



ROB KATTENBURG

”OUDAEN”

*A States Yacht of the Admiralty of Amsterdam
before a moderate breeze meeting a
Dutch Two-decker*

*An exceptional early painting
by Willem van de Velde the Younger*



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"OUDAEN" 1992



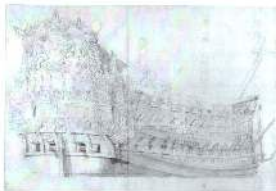
Adm Sir Geoffrey Kneller (1644-1723), William son de Velde the Younger, occasion, 16.9 x 25 cm. Painted by John Smith, 1707. Inscribed: Capitulorum Vnde Velde natus, Natus & Proprietarius marinarum Factor: et ab singularibus in illa Artu portibus a Carolo II & Jacobo II Regibus Britanniae Regibus annua Mercede abbas. Natus 6 Apr: Anno Domini 1707. Aetat: aetat 74. G. Kneller Eques pictor. 1686. J. Smith pinx. 1707. Amsterdam, Reproduction.

WILLEM VAN DE VELDE THE YOUNGER

Together with his father, Willem van de Velde the Elder, Willem van de Velde the Younger was one of the finest marine artists in Europe. The following is only a brief outline of the painter's life since this has already been described in detail in a number of publications by Michael Robinson.

Willem van de Velde the Younger was born in Leiden in 1633. Shortly afterwards the family moved to Amsterdam near the river IJ. His father had by then achieved fame as a skilled and accurate oval draughtsman and a producer of pen paintings, a kind of large to very large drawing in Indian ink on a lead white background (die so geprepareert sijn dat men se in regen ende in wind can hangen ende met eenne sponsie afwaschen gelijk als olieverve schilderijen) (which was prepared in such a way that it could be hung in the wind and rain and could be wiped clean with a sponge just like an oil painting). Van de Velde the Elder was the leading artist in this curious, though fascinating technique which was employed for a space of no more than fifty years. His wonderfully composed pen paintings also found buyers abroad, some as far as Italy. Cardinal Leopoldo de Medici was a particular admirer and patron. This technique was very time-consuming and these paintings were therefore exceptionally expensive. Van de Velde the Elder asked one hundred and fifty guilders for a small pen painting, compared to a landscape by Jan van Goyen, for example, which might sell for around fifty guilders.

It was probably Willem van de Velde the Younger's father who taught him the accurate portrayal of a ship. He subsequently became a pupil of Simon de Vlieger where he learned the art of painting. This was probably in the late 1640s. De Vlieger moved from Amsterdam to Weesp in 1648 and it is quite possible that Van de Velde the Younger followed him there: in 1652 he married a young woman from the area. However, the marriage was dissolved the next year and in fact De Vlieger acted as witness at the dissolution. The earliest dated painting by Willem van de Velde the Younger bears the inscription 1651. It must have been immediately clear that he possessed a remarkable talent. A letter to a foreign patron dated March 1652 indicates that Van de Velde the Younger was then working independently and at the early age of 18 he was already well known as 'een seer goed schilder ... van olijverven in aensichten en bataillen' (a very good painter ... of oil paintings of seascapes and battles). Father and son Van de Velde were by now working together, although the Younger was apparently able to set his own prices since the intermediary promises the patron to ask 'waervoren het de veldens soon op het nauwste sal willen maecten' (de veldens's son the lowest price for which he is willing to make it). These and other details have recently come to light with the



Willem van de Velde de Oude (1611-1695). The English first-rate Charles viewed from the starboard quarter. Black chalk and grey wash, 33 x 51.1 cm.



Willem van de Velde de Oude (1611-1695). The unsuccessful attack of the English on a fleet of Dutch merchantmen at Bergen in Norway, 12 August 1665, seen passing on canvas. 101 x 146 cm. Signed Wm. Velde and dated 1668. Private collection, Amsterdam.

discovery of previously unknown archive material from abroad, soon to be made public in published form.

The immense importance of the Van de Veldes lies not only in the development of marine painting; they are also important as compilers of historical records. These artists were unequalled in their accurate portrayal of ships, rigging and suchlike. The elder Van de Velde frequently sailed with the fleet to record events. He was given his own galliot from which he was able to view the whole scene. On board he drew sketches and he would later rework these in more detail at home or they might form the basis for a pen painting. His son also used the same sketches for his own paintings.

Willem van de Velde the Younger set the tone for a new development in marine painting, incorporating atmosphere and the effect of light in combination with sunlight coloration. His subjects vary from small pieces intended for private collections, simple and clear in composition, to large to very large historical and spectacular pieces with more complex compositions.

In 1672 father and son decided to try their luck in England in the service of King Charles II. The king and his brother James, Duke of York were delighted to have gained the services of the two leading marine artists of the day. Among Samuel Pepys's papers was the appointment by Charles II stating the decision 'to allow the salary of 100 pound per annum unto Willem Vandevelde the elder for taking and making draughts of sea-fights; and the like salary of 100 pounds per annum unto Willem Vandevelde the younger for putting the said draughts for our particular use.'

On top of this basic salary the Duke of York promised them a sum of 50 pounds a year with an additional payment for every painting delivered. Father and son were also given a large house in Greenwich and a studio was built for them in the Queen's House which could be extended if they were working on large commissions such as the design of a tapestry series depicting the Battle of Solebay.

At first the Van de Veldes had their hands full dealing with the commissions of their royal patrons and it was only when William III came to the throne in 1688 and their contract was allowed to lapse that they found time to work for other clients. It is clear that Charles II understood his proteges' value, in 1673 he actually forbade Willem van de Velde the Elder from sailing to view the Battle of Texel for fear that he might be killed.

Van de Velde the Elder continued to work until his death in 1693. A number of pen paintings are known to exist from that year. The younger Willem remained in England after his father's death although he now and then visited Holland. During one such stay in 1686 he painted a majestic view of the river IJ, now part of the Rijksmuseum collection but exhibited in the Amsterdam Historical Museum. He died in 1707 and, like his father, was buried in St James's, Piccadilly.



THE PAINTING

On the left in the foreground is the yacht of the Amsterdam Admiralty. The splendidly carved and painted stern of the ship portrays an oval shield bearing the arms of the United Provinces, a red lion on a yellow background. The shield is flanked on both sides by trophies of arms. Above the stern are the arms of Amsterdam, supported by two lions. The white part of the flag on the mast contains a circle with three crosses. The meaning is unclear.

Yachts were originally warships used by the sailors of Dunkirk, Zealand and Holland from the late sixteenth century to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. They were lightly armed, but fast and could be rowed when becalmed. This class of yacht was the predecessor for the royal yachts and state yachts used by such official bodies as the States General, the Admiralty and the city magistracies as the aquatic limousines of the day. They were intended to transport important people and to deliver messages and orders.

Because of their official function these yachts were often richly decorated with carvings and paintwork. Their speed and splendour led to a demand for yachts from abroad. During his stay in Holland King Charles II expressed a wish to own such a ship himself. The yacht given to him by the Amsterdam magistracy in 1660 created a new trend in England and led to an enormous increase in boating for pleasure.

The latter half of the sixteenth century saw the rise of the pleasure boat in Holland too, as can be seen on the many illustrations of such ships on paintings by Ludolf Bakhuizen and Abraham Storck, the principal marine painters in the Netherlands after the departure of the Van de Velde for England in 1672. Because they were almost exclusively used for pleasure these yachts were often smaller than those employed for official purposes.

The yacht in this painting carries a sprit sail and is firing a salute both from the bow and from the side. The salute is being answered by the ship on the right. This ship, a neo-decked ship with between 36 and 40 guns, is not flying a war pennant and from the red flag flying from the stern post it may be a merchantman. This flag, showing an arm with a sword, was flown by men-of-war as a sign they were attacking but was also used by merchantmen as a recognition signal. The stern post supports the flag of the United Provinces, although this may be a play on the name of the ship.

In the background between the merchantman and the yacht a man-of-war can be seen with the arms of Amsterdam on the stern.

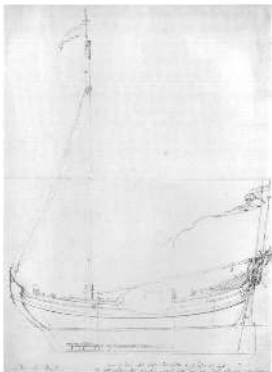
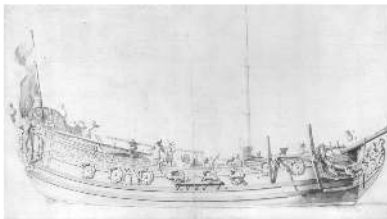
All this is probably taking place off the coast of Texel, the area where Dutch naval and merchant vessels generally entered and left the inland waters.

The painting is signed in full, W.V. Velde de jonge, and dated 1654 in the bottom right-hand corner in the sea. Willem van de Velde the Younger, a pupil of Simon de Vlieger who died in 1653, was 21 years old in 1654. This painting may have been personally commissioned. Whether or not this is the case, he was by then no longer a pupil and no longer restricted by the regulations which would have limited him to signing no more than one piece a year. It is not known exactly when Willem van de Velde the Younger began working with his father. The earliest evidence for a potential commission in which the younger Willem was to paint a sea battle using sketches made by his father in part at the actual battle and partly based on detailed accounts by eye witnesses dates from 1652.

In any event this painting is one of the earliest dated works by Willem van de Velde the Younger, our greatest marine painter, and this fact alone is sufficient to make the painting of interest. The manner in which the man-of-war and the merchantman are portrayed is reminiscent of Simon de Vlieger, yet the coloration, the way in which the water is painted, sharp and full of contrast, strengthened by the coulisre effect of the light and shadow on the waves is completely unique to the young artist and heralds the start of a new period in Dutch marine painting. While with Jan Porcellis and Simon de Vlieger the accent still lay on the sky, the light and the water in monochrome tones, Willem van de Velde the Younger allowed the ships to play an equal part and the coloration was enhanced with sunlight.

Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707): *Design for the artist's private yacht, pen and brown ink, 47.5 x 29.8 cm. Initialed in the bottom left corner: W/V and in the artist's personal: WVV, circa 1687.*

Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707): *The English yacht Portsmouth, pencil and grey wash, 29.3 x 49.2 cm., circa 1672.*



It never ceases to amaze how such a young artist was able to paint such complicated formations of ships so accurately and with such self-confidence. The accuracy with which he painted the ships leads one to suppose that he based his compositions on his father's drawings. His precision goes beyond pure academic exactitude, in itself no guarantee of a work of art. For true art more is needed, a combination of courage, vision, technical competence and especially the ability to leave things out, to bring the subject down to its essential elements. These are qualities which are abundantly evident in this painting and which reveal this as a key work in the oeuvre of Willem van de Velde the Younger.

Stewart de Vries circa 1600-1653. Chippy sea, oil on panel, 58.5 x 58 cm. Signed S. de Vries, 26/11



Willem van de Velde the Younger (1633-1707). A States Yacht of the Admiralty of Amsterdam before a moderate breeze wearing a Dutch Jan-decker, oil on canvas, 52 x 66 cm. Signed W. de Velde de Jonge and dated 1654. Detail.





WILLEM VAN DE VELDE THE YOUNGER

(Leiden 1633 - London 1707)

A States Yacht of the Admiralty of Amsterdam before a moderate breeze meeting a Dutch Two-decker

Oil on canvas, 51 x 66 cm

Signed and dated: W.V. Velde de jonge 1654

Provenance:

Sale X. de Burin, Brussels, 21 July 1819, lot 185.

Sale Christie's, Mrs Hibbert, 22 July 1820, lot 139.

Sale Christie's, C.J. Nieuwenhuys, 23 June 1873, lot 86.

Sale Christie's, to Ratley for Edward Deot, 17 July 1886, lot 110.

Exhibition:

London, National Maritime Museum, *The Art of the Van de Velde*, 23 June to 5 December 1982, No. 19.

Literature:

C. Hofstede de Groen, *Holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, Esslingen am Neckar 1907-1928, VII, no. 146; National Maritime Museum, *The Art of the Van de Velde*, London 1982, p. 36, 68
afb. IV.

M.S. Robinson, *The paintings of the Willem van de Velde*, The Hague 1990, no. 55, pp. 264-265.

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Tel: 03462 65098
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