

JOHNNY VAN HAEFTEN

OLD MASTER PAINTINGS

CS0406

WILLEM VAN DE VELDE the Younger
(Leiden 1633 – 1707 London)

A Wijdschip, a Kaag and other Shipping in a Calm,
with Fishermen in the Foreground

Signed and dated, lower right: *W.V.V 1663*
Oil on canvas, 13¾ x 12½ ins. (35 x 31.3 cm)



PROVENANCE

Milnes Gaskell, London, 1977

Anonymous sale, Christie's London, 11 December 1984, lot 38

With Richard Green, London

Private collection, New York, 1985 – 2022

LITERATURE

M. S. Robinson, *A Catalogue of the Paintings of the Elder and Younger Willem van de Velde*, 2 vols, London 1990, vol. I, pp. 493-494, no. 74 (1).

The greatest seventeenth-century Dutch marine painter, Willem van de Velde the Younger was born in Leiden in 1633. He came from a family with close ties to the sea. His grandfather was a skipper from Oostwinckel in Flanders, while his father Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611-1693) may well have spent some time at sea before embarking on a career as a marine artist. Two of his uncles were also seamen. The family moved to Amsterdam in 1636, where Willem became a pupil of his father, a talented draughtsman specialising in the art of "Pen painting" (*penschilderijen*), from whom he learnt to draw and acquired an extensive knowledge of ships. Subsequently, he studied with the celebrated marine painter Simon de Vlieger (1600/01-1653) in Weesp, who taught him to paint. On completing his training, Willem joined the family studio and worked in close partnership with his father until the Elder's death in London in 1693.

This small canvas takes up one of Willem van de Velde's favourite themes: namely, shipping in calm conditions. A stretch of shallow coastal waters is depicted at low tide on a windless day. Barely a ripple breaks the surface of the water, while overhead banks of cumulus clouds bubble upwards in a pale blue sky. To the right, a *wijdschip* and a *kaag* are under sail, barely moving in the light breeze. In the left foreground, two fishermen busy themselves in a *weyschuit* beached on an exposed sandbar, while another approaches carrying a heavy creel. Two more small cargo vessels lie at anchor further offshore, and on the right, in the middle distance, is a three-master. On the horizon, glimpsed through the morning mist is a broad expanse of exposed sand and beyond a distant city skyline.

In the early 1650s, shortly after leaving de Vlieger's studio, Willem van de Velde began to paint inshore calms and continued to do so until early in the next decade, when their production seems to have declined. The earliest are somewhat monochrome in character, but he soon developed a new idiom in which colours became more resonant, light more limpid and the contrast between light and shadow more pronounced. In the later 1650s and early 1660s, van de Velde brought his concept of the calm to perfection in such masterpieces as *Dutch Vessels close Inshore at low Tide and Men bathing*, of 1661, in the National Gallery, Londonⁱ and the similarly dated *Fishing Boats Offshore in a Calm*, in the Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, in Massachusetts, U.S.A.ⁱⁱ. This signed and dated painting of 1663 belongs to this phase of van de Velde's career, when he was at the height of his artistic powers.

Van de Velde's ability to convey the atmosphere of the North Sea coast has never been surpassed. The scene depicted here is one of the utmost tranquillity. The calm water reflecting the sky and the boats and the sense of pervading light are rendered with consummate skill and sensitivity. The activities of man seem measured as they go about their familiar routines in accordance with the natural rhythm of the tides, the hours of the day and the ever-changing patterns of the weather. Despite the picture's intimate scale, it achieves a sense of boundless space.

BIOGRAPHY

The second child of the marine artist of the same name, Willem van de Velde the Younger was baptised in Leiden on 18 December 1633. By 1636, the family had settled in Amsterdam where another son, Adriaen, who became a noted landscape artist, was born. Willem the

Younger probably first studied with his father and then, according to Houbraken, he became the pupil of Simon de Vlieger, probably in Weespⁱⁱⁱ where the artist had settled in around 1648-50. It was to a girl from Weesp, Petronella Le Maire, that the Younger was married in Amsterdam on the 18 December 1652. The marriage did not last long before Willem brought proceedings against his wife with de Vlieger testifying on his behalf. In 1666 Willem married for a second time to Magdalena Walravens and the couple had six children, of whom three sons, Willem III, Cornelis and Peter became painters. Willem remained in Amsterdam until the Third Anglo-Dutch War and the French invasion of 1672, when the art market collapsed and father and son emigrated to England. In the following year Willem is recorded painting *sopraporte* for Ham House and, in 1674, father and son entered the service of Charles II. The warrant of appointment states that each was to be paid a salary of one hundred pounds a year, the father for “taking and making of Draughts of seafights” and the son for “putting the said Draughts into Colours”^{iv}, in addition to which they received payment for their pictures. Except for brief visits to Holland, the van de Velde family stayed in England for the remainder of their lives, sharing a home and studio in the Queen’s House, Greenwich, until they moved to Westminster in 1691. Willem the Elder died there in 1693 and his son, who outlived him by fourteen years, died on 6 April 1707 and was buried next to his father in St. James’s Church, Piccadilly.

Willem van de Velde the Younger was hugely influential for later generations of marine artists. He had a number of pupils, including two of his sons, Isaac Sailmaker, Jacob Knyff, Peter Monamy and Charles Brooking, as well as followers and emulators, who perpetuated his style well into the eighteenth century. His remarkable achievements in marine art were later to serve as an inspiration for his most celebrated admirer, J. M. W. Turner.

ⁱ Willem van de Velde the Younger, *Dutch Vessels close Inshore at Low Tide, and Men bathing*, signed and dated 1661, on canvas, 63.2 x 72.2 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. no. 871.

ⁱⁱ Willem van de Velde the Younger, *Fishing Boats Offshore in a Calm*, signed, on canvas, 65.8 x 78.5 cm, Springfield Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A., The James Philip Gray Collection, inv. 50.02.

ⁱⁱⁱ Arnold Houbraken, *De Grootte Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders*, vol. 2, p.325. De Vlieger had been a neighbour of the van de Velde family in Amsterdam before moving to Weesp.

^{iv} Public Record Office, London, February 1673/4, King’s Bills, S07/40.