels in the lower right.

The varnish is clear, even and semi-glossy. The horizontally grained wood panel displays a very slight lateral warp on the lower right corner. This painting has no need of treatment or conservation and may be displayed in its current excellent state.

Notes:

¹25-26 November 2014, lot 57 in Amsterdam.

²For instance one that was auctioned in Paris (Ader) 12 October 1984 (115 x 167.5 cm).

³The lion's share of Beerstraten's output is thought to have been produced on spec for the free market. See for this: L. Bronkhorst, "De schipbreuk' van Jan Abrahamsz. Beerstraten. Hét atelier voor betaalbare marineschilderijen in Amsterdam', *Desipientia* 23 (2016), nr. 2, p. 18-22.

⁴Jan Beerstraten did paint 'portraits' of real shipping. Compare for instance his *Squadron of Ships under Command of Sijbrand Barandsz Waterdrincker leaving from the Taag Estuary* formerly with art dealer Theo Daatselaar (shown at Tefaf 2013; present whereabouts unknown), which contains four warships, three of which could be identified. Another example is his *View of the IJ with the Ship 'De Windhond'* (present whereabouts unknown). This was a war ship that formed part of the fleet that in 1656 together with the Danish war fleet successfully fought against the Swedish. Numerous other examples can be mentioned.

⁵In many of Beerstraten's marines and harbour views ships flying the Zeeland admiralty flag can be observed. Some of them even feature Zeeland sites as a backdrop. Two paintings in the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen show Zeeland ships respectively with Flushing and Fort Rammekens in the background. Middelburg was the second, and a leading port in the Republic and Zeeland was a powerful province. This may in part account for the prominence of Zeeland ships in Beerstraten's oeuvre.

⁶A 'View of an Italian sea port, with ships and figures, as fine as Claude' was auctioned on 18 June 1783 in London as lot 48. And on 24 September 1832 in Paris a marine was sold 'd'une couleur étonnante et vapoureux comme Claude Lorrain'.

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UV and IR Report:

The following condition report has been provided by Martin Bijl of Bijl Restauratie - Art Conservation, Kennemerstraatweg 174, 1815 LE, Alkmaar, The Netherlands, martin@bijlrestauratie.nl, an independent restorer (former head of restoration department Rijksmuseum).

(UV) ultraviolet examination - Condition Report

March 26th, 2020

RE: painting 'A Dutch Three-Master and other Shipping off a Rocky Swedish Coast' by Jan Abrahamsz. van Beerstraten (1622 - Amsterdam - 1666)

Close further UV and IR examination under laboratory conditions reveal an excuisitely intact main body of the painting with only light and expected surface retouch on some clouds, some ship sails and beam joints.

Very light and few retouch all-over in comparison to any painting this age.

Retouching is only visible under ultra violet light. The main centerpieces of this painting are immaculately intact, from the liquid brushwork of the foreground and fine detail throughout the ships including every minutiae of the rigging, the rich colour and texture of the figures, the dark sail and whole body of the ships.

The more distant shore building and ships further away to the center right are also finely preserved, with no wear visible nor retouching on even the furthest ships on the distant central horizon.

The great cloudscape above is beautifully intact throughout the lower and central sky, with the little old retouches mentioned above all near the uppermost edge, towards the right.

Overall excellent condition.

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(IR) Infrared examination - Condition Report

Interesting detail on the IR image is the adjusted front sail size of the main ship at center by the artist himself.

Overall excellent condition.

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Frame Report:

The capital ebony, piano lacquered hand-made wooden panel frame is approximately 30 years old. The Beerstraten frame is hand-made by John Davies Company of London.

It is the same type of frame as used to reframe Ruisdael's 'Landscape with Waterfall' (1668) for the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam by John Davies framing.

Davies has been one of the world's foremost suppliers and framers of 17th Century frames for over 52 years. Including; Private Collections, Rijksmuseum, Mauritshuis, UK Royal Collection, Victoria & Albert Museum and Louvre to name a few.

The original frame had deteriorated. It is very rare for a frame to survive the painting, rarely Old Masters are encountered in their original 17th-century frames.

Choosing a suitable frame for an Old Master is no simple matter. Especially considering the enormous variety available from different periods. Which is why specialists are often called in. Frame-making is John Davies of London's speciality.

For years current fashions were considered more important than an appreciation of the historical perspective. It was only in 1984, with the publication of 'Framing in the Golden Age', accompanying a similarly-titled Rijksmuseum exhibition also with the help of John Davies, that a change occurred.

This seminal work was the first to explain to a wide audience how seventeenth-century paintings were originally framed. For many it came as a surprise, and for art-lovers it was a revelation, to see the extent to which a frame determines the ambience of a painting. Authentic seventeenth-century frames are exceptionally rare and naturally expensive. English frame-maker John Davies therefore decided to specialize in new frames based on old models. He has a 250-page catalogue and store of expertise. He can tell exactly what kind of frame a particular work would have had.

He choose the black, piano lacquered, panelled cassette frame for the Beerstraten based on other paintings by the same artist and based on the deteriorated original frame.

The frame is in excellent condition, has been pre-treated for woodworm and displays no lateral warping.



Perspective with a 6'2" tall man:

