

ATTRIBUTED TO
JAN PORCELLIS

(Ghent, before 1584 - Zouterwoude 1632)

Navy with Boat and Sailing Ships

black chalk with brown pen and ink, grey wash, heightened with white, on light brown paper
 with traces of a frame in brown pen and ink, watermark Arms of Amsterdam
 18.3 x 30.1 cm (4⁷/₈ x 12 in)

Provenance: H. Hamal, with his inscription (Lugt 1231).

IN THE FOREGROUND OF THIS SMALL AND ATMOSPHERIC drawing, a rowing boat with fishermen lurches in the waves as a standing fisherman steadies himself to catch two large fish with his rod. Beyond the fishing boat, a sailing boat lists to the right in the wind, along with the distant fleet of sailing ships on the far horizon and at the far left, the outline of a remote town can be glimpsed. While the nearer vessels and figures are drawn with pen and brown ink - the thick, defined lines evoking their proximity - the vessels further out to sea are sketched lightly with black chalk, creating an impression of a distant fleet vaguely seen. By depicting vessels diminishing in size and clarity, the artist achieves an illusion of a vast distance. Great emphasis is given to the expanse of sky, which occupies over two-thirds of the sheet; with grey washes forming billowing clouds, drifting in the wind. Touches of white in the sky and on the horizon evoke a pale sunlight, which catches the sails, while white highlights form the crests of the waves. Sky and sea merge in this monochromatic drawing, the light brown tone of the paper forming the mid tone for both.

Navy and Boat with Sailing Ships has been attributed to Jan Porcellis by Peter Schatborn, bringing this work closer to one outlined on a signed document in respect of the Frits Lugt Collection, Fondation Custodia, Paris.¹ Porcellis, who owned a small yacht which he sailed on the Dutch waterways, found his artistic inspiration in the atmosphere of sea and sky.² After settling in Haarlem in 1622, Porcellis pioneered a new, more naturalistic approach to convey the atmosphere of sea and sky through the adoption of a near monochromatic palette of light grey and brown tones, highlighted with white to evoke light and sea spray. This entirely fresh approach represented a radical break from the colourful, graphically detailed portraits of vessels of the Dutch fleet practised by Hendrick Vroom of Haarlem (c.1563-1640) and his generation. By 1624, the artist had not only painted the first atmospheric seascapes in muted, monochrome

colours, but had also become the first of the sky painters in Dutch art, evoking as he did the Dutch weather with its shifting changes in mood (fig. 1). His work was to have a profound impact on the art of the great landscape painters of the seventeenth century, Jan van Goyen (1596-1656) (see catalogue nos. 134 and 135) and Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/03-1670) (see inventory).

Porcellis was the son of the Flemish Captain Jan Pourchelles or Porcellis, who escaped Spanish persecution by emigrating to the Northern Netherlands. The family settled in Rotterdam, where Porcellis married in 1605. Porcellis is first cited as a painter in Antwerp, where he moved in 1615 following his bankruptcy in Rotterdam. He became a Master of the Guild of St. Luke there in 1617. The artist achieved success after his move to Haarlem in 1622, where his artistic innovations altered the course of Dutch marine and landscape painting. The artist's last few years were lived in Zouterwoude near Leiden, where he owned several properties.



Jan Porcellis, *A Fishing Pink on a Windy Day*, c.1632, The National Maritime Museum, London (Figure 1)

¹ See the exhibition catalogue, *Eloge de la Navigation hollandaise au XVIIe siècle*, Dutch Institute, Paris, 1989, cat no. 41, pl. 19.

² Bob Haak, *The Golden Age, Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, New York, 1996 (originally published 1984), p. 268.



(Actual Size)