

Bijl-Van Urk

Willem van de Velde the Younger

Leiden 1633 - 1707 London

A Yacht and Other Vessels off a Jetty on Calm Waters

Oil on panel 32 x 31.4 cm

Inscribed lower right on one of the stairs of the stepladder: "W.V.V. [angular letters]"

Datable ca. 1656-60

Provenance

Sale Amsterdam (Christie's), 9 November 2010, lot 23, ill. (as Studio of Willem van de Velde the Younger)

Private collection, Netherlands

On a sunny day under a blue sky with billowing cumulus clouds, small vessels rest in a calm near a jetty. There is barely any wind and the water is motionless. A coastline is visible at the extreme left in the far distance. A sprit rigged States yacht in the foreground under mainsail and foresail is close to the end of the pier. The top of her stern is decorated with two sculpted lions carrying the coat of arms of the city of Amsterdam. A sloop is alongside her, probably receiving provision to be transported to the three-master beyond, no doubt an *Indiaman*. Three sailors stand on the pier and behind them the mast and sail of yet another vessel rise up. Seagulls hover over the water in the left and right foreground. On the left in the middle distance is a *wijdschip* and further away, a small yacht. The tiny silhouette of a barge punctuates the view onto the open water. Perhaps this scene is located off Texel, the usual assembly point for merchant ships sailing to the East Indies.

A true master of observation, Van de Velde conjures up a busy day with quiet weather. The viewer can easily imagine hearing the voices of the sailors and workmen. On most of the shipping human activity can be observed, but it is made subordinate to the all pervading, tranquil mood. The reflections of the ships' hulls emphasize the flatness of the water surface.

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Van de Velde began to paint inshore calms at the start of his career in the early 1650s and concentrated on this subgenre during this first chapter of his career.¹ He continued to depict calms in the early 1660s, returning to his specialty less frequently after that.² Although it is impossible to give an accurate date for our painting, it certainly belongs to this early period during which Van de Velde produced the finest examples. In the present calm Van de Velde strikes the perfect balance between sensitive atmospheric effects and pronounced contrasts in light and shadow.

Most of the calms are set under a sky of piled up cumulus clouds and all of them offer a continuous view to the horizon, creating a powerful sense of space. The compositional structure consisting of solid horizontal and vertical lines lends these quiet scenes monumentality, a quality also prevalent in our small panel painting. It was in these subtly composed coastal views that Van de Velde reached his apogee of refinement.

Willem van de Velde the Younger was the son of the marine artist Willem van de Velde the Elder and Judicgen Adriaensdr van Leeuwen. Shortly after Willem II's birth the family moved to Amsterdam. Another son, Adriaen, who would become a successful artist as well, was born in Amsterdam in 1636. Like his younger brother, Willem initially trained with his father but was sent off to Weesp around 1648 to finish his education with Simon de Vlieger. In 1652 he was back in Amsterdam and married Petronella le Maine but divorced her only one year later. In 1666 Willem married his second wife Magdalena Walraven. In 1661 Van de Velde the Elder visited England and by the closing of 1672 he had left with his son for England for good. Father and son settled in Greenwich, in the outskirts of London. At first Willem I and II primarily worked for King Charles II, who provided them with lodgings in Greenwich and allowed them to use the Queen's House as their studio, a handsome building designed by Inigo Jones and presently part of the Maritime Museum which houses so many outstanding works by the Van de Veldes. In 1674 a royal warrant stipulated that both artists were to receive an annual pension of one hundred Pounds while to were also to receive payment for every painting individually. From the outset, the Van de Veldes also worked for the king's brother, the future James II, who continued patronizing them after his brother's death in 1685. In 1691 the Van de Veldes settled in Westminster, London, where they remained until their deaths. They are buried alongside each other in the church of St James, Piccadilly. Willem the Younger had two sons, Willem III and Cornelis, who also became marine painters and continued to work in their father's style. Van de Velde also had some English followers. Namely Peter Monamy and Robert Woodstock, who further contributed to Van de Velde's fame by producing versions and imitations of the master.

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Notes

¹ See: G.S. Keyes, *Mirror of Empire. Dutch Marine Art of the Seventeenth Century*, exh. cat. Minneapolis (Institute of Arts); Toledo (Toledo Museum of Arts); Los Angeles (Los Angeles County Museum) 1990/91, p. 160.

² See for an early example of enormous dimensions (canvas 292 x 216 cm) , dated 1654: J. Gaschke (ed.), *Turmoil and Tranquility. The Sea through the Eyes of Dutch and Flemish Masters, 1550 – 1700*, exh. cat. Greenwich (The National Maritime Museum) 2008, cat. nr. 50, pp. 146, 147, ill. A late example of around 1690 shows the *Dutch Coast with a Weijsschuit* and is preserved in the National Maritime Museum of Greenwich, inv. nr. BHC0909.