

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

VP4997

JAN ABRAHAMSZ. BEERSTRATEN

(1622 – Amsterdam - 1666)

View of the Beach at Egmond-aan-Zee

Indistinctly signed and dated on the prow of the boat
on the right: *JA...STR..TEN 165(5?)*

Oil on panel, 35¼ x 53⅞ ins. (112.1 x 134.8 cm)



PROVENANCE

John Entwisle (1856-1945), Kilworth House, Leicestershire

Thence by inheritance to his second wife, Florence A. Entwisle, Kilworth House, Leicestershire

By whose Executors sold, Christie's, London, 27 March 1953, lot 73 (as signed and dated
1653), for £220 to Drown

With William R. Drown, London

Anonymous sale, Cabral Moncada Leilões, Lisbon, 5 July 2021, Lot 235

Anonymous online sale, Sotheby's, London, 9th December 2021, Lot 134

Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten was the most talented and versatile member of a family of Amsterdam painters. He developed a wide repertory of subjects, including seascapes, beach scenes, naval battles, imaginary Mediterranean seaports, townscapes and winter scenes. A prolific draughtsman, he made topographical drawings of Dutch towns, cities and castles, which were used in the preparation of his paintings.

In this painting, Beerstraten depicted the seashore at Egmond-aan-Zee, a fishing village on the North Sea coast, about thirty-five kilometres north of Haarlem. The location can be identified by the distinctive square tower of the Sint Agnes Church and the cluster of modest village houses that rise above the sand dunes on the right. The church tower, which had been badly damaged by fire when pirates ransacked the village in 1571, was eventually demolished in the eighteenth century. Today, the spot from which this view was taken now lies underwater, more than 200 metres off the Dutch coast.

Egmond-aan-Zee was a popular subject for many Dutch landscapists in the middle of the seventeenth century. Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) drew and painted views of the beach a dozen times or so during the 1640s and 1650s, while Salomon van Ruysdael (1602-1670) depicted it on at least five occasions from different aspects. The young Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682) made the picturesque village of Egmond, seen from inland, with the sea behind, the main subject of a group of paintings, while much later in his career, the seashore, taken from much the same viewpoint as the present painting, provided him with the inspiration for his masterpiece in the National Gallery, Londonⁱ.

In Beerstraten's painting, the sunny, windswept beach is the setting for bustling activity. The fishing fleet has recently returned. Two fishing pinks have been pulled onto the sand at the water's edge, and three others have been dragged higher up the beach using wooden rollers. Fisherfolk are busy with a variety of tasks. A young woman is seated on a fish boxⁱⁱ in the right foreground, playing with a small child, while the menfolk are at work unrigging their boat, or moving heavy baskets of fish about. Behind them, two housewives stand chatting to one another while a woman lays out her fish on the sand. A little crowd has gathered further off in the middle distance where the day's catch is being offered for sale. The bright blue sky and the accents of red in the figures' clothing enliven the otherwise restrained colour scheme.

Beerstraten depicted the beach at Egmond-aan-Zee on several other occasions, usually from the opposite direction, looking south, for example, in a painting which is today in the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzigⁱⁱⁱ.

BIOGRAPHY

The son of Abraham Danielsz, a textile-worker from Emden, and Meijns Luijcas from Amsterdam, Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten was baptised in Amsterdam on 1 March 1622. On 30 January 1642, while still living in his father's house in Elandsstraat, he married Magdalena Bronckhorst, the daughter of an ebony worker. Shortly after his marriage, he moved to a house near the Haarlemmerpoort, where he hung out a sign "De schipbreuk" (The Shipwreck). In 1651, he bought a house Rozengracht for 3000 guilders from the painter Johannes Collaert, where he displayed the same sign, and where he lived for the rest of his life. Between 1642

and 1662, the artist and his wife had eleven children (seven sons and four daughters), of whom eight were still alive at the time of their mother's death in 1664. A further three children had passed away by the time of Beerstraten's second marriage on 10 May 1665 to 38-year-old Albertje Egbertsdr van Crale from Zolle. However, their life together was short-lived as Beerstraten died at the end of June the following year, at which time only one of his sons had reached his majority and the other four children were still minors. Beerstraten was buried in the Sint Anthonis Kerkhof in Amsterdam on 1 July 1666, shortly before the birth of Albertje, his daughter from his second marriage, who was baptised on 18th July. His widow died the following day on 19 July. Following the deaths of their parents, the five underage children were taken in by the orphanage, but only two of them lived to become adults^{iv}.

At least two of Beerstraten's sons, Abraham (born in 1644) and Johannes (born in 1653), followed in their father's footsteps, becoming painters. Like his father, Abraham specialised in marines and views of towns and villages, usually in winter. Very little is known about his life: the last mention of his name occurs in a deed of 1665 in which the twenty-one-year old painter is cited as a beneficiary of his mother's estate. Abraham signed his paintings *A Beerstraten*, but it appears that another painter, Anthonie Beerstraten, also signed his paintings in a similar manner. To add to the confusion Anthonie painted very much the same subjects as Abraham in a similar style. There are no archival references regarding the life of Anthonie. The only record of a person of that name was a son born to Jan Abrahamsz. Beerstraten and Magdalena Bronckhorst, who was baptised on 4 February 1646 in the New Church in Amsterdam, but he seems to have died at an early age. Indeed the only indication of the existence of a painter named Anthonie Beerstraten seems to be a few fully signed paintings: some have even dubbed him the "phantom painter Beerstraten"^v. Nothing is known of the other brother Johannes.

Despite the difficulty in establishing the individual identities of the various members of the family, it is clear that at least two, or maybe three or more members of the Beerstraten family were involved in running a busy workshop. When Jan Abrahamsz. died in 1666, the inventory of his estate, drawn up on 15th April 1667, lists a large collection of paintings by such artists as Jacob Esselens, Jan Porcellis, Philips Wouwerman, Jan van der Heyden and Pieter de Hooch, suggesting that he may also have been an art dealer, as well as 40 wooden panels ready for painting, "7 canvases on stretchers" and "three canvases on which he [had] started to work"^{vi}. He also left a significant number of drawings, prints and books. With this legacy, the younger generation was no doubt well placed to continue with the production of works in a similar vein to those by Jan Abrahamsz. for which there must have been a ready market.

ⁱ Jacob van Ruisdael, *The Shore at Egmond-aan-Zee*, oil on canvas, 53.7 x 66.2 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. no. NG1390.

ⁱⁱ A small wooden container for storing fish. Perforations below the waterline of the container allowed water to flow through so that the catch could be kept alive. The fish box would have had a cover or deck along its full length, with one or possibly two hatches. It was either towed behind a fishing boat or moored to a quay or jetty. Information taken from Jeroen Giltaij and Jan Kelch, *Praise of Ships and the Sea: The Dutch Marine Painters of the 17th century*, Rotterdam & Berlin, 1997, p. 25.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten, *Beach near Egmond-aan-Zee*, signed, on canvas, 88 x 127 cm, Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig, Leipzig, inv. no. 506.

^{iv} Information about the couple's children is taken from the entry on the artist in The RKD Netherlands Institute for Art History, in The Hague.

^v G. van der Most, *Jan Abrahamsz., Abraham, Anthonie Beerstraten: kunstschilders uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Noorden, 2002, p. 61.

^{vi} Information taken from Jeroen Giltaij and Jan Kelch, *op. cit.*, 1997, p. 269.