



Reinier Nooms, called Zeeman  
Dutch, 1623 or 1624 - 1664

## *Amsterdam Harbor Scene*

c. 1654/1655

oil on canvas

overall: 61 x 81.8 cm (24 x 32 3/16 in.)

framed: 81.9 x 102.2 x 5.72 cm (32 1/4 x 40 1/4 x 2 1/4 in.)

Inscription: center right on the flag: R.Zeeman

The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund 2011.3.1

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### ENTRY

*Amsterdam Harbor Scene* is a beautiful example of Reinier Nooms's skill in combining first-hand knowledge of maritime life with artistic excellence, enabling him to create highly realistic depictions of not only the ships and the myriad activities enlivening this busy port, but also the changing atmospheric character of the sky and water. [1] Amsterdammers were justifiably proud of their city and its harbor—the source of the city's prosperity. Then, as now, visitors were taken on boat tours of the bustling port; and the crest of Amsterdam on the canopied sloop in the foreground of this painting indicates that its well-dressed passengers were guests of the municipal government. [2] Billowing clouds, fluttering flags, and slightly choppy water all add to the immediacy of the visual experience.

The distinctive line of wooden breakers that delineates the harbor proper, with openings at regular intervals to allow ships to enter and exit, identifies this scene as Amsterdam's harbor in the IJ estuary. Each opening was barricaded at night by a guard who placed a floating tree trunk (*boom*) or chain across it; correspondingly, the guard sheds flanking each opening were called *boomhuisjes*. [3] On the far left, two warships, their gun ports open to air out the decks, are moored along the

outside of the breakers. Two men standing in front of a *boomhuisje* observe the departure of a small sailing sloop toward the broad waters of the IJ. [4]

Inside the harbor, oceangoing vessels, including a warship and three merchant ships, are undergoing maintenance and repairs. To the left of center, two men on a temporary platform suspended from a railing are using fibers and pitch to caulk the hull of a large three-master. A workman on the large raft below tends to the vat of hot pitch suspended above a fire. A couple of small boats are tied to the raft: a man in a blue jacket seems to lower a fish trap into the water, while two women lean over the side of their skiff to do laundry in the waters of the IJ. Nooms's careful depiction of the rigging on these ships epitomizes his expert eye for nautical details. For example, he carefully records the complex system of masts on each ship. Square-rigged sailing vessels generally had three masts (spars) consisting of at least a lower mast and a topmast, but larger ships required a third section, the topgallant mast. In port (or in stormy weather), an upper spar could be struck so that its yard rested on the cap of the mast below it, after which the spar was lashed to the lower section, as is the case with the three-master that is being caulked. [5] Lashed spars are even more visible on the careened ship in Nooms's *Caulking Ships at the Bothuisje on the Y at Amsterdam* [fig. 1], while the jumble of masts, spars, and rigging on its warship at anchor inspire awe for the expertise of Holland's mariners.

Anchored behind the three-masted merchantman in *Amsterdam Harbor Scene*, is a *fluyt* bearing small white-and-red flags is a *fluyt*. With maximum cargo space and minimal crew requirements, the *fluyt* was the workhorse of the Dutch Republic's renowned commercial fleet. [6] The vessel in the center background has been careened (hauled onto its side) in order to expose the hull so that it can be caulked below its waterline. The open water of the IJ beyond the breakers is dotted with other ships.

Nooms enlivened the blue-gray tonality of the overall scene with a sensitive use of light and restrained use of brighter colors, preserving an overall clarity of form while subtly drawing the eye to the warship that is moored in the sunlit section of the harbor at the right. [7] Touches of gold give the decorations on the ship's stern a wonderful three-dimensionality, while delicate white highlights animate the numerous figures and activate the undulating surface of the water. The remarkable triangular cloud formation that seems to rise up from the horizon is likely *zeevlam* (sea flame), a fog bank that develops very suddenly above coastal waters, in this case the waters of the Zuiderzee, the inland sea just northeast of Amsterdam. [8]

Nooms used a similar triangular cloud in the background of *Two Ships Careened for Caulking the Hulls*, an engraving published in 1650 as part of a series of harbor views [fig. 2].

This harbor scene was in all likelihood commissioned by a member of the powerful Amsterdam regent family Bicker. The image of a castle on the warship's *tafferel* (or taffrail, the painted panel on the stern) identifies the ship as the *Huis te Swieten*, an important warship in the fleet of the city's Admiralty [fig. 3]. The warship was named after Castle Swieten (or Zwieten), since 1632 the country estate of Cornelis Bicker (1592–1654). In 1646, the artist Roelant Roghman (Dutch, 1627 - 1692) made four drawings of the castle for his large series on castles and country estates in the provinces Holland and Utrecht. One of these four drawings was almost certainly the model for the warship's *tafferel* [fig. 4]. [9]

The *Huis te Swieten* (sometimes *Huys te Zwieten*) was an impressive warship with a fascinating history. The Admiralty of the Italian port city of Genoa had commissioned the vessel from the shipyard of the Amsterdam Admiralty. However, following the ship's launch in 1653, it was not delivered to the Genoese. At that time the Dutch Republic was embroiled in the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–1654), so Amsterdam's Admiralty requisitioned the state-of-the-art vessel for its own fleet. [10] Soon after the vessel's launch, the celebrated marine painter Willem van de Velde the Elder (Dutch, 1611 - 1693) included the *Huis te Swieten* in a series of drawings depicting naval ships participating in that war [fig. 5]. [11] A few years later Willem van de Velde the Younger (Dutch, 1633 - 1707) also depicted the *Huis te Swieten*, incorporating it into the left-hand background of *A Dutch Flagship Coming to Anchor with a States Yacht Before a Light Air*, 1658 (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich). [12] The Admiralty of Amsterdam owned the warship from its launch in 1653 until 1661, when it was sold to the Amsterdam chamber of the Dutch East India Company (known by its acronym VOC). [13] The crossed anchors to the right of the rudder denote the Admiralty, while Amsterdam's city crest (three vertical crosses) can be seen above the rudder. Given the presence of the Admiralty crest and the absence of the initials of the VOC, Nooms must have painted this work prior to 1661. [14]

At first glance, the carved figure of a very old man atop the stern [fig. 6] would seem to symbolize Neptune, however it is rather unlikely that the sea god would be represented as an elderly man without a trident. A more likely explanation is that the stern figure actually depicts the greatest Genoese mariner of all time, the famous *condottiere* Admiral Andrea Doria (1466–1560). Not only had the municipal

government of Genoa commissioned the ship, but it was actually known in the Dutch fleet by its nickname, “The Great Genoan.” [15] The model for the carved figure was probably Agnolo Bronzino’s famous portrait *Andrea Doria as Neptune* [fig. 7].

Andrea Doria, however, is not the only admiral with a connection to the warship. Once commandeered into the fleet of Amsterdam’s Admiralty, the state-of-the-art *Huis te Swieten* served as the flagship of one of Holland’s greatest naval heroes, Michiel de Ruyter, when he led an armed convoy to the Mediterranean in 1653–1654. As Lieutenant Admiral of Holland and Westfriesland, De Ruyter captained the *Huis te Swieten* on several other missions, including an expedition to eradicate piracy along the coast of North Africa in 1661–1662. None other than Reinier Nooms accompanied Admiral de Ruyter on that voyage, and upon his return from the Mediterranean, Nooms painted four large canvases for the Admiralty depicting the port cities of Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli on the Barbary Coast, and Valetta on Malta. It is not certain, but it is very likely that the Admiralty of Amsterdam specifically recruited Nooms to create a visual record of the expedition.

It is highly probable that *Amsterdam Harbor Scene* was commissioned by Cornelis Bicker or one of his brothers. Throughout the second quarter of the 17th century the Bicker clan occupied the pinnacle of Amsterdam’s political and economic life. The four Bicker brothers—Andries (1586–1652), Jacob (1588–1647), Jan (1591–1653), and Cornelis—dominated Amsterdam’s municipal government to the extent that they, together with their inner circle, were known as the “Bickers’ League.” Building on the groundbreaking international ventures of their father, Gerrit Bicker (1554–1604), the commercial activities of the four brothers spanned the globe. [16] They were initiators, chief participants, and directors of various joint-stock companies, such as the Dutch East India Company, the Levant Company, the Dutch West India Company, and several others. The Bickers’ economic success led Holland’s most celebrated poet to write the following ode in their praise:

How widely did the Bickers' banner  
cast a shadow over the great ocean,  
slicing through it with richly laden ships  
that hauled the world's golden harvest onto Holland's bosom. [17]

Each of the four brothers dedicated himself to trade with a distinct part of the world, a division of labor that in all likelihood was intentional. Cornelis Bicker—who

purchased the castle and country estate Swieten in 1632—was one of the cofounders of the Dutch West India Company, which focused on trade with Africa and the Americas. Cornelis thrice served as burgomaster of Amsterdam, most importantly in 1650, the year that Prince Willem II of Orange overstepped his prerogatives as stadholder when he tried to enter the city by force. Acting decisively, Cornelis and his brother Andries—a director of the Amsterdam chamber of the Dutch East India Company, a very wealthy trader with Russia, commissioner of the city's Admiralty, and a 10-time burgomaster—ordered the defenses of Amsterdam to be readied for action. Faced with closed gates and primed cannons on the city walls, Prince Willem was forced to withdraw his troops; Amsterdam's firm stance under Bicker leadership is considered a significant moment in Dutch republicanism. [18]

Cornelis and his country estate in Swieten are not the only connections between Nooms's painting and the Bicker family. Cornelis's brother Jan focused on trade with the Levant (the eastern part of the Mediterranean) and operated a thriving shipbuilding enterprise on a new man-made island off Amsterdam's shoreline that he purchased in 1631, an island known ever since as Bicker's Island. [19] Reinier Nooms included a view of Bicker's Island and the harbor of Amsterdam in his compilation of engravings *Verscheijde Schepen en Gesichten van Amstelredam* (Various Ships and Views of Amsterdam) published in 1654.[fig. 8] Bicker's shipyard personnel also would have taken care of the routine maintenance and repair of ships, as shown in the Gallery's painting. Nooms's engraving of Bicker's Island includes a *boomhuisje* at the entrance of the harbor section known as the Nieuwe Waal, with Jan Bicker's shipyard on the left. In *Amsterdam Harbor Scene*, another guardhouse farther out along the same row of breakers allows us to determine Nooms's exact viewpoint: the northeastern shore of Bicker's shipyard, looking across the IJ.

Reinier Nooms specialized in maritime subjects at the height of Dutch maritime, commercial, and artistic supremacy. Well-traveled and perhaps even a professional sailor, Nooms signed his works with his nickname "R. Zeeman" (sailor), often, as here, on a flag proudly fluttering from the top of a mast. Drawing on his intimate knowledge of ships and maritime life, Nooms created engravings and paintings that are so accurate that the settings, activities, and specific vessels can be identified. With its excellent condition, stunning light effects, and pleasing composition, *Amsterdam Harbor Scene* embodies the best of Nooms's astute observations of daily life in this bustling port.

Henriette Rahusen

June 30, 2017

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Reinier Nooms, *Caulking ships at the Bothuisje on the Y at Amsterdam*, 1650–1668, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. SK-A-759



**fig. 2** Reinier Nooms, *Two Ships Careened for Caulking the Hulls*, engraving from *Diverse inschepingen en dergelijken* (Amsterdam, 1651–1652), fol. 4, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-OB-20.588

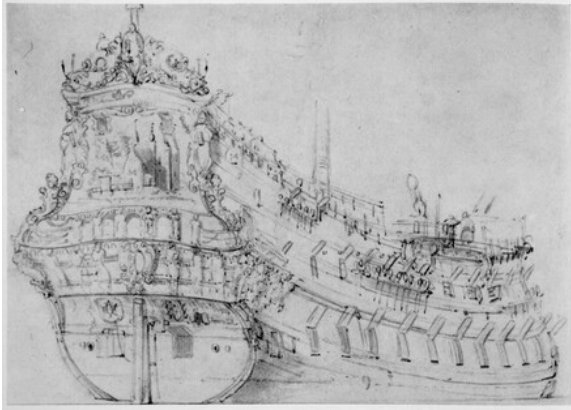


**fig. 3** Detail, the stern of warship Huis te Swieten, Reinier Nooms, called Zeeman, *Amsterdam Harbor Scene*, c. 1654/1655, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund, 2011.3.1



**fig. 4** Roelant Roghman, *Schloss Swieten*, 1646–1647, pen in brown and brush in gray, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, inv. 15130



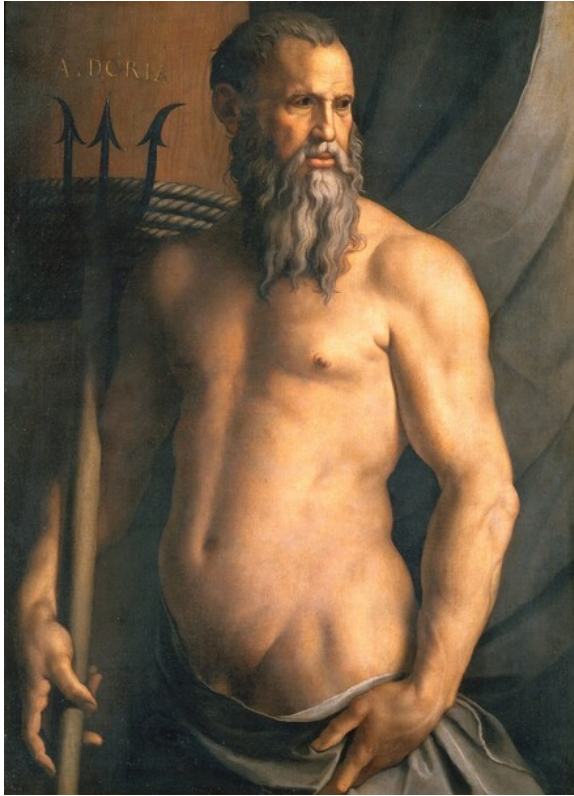


**fig. 5** Willem van de Velde the Elder, *Huis te Swieten*, 1653, black chalk, present location unknown



**fig. 6** Detail, the carved figure on the stern of the Huis te Swieten, Reinier Nooms, called Zeeman, *Amsterdam Harbor Scene*, c. 1654/1655, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington, The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund, 2011.3.1





**fig. 7** Agnolo Bronzino, *Ritratto di Andrea Doria in veste di Nettuno* (Andrea Doria as Neptune), c. 1540–1550, oil on canvas, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Scala / Art Resource, NY



**fig. 8** Reinier Nooms, *Bicker's Eylandt* engraving from *Verscheide Schepen en Gesichten van Amstelredam*, Amsterdam, 1654, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-OB-20.527

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## NOTES

- [1] Literature on the career of Reinier Nooms is exceedingly sparse. For a brief discussion of his work, see Laurens J. Bol, *Die holländische Marinemalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Braunschweig, 1973), 289–296. See also Jeroen Giltaij and Jan Kelch, *Praise of Ships and the Sea: The Dutch Marine Painters of the 17th Century* (Rotterdam and Berlin, 1997), 277.
- [2] The city crest denotes municipal ownership, so the people in the larger sloop are likely dignitaries treated to a harbor tour.
- [3] Old maps and profile views of Amsterdam clearly depict the breakers in the IJ estuary and the *boomhuisjes*. See, for example, Justus Danckert's *Profiel*

*van Amsterdam* of c. 1685.

- [4] The artist Roelant Roghman made a nice drawing of a *boomhuisje* in 1645. See Stadsarchief Amsterdam (Collectie van Eeghen), image no. 010055000046.
- [5] John H. Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail* (Annapolis, 1984), 20, 114, 117, and 119.
- [6] Nooms included this particular *fluyt* in one other painting, but unfortunately in neither work is the decoration of the stern sufficiently clear to positively identify the ship. The second painting, in a private collection, was exhibited in 2010 in the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, and was reproduced in Martina Sitt, “Schiffbau im Dienste der Nation,” in *Segeln, was das Zeug hält!: Niederländische Gemälde des 17. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Martina Sitt and Hubertus Gassner (München, 2010), 123 repro.
- [7] The flag on the main mast of the warship bears the artist’s signature (in gold): “R. Zeeman,” the nickname meaning “sailor” with which Nooms signed his paintings.
- [8] The phenomenon tends to occur on balmy days in late spring or early summer, when much warmer air hits seawater that is still relatively cold. For a description of *zeevlam*, see the website of the Dutch Royal Meteorological Institute, <http://www.knmi.nl/cms/content/36735/zeevlam>, accessed December 9, 2011.
- [9] An engraving of Castle Swieten (or Zwieten) as it appeared in 1606 (but that was only published in the early 18th century) further confirms the ship’s identity. See Abraham Rademaker, *Kabinet van Nederlandsche en Kleefsche Outheden: Geteckent en in’t Koper gebragt door A. Rademaker* (Amsterdam, 1725), fol. 95.
- [10] The 786-ton ship was armed with four cannon that shot 24-pound balls, 22 18-pounders, 20 8-pounders, and 14 4-pounders; its crew at the time consisted of 106 seamen and 80 marines. The warship had a draught of 15 feet. In battle against the English in 1665, about 300 marines were crammed aboard. In 1653, the Amsterdam Admiralty requisitioned a second ship commissioned by the Genoese; christened *Huis te Kruiningen*, it was nicknamed “the Small Genoan” in contrast to *Huis te Swieten*, which was known as “the Great Genoan” ([http://koti.mbnet.fi/felipe/Netherlands/Netherlands\\_ships\\_1648-1659/netherlands\\_ships\\_1648-1659.html](http://koti.mbnet.fi/felipe/Netherlands/Netherlands_ships_1648-1659/netherlands_ships_1648-1659.html), accessed March 9, 2011).
- [11] In Van de Velde’s drawing, Castle Swieten on the *tafferel* is clearly identifiable. The drawing was at Sotheby’s, London, December 10, 1968, lot 59. My gratitude to Gregory Rubenstein, Sotheby’s London, who graciously provided this reference and the 1968 catalog image.
- [12] George S. Keyes, *Mirror of Empire: Dutch Marine Art of the Seventeenth*

*Century* (Cambridge, 1990), 172–174. For Van de Velde the Younger's canvas in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, see <http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/12402.html>, accessed February 4, 2011.

- [13] Under the ownership of the VOC, the ship departed for Ceylon (Sri Lanka) on April 11, 1661. As part of the VOC fleet, the *Huis te Swieten* provided convoy protection to the company's large cargo ships during the risky return voyage from Asia, when they were loaded to the brim with precious goods. See <http://www.vocsite.nl/schepen/detail.html?id=11996>, accessed December 9, 2011.
- [14] Frank L. Fox, *The Four Days' Battle of 1666* (Andover, 2009), 113. At the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1664–1666), the VOC lent the *Huis te Swieten* back to the fleet of the Dutch Republic. In September 1665, at the height of the war, the English navy captured the ship in battle, after which it was incorporated into the English fleet as the *House of Swedes*. Fox calls *Huis te Swieten* the best ship captured by the English in the Second Anglo Dutch War. In 1667 the warship came to an ignominious end when the English scuttled it at the mouth of the River Thames to prevent the Dutch fleet from sailing upriver. See also J. J. Colledge, *Ships of the Royal Navy: The Complete Record of All Fighting Ships of the Royal Navy*, 4th ed., revised and updated by Ben Warlow (Philadelphia and Newberry, 2010), 188. Colledge lists the warship as *House de Swyte*.
- [15] Andrea Doria, despite his long career as a mercenary in the employ of King François I of France and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, always gave precedence to the affairs of his home town. As “Liberator et Pater Patriae,” Doria refused the appointment to become Doge of Genoa, settling instead for the title “Censor for Life.” In this role he firmly ruled Genoa until his death at age 94. See the biography of Andrea Doria, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Andrea-Doria-Genoese-statesman>.
- [16] For biographical information on the Bicker family, see Johan Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam, 1578–1795*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1903), 1:173–175. In 1653, the year the *Huis te Swieten* was launched, Jan Bicker served as one of Amsterdam's four burgomasters and Andries Bicker had just finished a term as Raad (commissioner) of the Admiralty. Cornelis Bicker was burgomaster in 1646, 1650, and 1654, and Andries held that post 10 times between 1627 and 1649.
- [17] “Zoo wyt als Bickers vlagh den grooten Oceaen Beschaduwde, en doorsnee met ryck gelade schepen Die 's weerelts gouden oegst in Hollants boezem slepen.” See Joost van den Vondel, *De werken van Vondel*, vol. 5 (1645–1656; reprint Amsterdam, 1931), 842, see [http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe05\\_01/](http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/vond001dewe05_01/), accessed March 3, 2011.
- [18] Erlend de Groot, ‘A Touch of Exoticism: Foreign Coastal Scenes in Dutch

Marine Painting' in *Turmoil and Tranquillity: The sea through the eyes of Dutch and Flemish masters, 1550–1700*, Jenny Gaschke, ed. Greenwich, 2008, 33–36.

[19] Bicker's Island is one of three islands that was developed in the waters of the IJ estuary as part of the city expansion of 1610.

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The primary support is a medium-weight, plain-weave canvas that was lined to multiple layers of fabric and attached to a modern stretcher. The original tacking margins were cut away unevenly; consequently, the original canvas is not square. Original cusping along all four edges can be seen in the x-ray images and is strongest along the top and bottom edges. This indicates the dimensions of the painting were not significantly altered when the tacking margins were removed, although the sides may have been reduced more than the top and bottom edges.

[1]

The lowest lying visible paint layer is gray but it is unclear if this is the ground layer. An underdrawing was not visible using infrared reflectography. [2] The paint medium is estimated to be oil and the layers were thinly applied. The sky and water were painted broadly, wet-into-wet, and the figures, ships, and other elements were also painted wet-into-wet but generally appear to be over drier layers.

The painting is in good condition. Due to the nature of the rigid lining, the canvas weave is enhanced, and there is an overall prominent craquelure pattern. There is a mended and retouched compound tear located in the cloud directly above the ships that overlap the careened vessel. There are additional retouched damages in the sky, scattered throughout the water, and along the edges. In general, the retouching is slightly discolored. The extent of old varnish discoloration is unclear under both natural light and ultraviolet radiation; however, the overall restoration varnish is even and saturates the paint.

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## TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] X-radiography was carried out with a Comet Technologies XRP-75MXR-75HP tube, and the images were digitally captured using a Carestream Industrex Blue Digital Imaging Plate 5537 (14" × 17"). The parameters were 20 kV, 5 mA, 25 seconds, and 100 inches distance (from source to plate). The resulting digital images were composited and processed using Adobe Photoshop CS5.
- [2] Infrared reflectography was carried out using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera filtered to 1.1–1.4 microns (J filter).
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## PROVENANCE

Probably commissioned by the Bicker family, Amsterdam.[1] Pieter Locquet [d. 1781]; (his estate sale, Amsterdam, 22–24 September 1783, no. 448); Mi[...].er.[2] Private collection, England; (sale, Bonhams, London, 12 September 2009, no. 82); (Johnny Van Haeften, Ltd., London); purchased 19 January 2011 by NGA.

[1] The painted panel on the stern of the warship in the painting bears an image of a castle, which identifies the ship as the *Huis te Swieten*, an important warship in the fleet of Amsterdam's Admiralty. The warship was named after Castle Swieten (or Zwieten), since 1632 the country estate of Cornelis Bicker (1592–1654), a member of the most powerful family in Amsterdam at the time. One of the four Bicker brothers—Andries (1586–1652), Jacob (1588–1647), Jan (1591–1653), and Cornelis—likely commissioned the painting from Nooms, who executed other paintings as well as engravings that included views of Bicker family property.

[2] A copy of the sale catalogue, annotated with buyers names and prices, is available on the Internet Archive:  
<https://ia800800.us.archive.org/18/items/catalogusvaneenu00locq/catalogusvaneenu00locq.pdf> (accessed 26 June 2017). The middle letters of the buyer's name are not clear.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

2018

Water, Wind, and Waves: Marine Paintings from the Dutch Golden Age, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2018, unnumbered brochure, fig. 5.

2021 Clouds, Ice, and Bounty: The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund Collection of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2021, no. 10, repro.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2011 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr., and Daniëlle H.A.C. Lokin. *Communication: Visualizing the Human Connection in the Age of Vermeer*. Japanese ed. Exh. cat. Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; Miyagi Museum of Art, Sendai; Bunkamura Museum of Art, Tokyo. Tokyo, 2011: 20, fig. 2.
- 2011 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr., and Daniëlle H.A.C. Lokin. *Human Connections in the Age of Vermeer*. Exh. cat. Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; Miyagi Museum of Art, Sendai; Bunkamura Museum of Art, Tokyo. London, 2011: 13, fig. 2.
- 2012 Bruyn Kops-Rahusen, Henriette de. "De Thuishaven van de Familie Bicker." *Maandblad Amstelodamum* 1 (2012): 34-43, 35 fig. 1, 36 fig. 2 (detail), 38 fig. 5 (detail).
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