

2023

Seventeenth-Century Dutch “Stranger Painter” Willem van de Velde the Elder and His Impact on British Maritime Art—Two Kings, the Netherland Marine Painters, and the Rise of the British Navy

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Recommended Citation

Raum, Mary (2023) "Seventeenth-Century Dutch “Stranger Painter” Willem van de Velde the Elder and His Impact on British Maritime Art—Two Kings, the Netherland Marine Painters, and the Rise of the British Navy," *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 76: No. 3, Article 8.

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Photographic reproduction of *Portrait of a Dutch Painter in His Studio*, by Michiel van Musscher, oil on panel, 18.7 x 14.4 in., ca. 1665–70, The Princely Collections, Vienna (Wikimedia Commons).

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY DUTCH “STRANGER PAINTER” WILLEM VAN DE VELDE THE ELDER AND HIS IMPACT ON BRITISH MARITIME ART

Two Kings, the Netherland Marine Painters, and the Rise of the British Navy

Mary Raum

It has long been recognised that the biggest single factor affecting English painting during the seventeenth century was the increasing presence of foreign artists.

RICHARD JOHNS, “JAMES THORNHILL AND DECORATIVE HISTORY PAINTING IN ENGLAND AFTER 1688”

In 1531, English diplomat and scholar Sir Thomas Elyot opined about his nation’s dawdling creativity: “If we will have anything well painted, carved or embroidered, we abandon our own countrymen and resort unto strangers.”¹ By the seventeenth century and for the duration of the reigns of Kings Charles I and Charles II, many leading painters and illustrators in England were either foreign-born or were British artisans who had traveled abroad to expand their skill-sets or apprenticed with talented non-British experts. Such international influence was important to the growth and expansion of British creative aptitude and enabled England to pull out of its sixteenth-century doldrums and lackadaisical attitude regarding the fine arts.

In the seventeenth century, native English abilities in maritime art were particularly lacking. Nautical themes were provincial, and England was lagging behind as a top-notch seafaring nation. It did not help that King Charles I (1600–49) had

a problematic relationship with the nation’s navy. Beginning in 1634, he levied ship money on his English citizens, and the unpopular tax exacerbated the first English Civil War between the Parliamentarians and Royalists in 1642. The navy also split into Parliamentary and Royalist fleets, with the king’s flotilla comprising thirty-five larger vessels

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Naval War College Review, Summer 2023, Vol. 76, No. 3

and smaller ships, which performed army-supply and blockade functions. English marine art throughout the reign of Charles I—if it existed at all—was comparatively adolescent in temperament, particularly in comparison with Dutch art.²

In the year of Charles I’s regicide, Robert Blake—who had taken up arms against the king—was installed as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in the Cromwellian administration. Known as the father of the Royal Navy, he built up the greatest sea force in England’s history to that time. He defeated Dutch admirals Maarten H. Tromp, Cornelis de Witt, and Michiel de Ruyter in the First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652–54. Blake made two important innovations in the sailing forces: developing strategic ideas regarding blockades and landings and creating a set of overarching rules and regulations for naval personnel, including sailing and fighting instructions. The British navy was on the rise as a global force, and this intensified interest in paralleling the newly found prowess at sea in artistic form.³

Still, themes of naval warfare were not yet “trendy” in England, and the subject matter remained uncommon.⁴ In the Netherlands, a wave of marine artists had been at work since the sixteenth century mastering techniques for presenting air, light, and water on paper and canvas. The region had become a wealthy empire from its international cargo trading and fishing, and its citizenry collected decades of practical experience plying the North and Norwegian Seas and the Atlantic Ocean.⁵ Expansion of the Dutch maritime realm made the country the envy of much of the continent, and its shipbuilders dominated the European market, with sales reaching from Riga in the Baltic to as far as Venice in the Adriatic. Ship architects of northern and southern Holland became known for their technical superiority in vessel design, and they remained unmatched for a century. These designers borrowed heavily from the German architecture of square and lateen sails and Mediterranean-constructed hulls.⁶ As fierce and successful naval fighters, the nation’s military commanders sought out artists who could replicate their exploits, produce striking scenes of their ships, and re-create the drama that was integral to maritime life.⁷

WILLEM VAN DE VELDE THE ELDER

One of the fleet’s most popular artists was draftsman Willem van de Velde the Elder. Research on Van de Velde’s life turns up little concerning his background. It is unclear where he may have learned to draw or whether he had any formal training or mentors.⁸ He was born in Leiden, a town in southern Holland, died in London in 1693 at the age of eighty-one, and was buried at Saint James’s courtyard.⁹ His Flemish father earned the family income as a ship’s master (known as a barque master in the Netherlands) of a transport merchant vessel. Willem spent the first half of his life on the inland waterways and high seas of

the Dutch territories soaking up the natural conditions that existed in a nation that thrived from its close association with the ocean. Afloat early, he already had been on a sea cruise with his father before he was twelve years of age.¹⁰ Thus, as a young man Van de Velde became educated on the transformations of weather and seasons through life experience, and he would continue to prefer to sit and work within the natural environment of his work rather than compose fantastical renderings in a studio.

Van de Velde had three legitimate children, including a daughter, Magdalena, who seems to have been overshadowed by her two brothers, who followed in the family business by becoming artists. His son Willem the Younger, a conspicuously gifted studio oil painter of maritime scenes, often relied on his father's drawings as a basis for developing subject matter.¹¹ His younger son, Adriaen, grew into a capable draftsman and print artist of landscapes and animals.¹²

If Willem the Elder's likeness provides any representation of his personality, he was a confident, cocky, tough, virile, and intrepid man (see figure 1).¹³ He must have had the eyesight of a bird of prey, as evidenced by the elaborate elements he

FIGURE 1



Photographic reproduction of *Willem van den Velden*, by Gerard Sibelius, engraving, 9.4 x 7 in., ca. eighteenth century, Royal Museums Greenwich (Wikimedia Commons).

was able to impart to his drawings while seated in a bobbing boat in the middle of an unfolding battle.

The Elder served as draftsman for the Dutch admiralty, and the naval hierarchy prized his work highly. It was common for him to be found sketching both sides of a conflict a short distance away floating on the water.¹⁴ He was present during the battle of Scheveningen in 1653 at the insistence of Admiral Tromp, and he produced a time line of the conflict across six joined sheets of paper (see figure 2).¹⁵ In the lower front of one of his compositions, Van de Velde placed himself sitting in a *galliot*—a single-masted Dutch cargo boat sometimes used as a fishing vessel—sketching the tumult while wearing a sun hat and holding a drawing block (see figure 3). A young man—perhaps his son,

FIGURE 2



Willem van de Velde the Elder created a continuous narrative of the battle of Scheveningen. Photographic reproduction of *The Battle of Scheveningen, 10 August 1653*, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, ink on paper, 45 × 61.4 in., 1655, Royal Museums Greenwich (Wikimedia Commons).

the Younger, who had accompanied him on several occasions, including the Four Days’ Battle off North Foreland in 1666—stands next to him watching the fight. During the 1640s and 1650s, the Elder was very often in the Baltic recording conflicts, also going as far north as Bergen in the Norwegian fjords.

In 1658, Van de Velde, along with nobleman Jacob van Wassenaar, convoyed with the Dutch navy to Copenhagen and recorded the defeat of Charles X Gustav’s Swedish forces to end the blockades that had been disturbing the free flow of sea trade in the area.¹⁶ Van de Velde’s work earned him praise from the Danish king, Frederick III. After seeing Willem’s illustration of the flagship *Amelia*, Cornelis Evertsen the Elder—privateer and vice-commodore in the Zeelandic navy—asked that a commemorative series be made to glorify his family name. In the course of his career, Willem went on to receive several high-level commissions, including for Van Wassenaar, now an admiral; Charles X of Sweden; and Admiral Michiel de Ruyter.

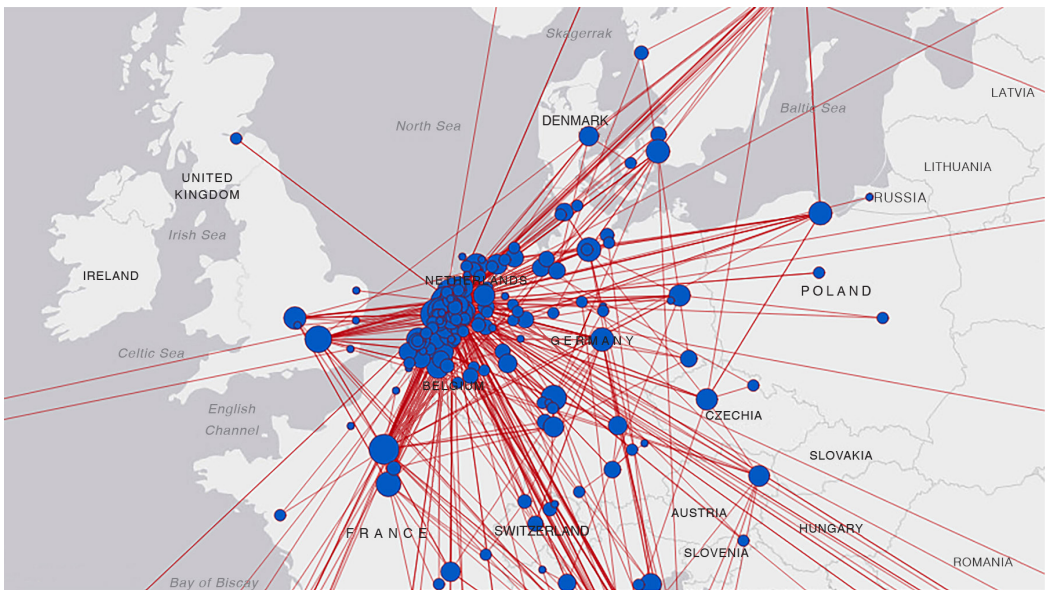
Land and sea battles during the Anglo-Dutch Wars caused economic downturns and concern for their physical safety that forced continental artisans to vacate their homelands and disperse across Europe (see figure 4).¹⁷ British interest in marine-themed scenes was amplified during the Restoration period after

FIGURE 3



The maritime art of Van de Velde the Elder, who is depicted here in a sun hat, was composed while the Elder was an observational participant near active conflicts in the water, setting him apart from other artists. Enlargement of figure 2 by Mary Raum, 2023.

FIGURE 4



Map showing migratory movements of painters active in Amsterdam between 1600 and 1700, using modern borders and country names for reference.

Source: Marten Jan Bok, Harm Nijboer, and Judith Brouwer, eds., *ECARTICO: Linking Cultural Industries in the Early Modern Low Countries, ca. 1475–ca. 1725*, vondel.humanities.uva.nl/.

Charles II returned from his exile and concentrated on expanding his naval forces. He renamed all royal vessels with the designation His Majesty’s Ship (HMS), introduced navigation acts for trade, decimated the piratical Barbary corsairs, and began winning sea battles against the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Dutch.¹⁸ As Charles II’s England gained naval notoriety, the king faced a lack of homegrown skills to satisfy his desire to produce artwork that could convey the nation’s seafaring excellence.

In 1672, known as the “Disaster Year” by the Dutch Republic, the nation faced three conflicts close to one another. The Franco-Dutch War, the Third Anglo-Dutch War, and the English naval blockade precipitated the failure of banks, shops, courts, schools, and theaters, and many artisans began to experience economic difficulty. During this turmoil, Charles II extended an invitation to Willem van de Velde the Elder and his son the Younger to become court artists for the house of Stuart.¹⁹

Three events contributed to the Elder’s decision to make this move: the impact of the economic depression on his ability to make a living, the dangers of the French occupation and its impact on his family’s safety, and Charles II’s issuance of a declaration of indulgence that encouraged Dutch citizens to emigrate to England.²⁰ On 20 February 1674, the British monarch issued a warrant of appointment directing that the treasury of the navy pay “the Salary of One hundred pounds p. Annum unto William Van de Velde the Elder for taking and making Draughts of seafights, and the like Salary of One hundred pounds p. Annum unto William van de Velde the Younger for putting the said Draughts into Colours for our particular use.”²¹ Both father and son spent the remainder of their careers recording naval engagements from the British perspective.

The Younger’s oil-painting approach was very different from his father’s precise draftsmanship. Using the oil technique, the Elder’s son was able to create interpretive differences among the atmospheric interplay of light and shade in both sea and sky. He became heir to the tonal paintings of Dutchmen Jan Porcellis and the exceptional genre painter Jan van Goyen, and during the Younger’s lifetime he would paint nearly every type of Dutch and English ship afloat.²²

The combined aptitudes, techniques, and virtuosity of the father and son would set the standard for British marine art for the next two centuries—the Elder, a black-and-white, muted-tone draftsman, and the Younger, a color oil painter formally trained under the tutelage of the multifaceted, Rotterdam-born marine painter Simon de Vlioger. Their influence would permeate the field through the Enlightenment and Romantic periods into the nineteenth century, a period that saw the rise of a gifted cadre of British painters. Such artists included cartographic style painter Peter Monamy (1681–1749); sea-battle painters Samuel Scott (ca. 1702–72) and Nicholas Pocock (1740–1821); and the leading

pioneer of Romantic marine art, J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851).²³ Monamy, who collected Van de Velde drawings, and Scott, who copiously copied them, both were inspired by the Elder’s craftsmanship.²⁴

MARITIME ART BEFORE VAN DE VELDE

To understand Van de Velde’s influence on maritime art in Britain, it is useful to describe briefly what this form of endeavor entailed before his rise in the genre. A few examples from history will show how the field grew from its idealistic and imaginative roots toward realism.

In the period leading up to the fifteenth century, artists only were able to anticipate and not replicate low horizons, and they were naive about the application of isometric perspective, foreshortening, and theoretical ground planes—techniques that were imperative for displaying faithful representations in a water environment.²⁵ Waves were especially inaccurate in these early works of art, as they were composed “using the fertility of invention” resulting from an uninformed internal viewpoint because many artists had never seen the water.²⁶ It was not until 1805—nearly two hundred years after Dutch marine painters Cornelis Vroom, Jan van de Cappelle, and Ludolf Backhuysen already had leapt beyond elementary oceanic scenes—that the publication of a definitive educational treatise on the optics governing wave action appeared in England, with Dominick Serres and John Thomas Serres’s penning of *Liber Nauticus and Instructor in the Art of Marine Drawing*.²⁷

For many centuries, the earth’s curvature at the waterline was not depicted correctly, although Dutch-born Mainz woodcutter Erhard Reuwich was one of the first to attempt to do so, in the 1480s, in illustrations found in his travel books (see figure 5).²⁸ Some British cartographers had attempted to produce a semblance of vessels and horizon lines on their charts around the mid-1500s.²⁹ Nearly all these were of coastal cities projected from an unrealistic bird’s-eye view with ships not on the water but instead awkwardly rendered in relation to geographic features. For the most part, until the arrival of the Van de Velde father and sons, British marine art remained limited to flat-pattern making, manuscripts, and elementary official seals of coastal ports.³⁰

In 1499, around the time of the second Ottoman-Venetian war, one of the first known artistically rendered naval battles appeared, depicting the clash between the Turks and Venetians off Cape Zonchio. The woodcut piece was hand printed from two blocks on two joined sheets of paper, then the artist stenciled color on top.³¹ In the piece, high-sided sailing vessels—known as *round ships* or *carracks*—are jammed together, with sailors boarding one another’s watercraft. Spears and arrows fly, cannon fire, decks are ablaze, and men can be seen falling to their fate into the sea (see figure 6). For a fifteenth-century display, its complexity is

FIGURE 5



A view of Rhodes featuring an early attempt to show the curvature of the earth on a body of water. Photographic reproduction of Hartman Schedel, *Liber chronicarum* ["Nuremberg Chronicle"] (1493), fol. 26v, color plate, adapted from Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinatio in Terram Sanctam* (1486), woodcut (Wikimedia Commons).

astounding, and the use of a simplified color palette allows the viewer to appreciate the action without being distracted by too much divergent pigment (see figure 7). Hash marks are used in an attempt to show depth—a technique that Willem the Elder used consistently in his drawings and pen paintings.³²

One of the earliest battleships replicated in a flat-pattern engraving of an English war vessel was the galleon *Ark Royal*—and it was created by a Dutchman, Claes Janszoon Visscher, not a British artist. The vessel originally was built for Sir Walter Raleigh but was purchased by Queen Elizabeth I to contribute to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (see figure 8). A famous sea painting from 1588 of English vessels with a war theme by a British artist was part of the iconographic background found on a series of three surviving portraits of Elizabeth I. These armada portraits were a propagandistic expression extolling her nation's triumph on the high seas against Spain. In these portraits, Elizabeth sits in the foreground, her hand resting on a globe. Behind the monarch are

FIGURE 6



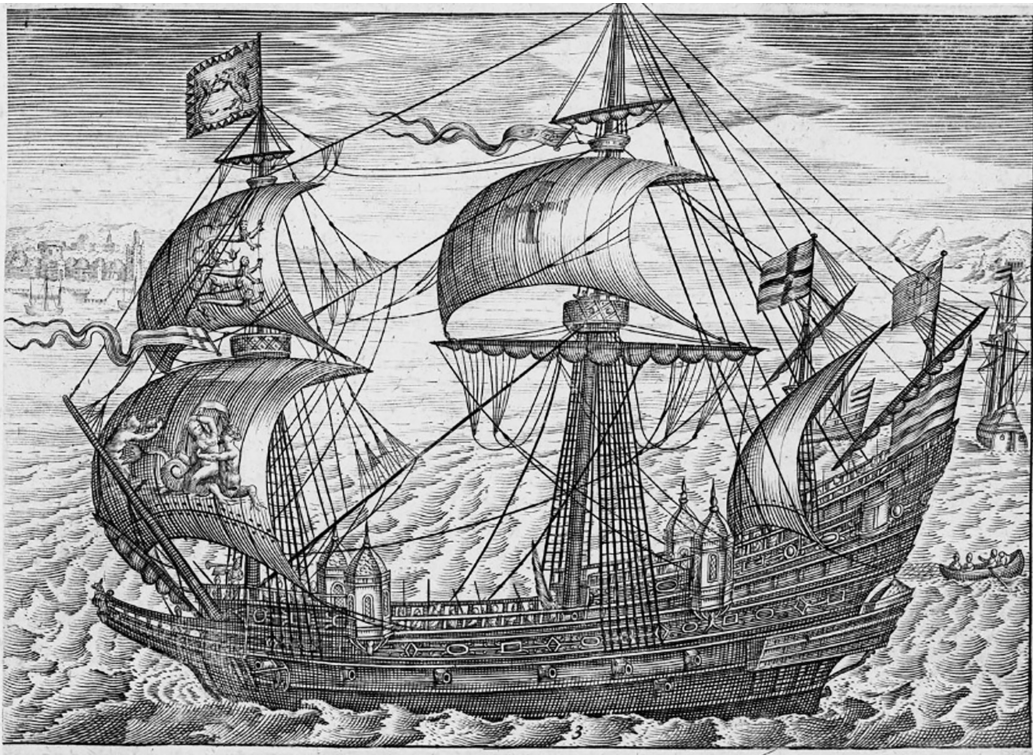
A fifteenth-century battle scene. Photographic reproduction of woodcut of the battle of Zonchio, 1499, featuring three large Venetian and Turkish vessels ("Nave Loredan," "Nave Turchesca," and "Nave Del Armer"), with numerous smaller vessels around them, by unknown artist (Italian school), colored by stencil and hand printed from two blocks on two joined sheets of paper, 22.4 × 32.5 in., 1499–1500, British Museum (Wikimedia Commons).

FIGURE 7



Enlargement of figure 6, which uses hash marks to show depth and shadow.

FIGURE 8



Engraving by Dutch artist of *Ark Royal* under full sail, part of a set of ten prints. Photographic reproduction of *Arca Rale Admiraal*, by Claes Janszoon Visscher, print, 15.3 x 21.1 in., 1587, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (Wikimedia Commons).

a pair of paintings, one depicting English fireships and galleons threatening the Spanish fleet and the other showing Spanish ships being driven onto the rocks off the coast in a stormy sea. It is evident in these late-sixteenth-century paintings that British artisans had not yet achieved sufficiency in maritime art, as neither rendering of vessels afloat is of the skill level of the Netherlandic schools—the ships look more like bathtub toys (see figure 9).³³

VAN DE VELDE THE ELDER BRINGS DUTCH TECHNIQUE AND ARTISTIC EXPERIMENTATION TO ENGLAND

Drawing is seven-eighths of what makes up painting.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH GRISAILLE
PAINTER JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES

Beyond Van de Velde the Elder’s intimate association with the sea from birth, three components led to his elevation of the field of naval and maritime art: (1) his application of geometric techniques, (2) the unique materials he used, and (3) his ability to form a successful business and studio model.³⁴

FIGURE 9



There are three versions of the Armada Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I. Two versions appear in the Woburn Abbey Collection (top and middle row) and the Queen's House in Greenwich, U.K. (bottom row). *Top*: Photographic reproduction of the full Armada Portrait as it appears in Woburn Abbey Collection, unknown artist (formerly attributed to George Gower), oil on panel, ca. 1588 (Wikimedia Commons). *Middle row*: Details from the Woburn Abbey Armada Portrait, depicting the English fleet (*left*) and Spanish fleet (*right*). *Bottom row*: Details from a photographic reproduction of the Armada Portrait in Greenwich, depicting the English fleet (*left*) and Spanish fleet (*right*) (Wikimedia Commons). Analysts believe the Greenwich version was overpainted by an unknown artist in the seventeenth century.

Application of Geometric Techniques

Willem the Elder considered himself foremost a ship’s draftsman rather than a painter, owing to his use of graphite, chalks, sepia ink, and washes instead of oils. The Elder first would make rapid sketches at sea with pen and ink or graphite; then he would return to his studio, where he would add vessel and panoramic background details. Many of his pen paintings used a similar format of “two large ships in the foreground with onlookers on the shore and a smaller vessel somewhere in the scene closer toward the viewer” (see figure 10).³⁵ Artists at the Van de Velde studio used a specific offset process as a means of reproduction for particular motifs. The process included the following: a piece of blank paper was moistened with water; next, an original drawing was placed face down over the paper; then, it was rubbed vigorously so that the drawing was transferred onto the blank paper. These illustrations were the lifeblood of the studio, and this technique was the most valuable part of the Elder’s ability to make a living from his art.

His greatest contributions to marine art were his *grisailles*, which resembled drawings but in fact were a form of pseudopainting that used monochromatic palettes of gray or other neutral opaque color washes over pen-and-ink outlines. The technique was useful for creating an atmospheric ambience associated with sunshine and cloud cover (see figure 11). *Grisailles* or *penschilderij* (which

FIGURE 10



Although the image here features two views of the same vessel (*Oosterwijk*), the *grisaille* displays Van de Velde the Elder’s technique of placing two large vessels in the foreground with smaller vessels nearby in his *grisailles*. Photographic reproduction of *The Dutch Ship Oosterwijk under Sail near the Shore in Two Positions*, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, *grisaille* on panel, 36 × 48 in., 1654, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Macpherson Collection (Wikimedia Commons).

FIGURE 11



The Battle of Scheveningen: The Meeting of the Squadrons of Lieutenant-Admiral Tromp and Vice-Admiral Witte de With, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, gray wash over graphite on six joined sheets of paper, 10.5 × 23.9 in., 1610–11, Morgan Library & Museum, Thaw Collection, New York (Wikimedia Commons).

translates from the Dutch as pen-and-ink drawing) collectively constituted Willem's magnum opus, and they opened an entirely new market share that distinguished him from all other European marine artists. Near the end of his life, he also painted with color oils, but this was a rarity, and only eight of these works are known to exist today (see figure 12).³⁶

Willem was a spirited illustrator. He set about his work in two ways. As stated, sometimes he made quick drafts outdoors, to be used later for guidance in composing a final product (see figure 13). Other times he drew judiciously, taking time to detail the intricacies of ships. He was able to delineate the stunningly complex, carved, baroque sterns of naval vessels, with their complicated mazes of figures, coat-of-arms inlays, balconies, and extravagant gold-underlaid decorations (see figure 14).³⁷

From the 1650s onward, he added paintbrushes to his repertoire of reed and quill work to apply washes to indicate the shadows on clouds and waves (see figure 15). All the Elder's artwork demonstrates a discerning mathematical eye and a natural aptitude for handling foreshadowing, viewer perspective, isometric perspective, and theoretical ground planes. Van de Velde the Younger took what was innate in his father's tactile arithmetical abilities and turned out study materials for use in his studio classes (see figure 16).³⁸ If a design required a modification, redrawn overlays or cutouts would be placed on top of an original layout, as mentioned above. Sea sketches usually contained geometric lines and dots as well as written notes with explanations of a ship's nationality, architecture, and movements. The Elder never considered his drawings to be finished products, as other artists may have done; instead, they were to serve as marketing inventory and a library of chronological

FIGURE 12



One of only a few color oils produced by Willem van de Velde the Elder. Photographic reproduction of *The Dutch Ship Gouden Leeuw Salutes English Ship Prince*, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, oil on canvas, 62.9 x 84.25 in., ca. 1672–73, private collection, Amsterdam (Wikimedia Commons).

work, rather than to be sold as autonomous pieces. Much of this inventory was used to make print reproductions or serve as guides for other artists’ oil paintings of seascapes. During his lifetime, he amassed a catalog of items numbering in the thousands and kept them at the studio with an organized system to access them.³⁹

Unique Materials

Early on, Van de Velde laid down his pictures using deep, black inks and animal glue. A thick quill was employed to make hash strokes to create a sense of recession on wave troughs and ship hulls (see figure 17). The accuracy he achieved from employing these materials and tools could be found only in printmaking—a process that used intricate incisions on brass, copper, or wooden plates and could create lines less than one millimeter in width. Until the time of Van de Velde, England had produced only one native painter and line engraver of stature in the field of printmaking: William Faithorne, who had been exiled to France during the English Civil Wars.⁴⁰

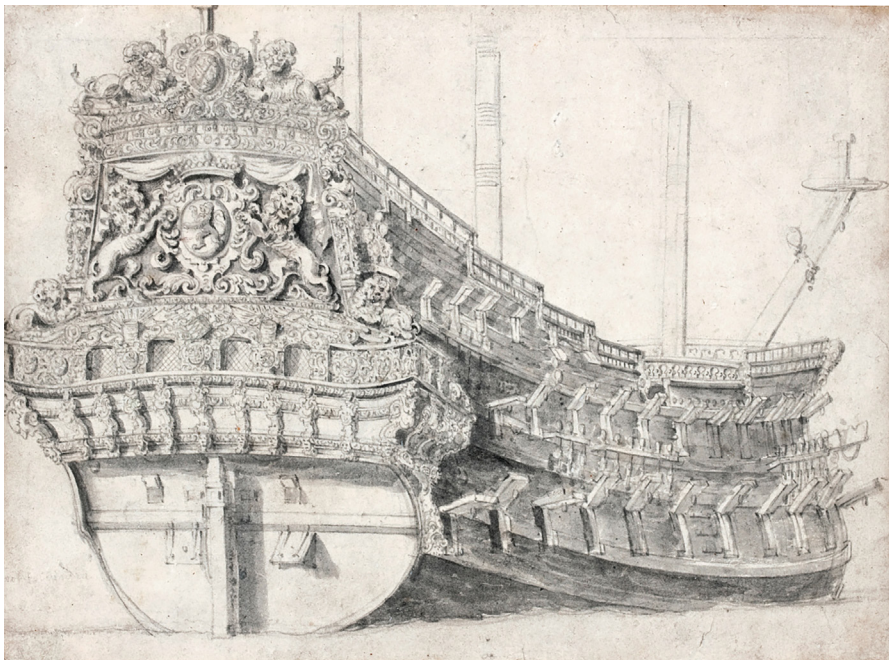
Willem often used Dutch and French handmade papers, because the quality was far superior to the coarse, inexpensive, oatmeal-and-sawdust papers

FIGURE 13



Sketch by Willem van de Velde the Elder. Photographic reproduction of *Figures on Board Small Merchant Vessels*, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, pen and brown ink and blue-gray wash over lead point, incised for transfer, 8.3 × 12.7 in., ca. 1650–58, Getty Museum, Los Angeles (Wikimedia Commons).

FIGURE 14



Photographic reproduction of *Portrait of a Dutch Warship*, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, black chalk and gray wash, 9.2 × 12.3 in., unknown date, private collection (Wikimedia Commons).

FIGURE 15

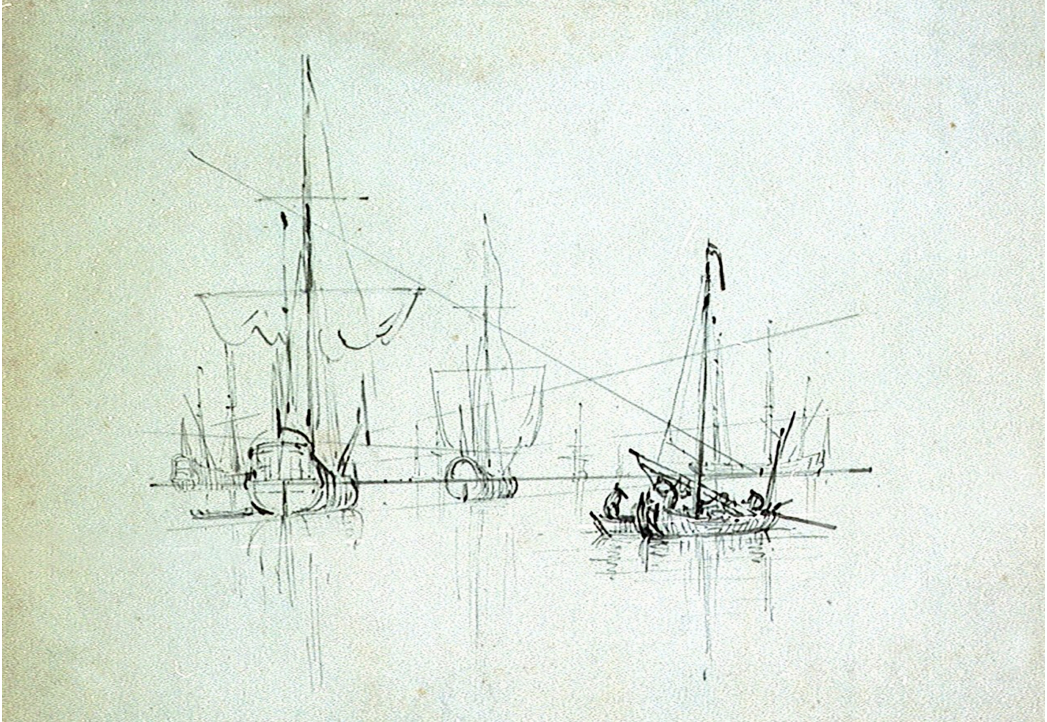


Example of a pen painting where a brush was used to delineate clouds. Photographic reproduction of *Slag in de Sont* [Battle of the Sound, 8 November 1658], by Willem van de Velde the Elder, pen and ink and brush over lead white on oak panel, 38.4 x 55.5 in., ca. 1660, Amsterdam Museum (Open Art Images).

common in England. This use of expensive papers demonstrates that he was a profitable artist. Over time, he transitioned from vellum to wood panel to canvas. Vellum eventually became less popular with the artist, even though it could be acquired in large sheets that were conducive to his long, horizontal scenes. Its surface irregularities were incompatible with the exactness he wanted to realize, and the product also was susceptible to humidity, which caused rippling.⁴¹

Employing wooden panels also had its issues. The primary drawback was that some of the splendor of natural scenery attained when using paper or vellum was lost. To offset this problem, Van de Velde used an innovative method that others would copy later. First, a layer of brown paint was applied to a wooden board, which then was topped with two layers each of lead white (a form of plaster), limestone chalk, and a drying oil; this resulted in six layers of materials.⁴² The process required at least an eight-week cure time for the surface to harden enough that sharp reed pens could be used to create the hash marks required for imitating depth. Willem had a preference for graphite, another tool that was not embraced enthusiastically in Britain owing to its rarity and cost. He valued its impermeability and flexibility, and it was ideal for transference, which sped up the copying or alteration processes.

FIGURE 16



Perspective drawing that Willem van de Velde the Younger used in apprentice courses showing height walls for replicating ships of comparable size in three-dimensional space. Photographic reproduction of *Royal Yachts and a Galliot at Anchor in a Calm*, by Willem van de Velde the Younger, drawing, unknown date, in Daalder, *Van de Velde & Son*, pp. 194–95.

FIGURE 17



Detail of a Van de Velde the Elder pen-and-ink drawing showing his use of lines and hash marks to define the movement of water. Photographic reproduction of *A Sea-Piece with a Dutch Merchant Ship and a Swedish Flute*, by Willem van de Velde the Elder, pen and brush on wood panel, 23.8 × 32.9 in., 1650, National Galleries Scotland (Wikimedia Commons). Photographed by Alf van Beem, February 2020.

Successful Business and Studio Model

In addition to the marine art proficiencies that Britain came to acquire through Van de Velde's move from the Netherlands, the artist also brought experience in studio operations and a fruitful marketing model.⁴³ Decades of experience in observing market-sector chains and an understanding of the differentiators among

wealthy connoisseurs, art lovers, serious collectors, dealers, merchants, and vendors were valuable assets to have in Britain during the period of burgeoning popularity of sea paintings.⁴⁴ Willem and his son thrived in their new homeland because of a deep knowledge of Netherlandic art production that involved international export-market chains, guild regulations, speculators, and pricing schemes.⁴⁵

Part of Van de Velde’s affluence likely was tied to the significant growth in agents and collectors that occurred in London after his arrival. By the time he moved there, he was producing his work at the height of an explosion in the city’s population from eighty thousand in the mid-sixteenth century to over half a million by 1700. A quarter of those domiciled in London—where his studio was located—were tied to the trades or commerce. The growing middle class with more disposable income, the nation’s rise in sea dominance, and Van de Velde’s exceptional gifts were the reasons he gained his notoriety as a marine artist, despite being a relative stranger.⁴⁶

The barque master’s son rose to become a favorite image maker for the European elite. His skills were unmatched, which made him popular among European royalty, politicians, naval leaders, and wealthy businessmen. When Van de Velde moved to Britain, the nation acquired a superior dimensionalist and perspectivist and someone who understood how to use precise mathematical patterning in creating true-to-life maritime scenes. From his grisailles, artists learned how to depict air, water, and horizon in three dimensions. Owing to the prolific output from the Van de Velde studio, it became the home for over two thousand drafts that artists constantly reviewed for inspiration. Beyond his raw talent, Van de Velde was also at the right place at the right time. He moved to Britain when it was emerging as one of the most powerful maritime nations in the world; its citizens egotistically were yearning to acquire representations of their new status. Arising from the Van de Velde legacy of draftsmanship would be some of the greatest British marine painters in the nation’s history, including his son, Willem the Younger, Charles Brooking, Dominic Serres the Elder, John Cleveley the Younger, and J. M. W. Turner.

NOTES

1. Charles Nicholl, “The Kings and Queens of England (and Other Mafiosi),” *Independent*, 24 October 1995, www.independent.co.uk/. Epigraph is from Richard Johns, “James Thornhill and Decorative History Painting in England after 1688” (PhD diss., Univ. of York, September 2004).
2. “Dutch Landscapes and Seascapes of the 1600s,” *National Gallery of Art*, www.nga.gov/.
3. Blake appears in a cartographic-map rendering in the 1650s. See, for example, a detail of a much larger map, ca. 1650, showing part of modern-day Canada’s province of

Newfoundland and Labrador, originally published in the June 1740 issue of *Gentlemen's Magazine*. Photo of the map by Hulton Archive / Getty Images, available at www.gettyimages.co.uk/.

4. There does exist a nineteenth-century, retrospective, romanticized portrayal of Admiral Blake by English historical portraitist Henry Perronet Briggs. Blake is shown wearing a breastplate, standing in front of a cannon, his scabbard lying on the deck beside him, pointing out to sea with his saber. The only nautical part of the painting is that he is depicted beside a gunwale with block and tackle behind him, and a bit of ocean can be seen in the space around the gunport. For a photo of the portrait, see "Robert Blake," *Westminster Abbey*, www.westminster-abbey.org/. In the seventeenth century, there also were paintings that had some lesser maritime themes, such as Italian painter Antonio Verrio's *The Sea Triumph of Charles II*, ca. 1674, in which a naval fleet is painted in the background. Another example is the full-length, color, baroque portrait, ca. 1672, by the French artist Henri Gascar of Charles II's brother, James, the Duke of York, who served as the king's Lord High Admiral. The duke is dressed in Roman costume representing Mars, the god of war. Behind him is a depiction of the fleet, and his one-hundred-gun flagship *Royal Prince* shows prominently. The portrait is believed to be a commemoration of his victory over the Dutch off Lowestoft in 1655.
5. MSW [Mitch Williamson], "Sea-Power in the 17th Century I," *Weapons and Warfare* (blog), 12 January 2020, weaponsandwarfare.com/. The following is quoted from this source: "[S]uperior organization and better seamanship of the Dutch East India Company enabled [the Dutch] to establish a commercial supremacy in Indonesia by 1650, despite prolonged and sometimes effective resistance by the Portuguese and others. . . . By 1621 over half the carrying trade of Brazil was in Dutch hands, by the 1650s the Dutch and English were permanently established in the Caribbean and were establishing treaty rights. . . . Naval strategy turned more than ever on the protection and destruction of trade, and sea-power as always depended upon both trading and fighting fleets." The extent of the company's reach was extraordinary, as laid out in the following description at the National Gallery of Art website: "At its height in the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company was the largest commercial enterprise in the world, controlling more than half of all oceangoing trade and carrying the products of many nations. Its flag and emblem—a monogram of its name in Dutch (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC)—were recognized around the globe. Founded in 1602, the VOC's charter from the states-general ensured its monopoly on trade between the tip of Africa and the southern end of South America. It was also granted diplomatic and war powers. The new corporation was formed by the merger of existing trading companies in six cities. Business was guided by seventeen 'gentlemen,' eight of whom were appointed by officials in Amsterdam. Any resident of the United Provinces could own shares in the VOC—the first publicly traded stock in the world—but in practice, control rested in the hands of a few large shareholders." *Painting in the Dutch Golden Age: A Profile of the Seventeenth Century* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2007), p. 20, available at www.nga.gov/.
6. Richard W. Unger, "Dutch Shipbuilding in the Golden Age," *History Today* 31, no. 4 (April 1981), available at www.historytoday.com/.
7. For examples of the variety of sea-related paintings from the Dutch school, see "Water, Wind, and Wave: Marine Paintings from the Dutch Golden Age," *National Gallery of Art*, www.nga.gov/. Included are paintings and descriptions of work by Hendrick Vroom, who was a naval architect and an important predecessor of Willem van de Velde the Elder; Reinier Nooms, who had an expert eye for nautical detail; and the port art of Abraham de Verwer. Also included are works by marine landscape painter Jan van Goyen; Simon de Vlieger, who was influenced by Van de Velde the Elder; and German-born Dutch immigrant Ludolf Backhuysen, who overtook the Van de Veldes in importance in Dutch marine painting after they moved to England.
8. Geoffrey Callender, "Willem van de Velde the Elder and His Art," *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 76, no. 445 (1940), pp. 105–10, available at www.jstor.org/.

9. "Willem van de Velde the Elder," *Find a Grave*, 6 January 1999, www.findagrave.com/.
10. Ibid.; Callender, "Willem van de Velde the Elder and His Art," p. 105.
11. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, "Willem van de Velde the Elder," 24 April 2014, *National Gallery of Art*, www.nga.gov/. One example of this is the Younger's work *The Burning of the Royal James at the Battle of Solebay, 28 May 1672*, painted years after his father completed the first drawings.
12. "Adriaen van de Velde," *Getty Museum Collection*, www.getty.edu/.
13. According to David Cordingly, a twentieth-century English historian, the Elder was adulterous and fathered two illegitimate children by his maidservant and her friend, after which his wife applied for a legal separation owing to disputes and violent quarrels. A final divorce decree never materialized, as he sent for her once he was settled in England.
14. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century," NGA Online Editions, *National Gallery of Art*, 23 April 2014, purl.org/nga/collection/catalogue/17th-century-dutch-paintings.
15. "The Battle of Scheveningen, 10 August 1653," *Royal Museums Greenwich*, rmg.co.uk/.
16. Wheelock, "Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century."
17. "Who Were the Van de Veldes?," *Royal Museums Greenwich*, rmg.co.uk/.
18. David Cordingly, *Marine Painting in England 1700–1900* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), p. 69.
19. "Who Were the Van de Veldes?"
20. Paul Seaward, "March 1672: The Declaration of Indulgence," *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social and Local History* (blog), 10 March 2022, thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/.
21. Cordingly, *Marine Painting in England*.
22. Ibid.
23. "Spreading Canvas: Eighteenth-Century British Marine Painting," *Yale Center for British Art*, September 2016, britishart.yale.edu/.
24. For an excellent chronology of marine art, see Cordingly, *Marine Painting in England*. "Born in London c.1702, Samuel Scott is widely considered to be at the forefront of 18th Century British marine painting. Little is known about his early life and training but his depictions of naval battles and port scenes show a strong influence from the Dutch marine masters, particularly Willem Van de Velde the younger (1633–1707) from whom many of his compositions are derived." "Samuel Scott," *Rountree Tryon Galleries*, www.rountreetryon.com/. See Ellis Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530 to 1790*, 5th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 103–104.
25. Seymour Slive, "Realism and Symbolism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting," *Daedalus* 91, no. 3 (Summer 1962), pp. 469–500, available at www.jstor.org/.
26. John White, "Developments in Renaissance Perspective—I," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949), pp. 58–79.
27. Dominick Serres and John Thomas Serres, *Liber Nauticus and Instructor in the Art of Marine Drawing* (1805; repr. London: Scholar, 1979). The work is composed of forty-one plates of detailed views of warships and a series of seascapes. Plates in part 1 show how to draw parts of a ship and water, the mechanics of sailing ships, ships' rates and classes, and the ranks of admirals. Part 2 has twenty-four plates in aquatints modeled after drawings by the two authors' deceased father, Dominic Serres. This comprehensive work helped to identify the study of marine drawing as a formal school of art for the first time.
28. Boudewijn Bakker, "Bernhard von Breydenbach and Erhard Reuwich of Utrecht: Pioneers in the Theory and Practice of the Lifelike Printed Image," *Academia*, 25 March 2019, www.academia.edu/; White, "Developments in Renaissance Perspective."
29. A. H. W. Robinson, *Marine Cartography in Britain: A History of the Sea Chart to 1855* (Oxford, U.K.: Leicester Univ. Press, 1962).
30. Cordingly, *Marine Painting in England*.
31. "The woodcut in the early 16th century became the most important medium for producing images of topical interest and they were coloured using stencils so that many impressions could be produced quickly. Many impressions of this print must have been produced but this is the only one that survives. It comes from a famous album of early woodcuts that once belonged to Rudolph II in

- Prague." "Battle of Zonchio," *British Museum*, britishmuseum.org/.
32. The Ottoman battle was one in which Willem the Elder would have taken a front seat with his artist tools in hand, if he had been alive. His rendering, though, would have been entirely different. By the time Willem began creating his considerable portfolio, he and the Dutch school of artists innately understood the geometry needed to produce three-dimensional art on a two-dimensional space.
 33. Karen Hearn, "Elizabeth I and the Spanish Armada: A Painting and Its Afterlife," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 14 (2004), pp. 123–40, available at www.jstor.org/.
 34. James Ayres, *Art, Artisans & Apprentices: Apprentice Painters & Sculptors in the Early Modern British Tradition* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxbow Books, 2014).
 35. Remmelt Daalder, *Van de Velde & Son, Marine Painters: The Firm of Willem van de Velde the Elder and Willem van de Velde the Younger, 1640–1707*, trans. Michael Hoyle, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Neth.: Primavera Pers, 2020).
 36. "Lot 32: Willem van de Velde the Elder," Master Paintings: Part I, *Sotheby's*, www.sothebys.com/.
 37. "Architectura Navalis: Floating Baroque," *Architecture and Design*, 3 January 2019, meer.com/.
 38. The Elder possessed inborn and instinctive tactile arithmetical abilities of three-dimensional spatial conceptualizations, which allowed him to replicate complex scenes to exact scale.
 39. *The Art of the Van de Veldes: Paintings and Drawings by the Great Dutch Marine Artists and Their English Followers*, 1st ed. (Greenwich, U.K.: National Maritime Museum, 1982). Fates of the drawings varied over the years, and many were resold or moved into private collections. In the eighteenth century, Englishman Charles Gore, who had turned into a wealthy "gadabout" after a substantial inheritance, bought some of the draftsman's drawings as inspiration for his amateur watercolors. In this case, Gore marred the originals with his own penwork and inks, and he overpainted some of them. It is not known whether, while Van de Velde was alive, the many drawings at the studio were "rented out" or left as open-source material to those who desired to study them. Collectively, they represented a valuable archive of precise historical research of navies and their battles in the seventeenth century.
 40. "William Faithorne Publishes the First Work in English on Engraving and Etching," *Jeremy Norman's HistoryofInformation.com*, historyofinformation.com/.
 41. "The History of Paper," *The Connoisseur* 3, no. 1 (September 1888), pp. 35–37, available at www.jstor.org/; Jeanne Willoz-Egnor, "Pen-Skill-der-What?," *Mariners' Museum and Park*, 11 May 2020, www.marinersmuseum.org/.
 42. "The History of Paper"; Willoz-Egnor, "Pen-Skill-der-What?"
 43. Neil De Marchi and Hans J. Van Miegroet, "Art, Value, and Market Practices in the Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 3 (September 1994), pp. 451–64.
 44. Carol Gibson-Wood, "Picture Consumption in London at the End of the Seventeenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 84, no. 3 (September 2002), pp. 491–500, esp. pp. 491–94.
 45. David Ormrod, "Art and Its Markets," *Economic History Review*, n.s., 52, no. 3 (August 1999), pp. 544–51.
 46. "People in Place," *People in Place: Families, Households and Housing in London 1550–1720*, archives.history.ac.uk/.