NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS
Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

Circle of Jacob Adriaensz Bellevois
Anonymous Artist

Jacob Adriaensz Bellevois
Dutch, 1620/1622 - 1676

Dutch Ships in a Lively Breeze

probably 1650s

oil on canvas
overall: 122.5 × 147.8 cm (48 1/4 × 58 3/16 in.)
framed: 144.78 × 170.18 × 13.97 cm (57 × 67 × 5 1/2 in.)
Gift of Mrs. Robert Giles 1947.3.1

ENTRY

Under the billowing clouds of an expansive sky, a large three-master, carrying the Amsterdam coat of arms on its stern, sails in brisk winds through crowded shipping lanes. While no land is visible, the mixture of both large and small vessels sailing in a variety of directions suggests that the setting may be one of the broad river estuaries along the coast of the Netherlands that were so important for fostering the Dutch mercantile empire. Nevertheless, given that the ships seem to be generic in character rather than identifiable, it would appear that the scene is a fanciful construction conceived in the artist's workshop. [1]

The attribution of this painting is difficult to determine, in large part because the condition is poor and the surface is heavily Overpainted. A more essential problem, however, is that the quality of the work is not very high, indicating that the artist was not a master of the first rank. Ships are ill-drawn and do not sit comfortably in the water, the waves are not convincingly rendered, and the composition lacks focus and a sense of cohesion.

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When the painting was accepted by the National Gallery of Art in 1947 it was attributed to Abraham Storck (1644–1708), presumably on the basis of an old label that was once attached to the back of the original canvas that read: “Storck Dietsch 1696—Shipping in the Scheldt.” Storck, however, was a rather talented marine painter, whose style is quite different. Instead of the elongated, insubstantial forms of the vessels found in this painting, he gave his ships a physical presence. [2]

The attribution to Storck was changed in 1964 after Horst Gerson suggested, on the basis of a photograph, that the painting was close to the manner of Hendrick van Anthonissen (1606–after 1660). [3] This Amsterdam marine painter, who studied with his brother-in-law Jan Porcellis (before 1584–1632), was an effective painter of naval battles, but he never developed Porcellis’ compositional sensitivity or achieved the atmospheric qualities that emanate from the older artist’s palette. Anthonissen’s less accomplished style is in many ways quite close to that found in this painting, although his mastery of ship details quite surpasses that evident here. [4]

A closer comparison, however, can be made with the work of another retardataire marine painter, Jacob Adriaensz Bellevois (Dutch, 1620/1622 - 1676). This Rotterdam artist was influenced by Jan Porcellis’ son, Julius Porcellis (c. 1609–1645), who practiced his tonal style in that port city. Just as with Anthonissen, however, Bellevois never did develop into an effective tonal artist, in large part because he remained wedded to earlier pictorial traditions, particularly those of Hendrick Vroom (1566–1640). [5] Whether painting shipwrecks or vessels sailing in a brisk wind along the Dutch coast [fig. 1], Bellevois spread his vessels randomly along the breadth of the picture plane rather than uniting them into an integrated whole. While his palette remained largely limited to monochromes of gray and brown, he differentiated between foreground and middle ground with artificially constructed zones of shadow and sunlight rather than with the diagonal compositional schema developed by Julius Porcellis and his father. Also characteristic of his style is that he painted rather loosely, never softening details of the boats or of the riggings so that they merged atmospherically into the broader tonal character of the image. All of these mannerisms are evident in the Gallery’s painting. Also consistent with his style is the lack of weight felt in the material of the sails and, perhaps most tellingly, the distinctive staffage figures that populate the ships. The figures in Bellevois’ paintings are quite schematically rendered and almost always wear hats with wide, flat brims.

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The one mitigating feature in any effort to attribute this work to Bellevois is that the quality level is perhaps lower than his standard. His whitecaps tend to be more softly rendered and integrated into the waves than they are in this work. Likewise, the three-dimensional qualities of his ships are usually more convincing than they appear here. Whether this range of quality is acceptable within his work is uncertain given our fragmentary knowledge of his life and work. Little is known of the evolution of his style, thus one cannot say whether this painting would date early or late in his career. Perhaps Bellevois had a workshop, or perhaps the problems noticed here are exacerbated by the painting's poor condition. At this time too many unknowns exist to be able to establish a firm attribution for this work.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

fig. 1 Jacob Adriaensz Bellevois, *Two Warships Bringing in a Capture*, 1660s, oil on panel, Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

NOTES

[1] Margarita Russell, in a memo in the NGA curatorial files, suggests that the prominent ship in the foreground is "an East Indiaman."

[2] Margarita Russell, in a memo in the NGA curatorial files, speculates that the

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reference to Dietsch [Dietzsch] on the old label was to a member of a prolific eighteenth-century family of Nuremberg painters and graphic artists who produced paintings in the Dutch manner. For Johann Israel Dietzsch (1681–1754) and his family, see Ulrich Thieme, Felix Becker, Fred. C. Willis, and Hans Vollmer, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 37 vols. (Leipzig, 1907), 9:275–277; and Horst Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Haarlem, 1942), 98, 327. Russell's hypothesis is that this painting was executed by a member of the Dietzsch family after a now lost painting by Storck that was dated 1696. Since comparative material does not exist to buttress her arguments, and since nothing in the manner of execution suggests that the painting is eighteenth century in origin, it is perhaps more prudent to conclude that the inscription on the old label is not reliable than to try to base an attribution upon it.

[3] Horst Gerson letter to Perry Cott, November 17, 1964, in NGA curatorial files.

[4] Quite close to Van Anthonissen in style is the work of Aert Anthonisz (1580–1620), alias Aert van Antum, an Amsterdam follower of Hendrick Vroom (1566–1640) about whom little is known. For both artists, see Rupert Preston, *The Seventeenth-Century Marine Painters of the Netherlands* (Leigh-on-Sea, 1974), 2, 65–66; and Laurens J. Bol, *Die holländische Marinemalerie des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Braunschweig, 1973), 11–29, 36–40.

[5] For the importance of Vroom for the development of Dutch marine painting, see Margarita Russell, *Visions of the Sea: Hendrick C. Vroom and the Origins of Dutch Marine Painting* (Leiden, 1983).

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The picture support is composed of two pieces of fabric sewn with a horizontal seam just below the center. The tacking margins were removed when the painting was lined, but cusping at the edges suggests that the original dimensions have been retained. The fabric support sustained damage in the form of a long tear in the upper right, in the sky. A thin, reddish brown ground was laid overall. The sky, the most thickly painted area of the picture, was painted first, followed by the water, and then the boats. The paint used for the water and boats is thinly applied. The paint is in fairly poor condition, with extensive abrasions and much repaint. Overpaint covers several centimeters on either side of the seam and the tear, and extends beyond the perimeters of the several small but significant losses in the sky. The varnish is very discolored. The painting has not been treated while at the National Gallery of Art.

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PROVENANCE

Mrs. Robert Giles [1862-1947, née Frederica Rodgers], Washington, D.C.; bequest 1947 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1954 Extended loan for use by The White House, Washington, D.C., 1954-1960.

1969 Inaugural Exhibition: European Paintings, The Art Museum, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, 1969-1970, no cat.

1972 Extended loan for use by The Supreme Court of the United States, Washington, D.C., 1972-1986.

1986 Extended loan for use by Secretary Richard Lyng, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 1986-1989.

1989 Extended loan for use by Secretary Samuel Skinner, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C., 1989-1992.

1992 Extended loan for use by Secretary Andrew H. Card, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C., 1992-1993.

1993 Extended loan for use by Secretary Federico Pena, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C., 1993-1998.

1998 Extended loan for use by Secretary Rodney Slater, U.S. Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C., 1998-2001.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1965 National Gallery of Art. *Summary Catalogue of European Paintings and Sculpture*. Washington, 1965: 8, as *Ships in the Scheldt Estuary* by Circle of Hendrik van Anthonissen.

1968 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings and Sculpture, Illustrations*.

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Washington, 1968: 2, repro., as *Ships in the Scheldt Estuary by Circle of Hendrik van Anthonissen.*

1975 National Gallery of Art. *European paintings: An Illustrated Summary Catalogue*. Washington, 1975: 14-15, repro., as Ships in the Scheldt Estuary by Circle of Hendrik van Anthonissen.

1980 Archibald, Edward H.H. *Dictionary of Sea Painters*. Woodbridge and Suffolk, 1980: 60, repro. 54, as by Hendrick van Anthonissen.

1985 National Gallery of Art. *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. Washington, 1985: 31, repro., as Ships in the Scheldt Estuary.

1989 Archibald, Edward H.H. *Dictionary of Sea Painters*. 2nd ed. Woodbridge and Suffolk, 1989: 67, repro. 56, as by Hendrick van Anthonissen.

1995 Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue. Washington, 1995: 19-22, repro. 21.

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