



Pieter van de Velde
(Antwerp 1634 - 1707)

The arrival of Saint Norbert of Xanten at Antwerp in 1122
Oil on Canvas - 82 x 120 cm. - 1660-70 ca.

For the month of October, and in advance of the new collection, we chose this wonderful and interesting historical passage from "The entrance of St. Norbert of Xanten in Antwerp in 1122" by the important Flemish painter Pieter van de Velde, born in Antwerp in 1634 and belonging to a prominent family of artisans. Influenced by the great Willem van de Velde "The Young", who probably was his teacher, he specialized in marine and coastal views. Thanks to the documentation of the time we know that in 1654 he became master of the Guild of Saint Luke in Antwerp, indicating its prestige as an artist since then.

Technically his works are reminiscent of Jan and Bonaventura Peeters, but with a less precise drawing showing a more natural. His artistic career was brilliant, enjoyed great recognition and popularity in his time, both for its magnificent artistic quality as the theme of his works, which were of the most requested by bourgeois society at the time.

With his extensive repertoire of works we can say that Pieter van de Velde was a great student of history, capturing some episodes of it in many of his paintings, as in our case represents one of the most famous episodes of Antwerp Medieval History: the arrival, on the river Scheldt, in 1122, of St. Norbert of Xanten to the port of Antwerp. In these compositions we observe that reconstructs these places architectures incorporating coastal landscapes, with boats and characters of the seventeenth century.

The works of Pieter van de Velde are characterized by being wrapped in a light golden haze, of a very Italian taste, with a predominance of blue and ochre tones. His compositions are always full of movement, strategically placing numerous characters and ships, and paying attention to the smallest detail.

There are three versions of this great composition of the "Arrive of Saint Norbert of Xanten to Antwerp". The first is preserved in the Maritime Museum of Antwerp (Mas, inv. N. AS. 1952,045,002, formally a legacy of the Museum of



Fine Arts Antwerp, inv. no. 756, like Bonaventura Peeters); the second with support and measures unknown (Delen 1930, fig. 51, erroneously taken as the version of the Museum of Antwerp), and the third made on canvas and measures 135 x 191 cm, Wallraff-Richartz Museum, Cologne, inv. n. 633, was destroyed during the Second World War 6/29/1943.



The arrival of St. Norbert of Xanten in 1122, on the river Scheldt, to the port of Antwerp, also known as "Kranenhoofd" for its characteristic crane, which is represented in the version of Bonaventura Peeters, but in ours the artist omitted, probably for the vision of the city did not stay broken by said crane. It is obvious that the work represents the city of Antwerp in the seventeenth century, not in 1122, for example, the large door on the left is the "Werfpoort", which was rebuilt in 1579, and on which you can see the statue of the legendary Roman soldier Silvius Brabo (288 d. C), to whom he must the name of the Province of Brabant and Antwerp.



The tower next to the Werfpoort belongs to the Church of St Walpurgis, also rebuilt and modified several times; the last one took place in 1500. We can see how the artist has tried to capture even the smallest detail of the architectural elements that make up this Gothic church, taking special care to cover both the nave and towers, the latter conical and finished in point, lost in the sky, a way to bring the earthly to the heavenly world, widely used resource from the Late Medieval.

The great tower which overlooks the city is the Cathedral of Our Lady, of course baroque style, an architectural reference of that style in Northern Europe. Next to it we see two small towers that correspond to Viskoperstoren and Bakkerstoren. All this, in a perfect harmony with the other buildings closer to the coast.





Much further in the distance can see the steeple of the Church of San Andrés, and just to the right, the Abbey of San Miguel. The last building was demolished by the French in 1830, was for centuries the meeting point Antwerp's most important religious and plays an important role in the history displayed in our canvas.



In the first decade of the twelfth century, the Protestant heresy Tanchelm spread like wildfire through the provinces of Brabant and Zeeland. Criticized for all Catholic institutions, in no time Tanchelm won numerous proselytes, earning himself a great reputation not only as a heretic, but also as an evil blasphemer and a pervert addicted to all kinds of excesses. Although he died in 1115 at the hands of a murderer (his skull



was crushed by a priest in a boat), its popularity continued until much later, in fact the Bishop Burchard of Cambrai, later known as "Norbert", was called to struggle against this heresy. In 1124, the documents confirm the change of Norberto and his monks of the Church of San Miguel to the Cathedral of Our Lady. This episode allows Velde recreated down to the smallest detail of the city and in particular of the Abbey of San Miguel.



Until now we have only made mention of all the history that is contained in our picture, but if you look at the amount of characters appearing, we could do besides study, as we can see, fights with soldiers intervening therein, mothers with children, smart people mixed with the common people, very interested in not missing the event, even dogs.

Furthermore, we see a wonderful marina with numerous boats. The humblest are small fishing boats and sailboats, with different characters on board who also want to be participants in an event of such significance that would go down in history. But the most striking is the great frigate, thanks to having the sails set allows us to see the buildings that appear at the bottom.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- J. Maere & M. Wabbes, *Illustrated Dictionary 17th Century Flemish Painters*, pg. 407, plates 1147 y 1205.
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- R.H. Wilenski, *Flemish painters*, Vol I, pg. 675
- Catalogue *All the paintings of the Rijkmuseum in Amsterdam*, pg 564.
- U. Thieme & F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Leipzig, 1950.
- E. Benezit, *Dictionnaire des peintres....*. Vol. 14, 1999, pg.102 y 103.

PROVENANCE

Verstraete Collection, Brussels, 1930

Private Collection, France

Salomon Lilian Gallery, Amsterdam

MUSEUMS

Pieter van de Velde's works can be found in many museums around the world including: Amsterdam- Rijksmuseum, Ansbach- Residenz Gemadegalerie, Stockholm- Statens Konstmuseum, Kiev- National Museum, Lille- Fine Arts Museum, London- Greenwich National Maritime Museum, Prague- Nostitz Museum, San Petersburg- Hermitage Museum, Sibiu- Brukenthal Museum.