



ROB KATTENBURG

Dutch Old Master Marine Paintings, Drawings & Prints



Bijl-van Urk BV

Dutch and Flemish Old Master Paintings and Impressionist Paintings

CONTENTS

Willem van de Velde, a rising star	3
Willem van de Velde the Younger	6
The painting of A Kaag at Sea in a Fresh Breeze, Shipping on the Roadstead of Texel	10
Innovative compositions	11
The painting	12
Kagen en lighters	14
The pilotage	14
An ode to Willem van de Velde	15
Concluding remarks	17
Acknowledgements	18

WILLEM VAN DE VELDE, A RISING STAR

Rarely has an artistic family been as blessed with talent as the Van de Veldes. The father was a virtuoso ship draughtsman, and his two sons, his namesake Willem and Adriaen, were brilliant painters, each in his own genre: Willem as a marine artist and Adriaen as a master of bucolic landscapes.

Before the two Willems moved to England in 1672- 1673 (Adriaen had died at the beginning of 1672) it was mainly the father who received one major commission after another. The younger Willem seems to have spent most of his time in the studio making small oil paintings, not for specific clients but for people who came in off the street in search of an attractive 'sea piece' to hang on the wall. That is the conclusion drawn from the small size of most of his pictures prior to 1672, rarely more than half a square metre. He only started making large paintings on a regular basis after going to live in England, and there he went to the other extreme with canvases up to 3 metres wide, such as his huge painting of the *Gouden Leeuw* at the Battle of the Texel in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, and the famous work in the Amsterdam Museum, *The 'Gouden Leeuw' on the IJ by Amsterdam* of 1686, which he painted while on a visit to the city.¹

An artist would only make pictures that big if he was specifically asked to do so. Even the most successful painters would not have set up such a large canvas on their easels unless they knew beforehand that they had a customer for it. Van de Velde's *Dutch fleet assembling before the Four Days' Battle of 11-14 June 1666, with the 'Liefde' and the 'Gouden Leeuwen' in the foreground*, is 202.5 cm wide, making it one of his ten largest pictures, or at least of the ones that have survived. Only three of those ten date from his Dutch period,² including the famous ship portrait in the Wallace Collection in London, which also features the *Liefde*.³

Given its size, *A Kaag at Sea in a Fresh Breeze, Shipping on the Roadstead of Texel*, can be dated around 1670 when he started to paint large pieces in a storm in his most creative period, shortly before his departure for England. Van de Velde was already anticipating the demand for spectacular seascapes from both his future English patrons and the many collectors of his work.

This time it was not warships in action but an almost impressionistic depiction of the

sea, the line of dunes, the clouds and the ships. The painting must have been admired by art lovers at the time of its creation, wealthy ones that is, because father and son Van de Velde were not inexpensive!

As early as 1652 an intermediary was praising the young artist, just 18 at the time, as 'Master Van de Velde's son, a very good painter [...] in oils of sea pieces and battles'.⁵ Nothing came of that particular venture, but there is one other documented commission that certainly was executed. It was for two paintings of incidents in the Four Days' Battle that Willem the Younger made for the Amsterdam Admiralty, as recorded in its resolutions for 30 September 1666: 'to come to an agreement with Willem van de Velde to make two paintings of the two glorious battles against England'. Both of them are now in the Rijksmuseum and must have been completed at the end of the 1660s, in roughly the same period as the *Dutch fleet assembling before the Four Days' Battle of 11-14 June 1666, with the 'Liefde' and the 'Gouden Leeuwen' in the foreground*

The painting of the *Liefde* and the *Gouden Leeuwen* marks a new stage in Van de Velde's development. Not only did he start working on a larger scale around 1670, but his style was also evolving. He had previously excelled in sublime, calm seas and coastal waters, but now the elements are playing a far more tempestuous role. This is an unusual kind of scene for Van de Velde's Dutch period. In England he quite often depicted ships battling the elements like this.

The Van de Veldes moved to England in the year 1672. In Dutch history, the year 1672 has from that time, to present been known as "*Het Rampjaar*" (The Disaster Year).

So many catastrophes and calamities befell the Dutch Republic in that year, which to the Dutch of that day and later, the whole year merited the description "Disaster." It almost meant the end of the Republic.

The Van de Veldes moved to England because of the collapse of the art market in the Republic and because Ludolf Backhuysen (1630- 1708) made his best works in this period and he was a distinguished competitor with many more important relations in Amsterdam. The foregoing can be deduced from letters of Willem Janszoon Blaeu (1571-1638).