

Paintings or Prints? Experiens Sillemans and the Origins of the *Grisaille* Sea-piece: Notes on a Rediscovered Technique*

David Freedberg, Aviva Burnstock and Alan Phenix

Everyone is familiar with the monochromatic paintings of ships or sea-battles that became popular in the Netherlands in the second half of the seventeenth century (see, for example, figs. 62–63). They are not, however, the kind of objects one would normally have felt justified in bringing to the attention of readers of *Print Quarterly*, were it not for the fact that the rediscovery of the technique described in the following pages has important implications for the hitherto unsuspected use of printmaking techniques – to say nothing of the new light that can now be cast on the development of a major genre in seventeenth-century painting. Nowhere do the techniques of drawing, painting and printmaking seem so close and more difficult to distinguish than in the objects that form the centre of our discussion, to such an extent that, with a very few exceptions, the distinctions have remained unnoted, undescribed and unclarified.

The best-known exponent of the so-called *pen-schilderijen* – ‘pen-paintings’ or *grisailles* as they have more popularly been called – was Willem van de Velde the Elder (1611–1693),¹ who produced most of his works in this genre (see, for example, fig. 62) before he emigrated to England in 1672, the very

year in which Cardinal Leopoldo de’ Medici was intensely involved in negotiations to buy such a picture from him.² This is how the account of his technique runs in what was until very recently the standard survey of the whole subject, Admiral Lionel Preston’s *Sea and River Painters of the Netherlands* (1937):

His fame now rests on what are popularly called ‘grisailles’, a term generally used in painting a grey monotone; in reality these are etchings in the grand style made mainly with the reed-pen . . . The method was to paint a white background on a panel or canvas, then etch thereon the composed picture, shading it with black or plumbago to soften the general effect. The masterly freedom of execution, the extreme accuracy of detail, the perfection of the composition, mark every reed-pen etching by the elder van de Velde, for they are of a far finer calibre than the works of the other reed-pen etchers . . .³

Readers may well start at the evasive detail of this presumably unintentional farrago: what can be meant by a ‘reed-pen etching’? In what sense is it possible to etch on a panel? What precisely is the technical genre – painting, drawing or print (since

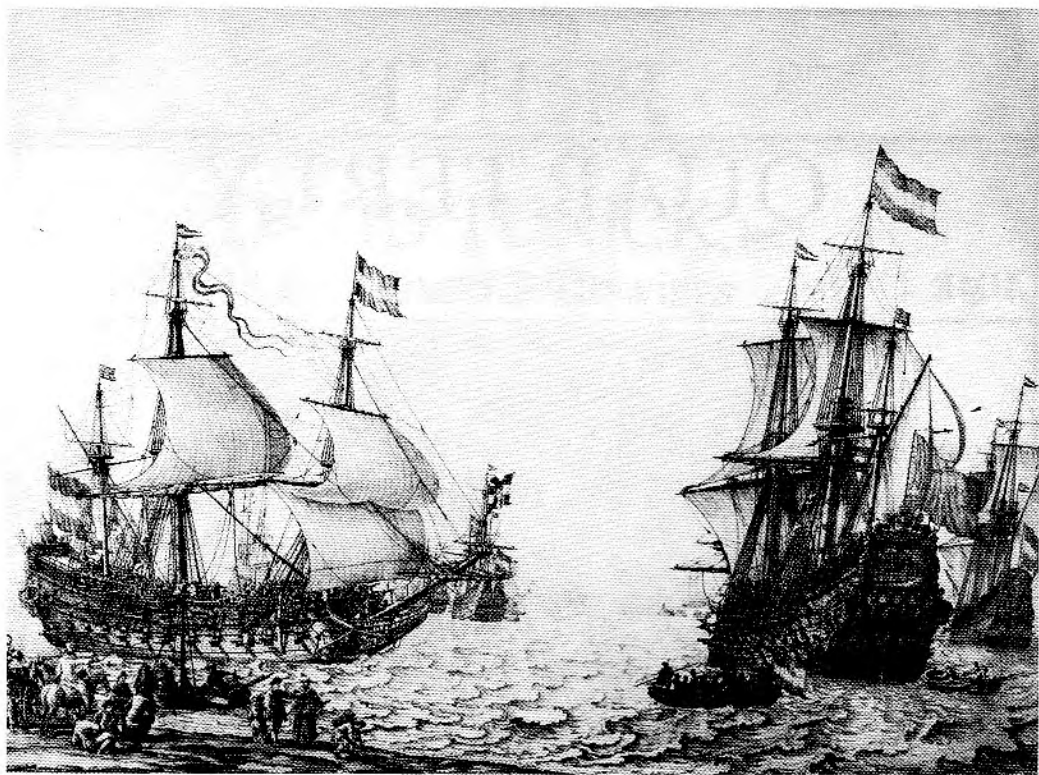
* This article was written by David Freedberg, while the technical reports on which the central section is based were prepared by Aviva Burnstock and Alan Phenix. It would not have been possible without the help of Harley Preston (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich) and Gary Schwartz (Maarsse), both of whom provided key information about Sillemans and about the techniques he used. To them must go the credit for having anticipated the main discoveries outlined in these pages. David Landau (London), Wouter Klock (Rijksmuseum) and Martin Bijl (Rijksmuseum) unstintingly gave help and advice on a variety of issues.

1. The literature on Willem van de Velde the Elder is still undeservedly thin. The basic biographical articles are those by P. Haverkorn van Rijsewijk, ‘Willem van de Velde de Oude, Zijn Leven en Zijn Werk’, *Oud-Holland*, XVI, 1898, pp. 65–78; ‘De Eerste Oorlog met Engeland en Willem van de Velde de Oude’, *Oud-Holland*, XVII, 1899, pp. 33–46; ‘Willem van de Velde de Oude te Zee en te Land’, *Oud-Holland*, XVIII, 1900, pp. 21–44; ‘Willem van de Velde de Oude’, *Oud-Holland*, XX, 1902, pp. 170–92 and 225–43; but see now the excellent introduction by M. S. Robinson, *Van de Velde Drawings: A Catalogue of Drawings in the National Maritime Museum made by the Elder and Younger Willem van de*

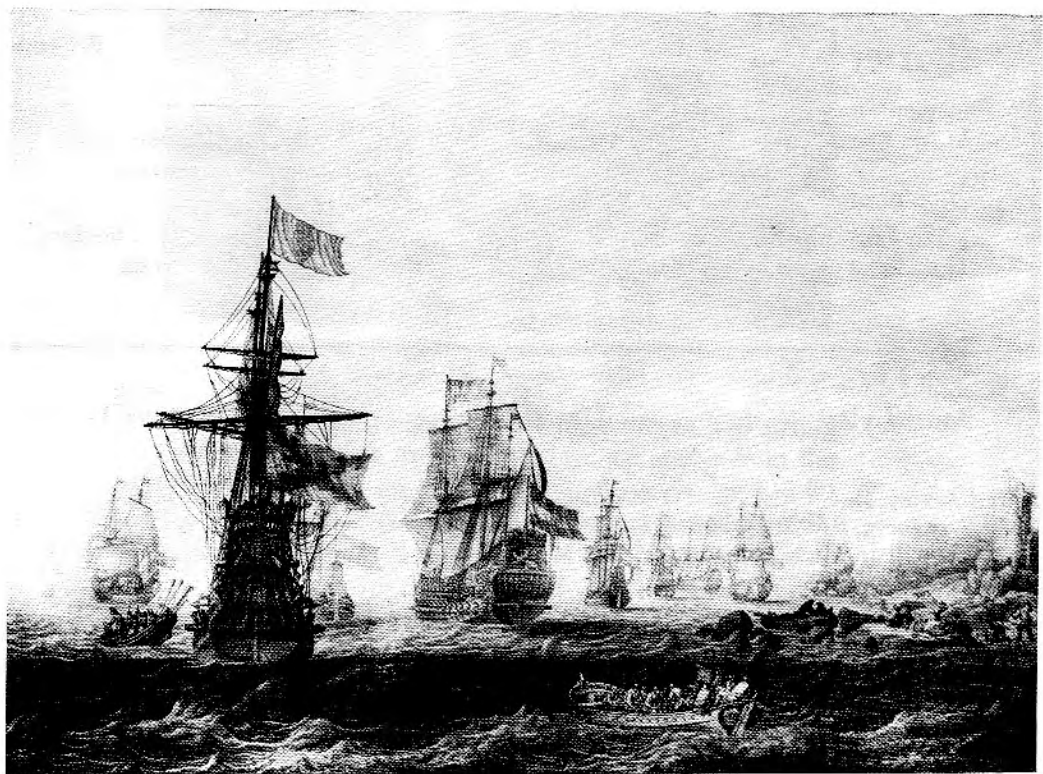
Velde, Cambridge, 1958, pp. 1–29. The most recent and useful survey is in *The Art of the Van de Veldes*, exhibition catalogue, London, National Maritime Museum 1982 (henceforward *The Art of the Van de Veldes*), with a résumé of the scant bibliography on p. 143; but see also the works cited in notes 2–4, 6 and 8 below.

2. See H. Geisenheimer, ‘Beiträge zur Geschichte des niederländischen Kunsthandels in der zweiten Hälfte des XVII. Jahrhunderts’, *Jahrbuch der königlich preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, XXXII, 1911, Beiheft, pp. 34–61, especially pp. 34–35 and 43–44 on the negotiations to buy the painting of the *Surrender of the Royal Prince* (dated 1672); having bought the work for 500 florins, Leopoldo later gave it to Cardinal Chigi (Rome, Palazzo Chigi). For evidence of further purchases by Cosimo and then by Leopoldo (including the two pictures showing the *Netherlands Fleet before the Four Days Battle, 11–14 June 1666*, now at Poggio Imperiale but formerly in the Pitti Palace), see K. Langedijk, ‘Een van de Velde Aankoop door Kardinaal Leopoldo de’ Medici in het jaar 1672’, *Oud-Holland*, LXXVI, 1961, pp. 97–106.

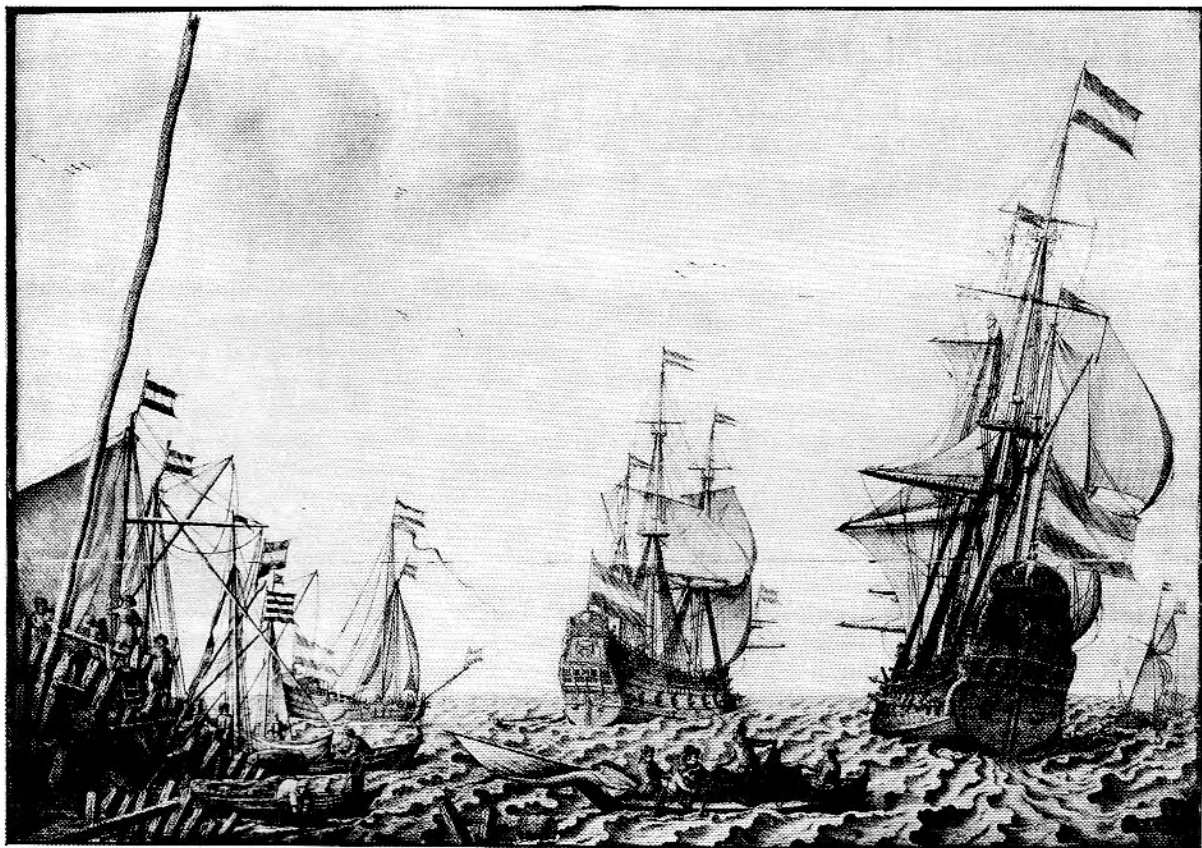
3. L. Preston, *Sea and River Painters of the Netherlands*, Oxford, 1937, p. 30.



62. Willem van de Velde the Elder, *The 'Oosterwijk' under Sail in Two Positions*, signed and dated 1654, panel, 898 × 1,214 mm (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum).



63. Herman Witmont, *Fleet of Dutch Ships near the Shore*, signed, panel, 787 × 1,103 mm (Anglesey Abbey).



64. Experiens Sillemans, *Ships near a Harbour*, signed and dated 1649, panel, 770 × 1,060 mm (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum).

it is the latter that seems to be hinted at here)? The account seems unhelpful, and one is finally left wondering how exactly the 'composed picture' was supposed to have been etched.

Five years after this account, H. P. Baard, in his small book on both the Elder and the Younger van de Velde, judiciously commented on the inaccuracy of the term *grisaille*: 'since the *grisaille* usually has a painterly quality, which one could never say of the work of van de Velde (*sc.* the Elder). The correct term "pen-painting" sounds self-contradictory, but it does convey most accurately the technique he used'.⁴ He also recalled how the aged van de Velde himself was to refer to 'my art of drawing the pictures'.⁵

In 1974, Rupert Preston (the second of the three Prestons who must feature in these pages) was clearer than the Admiral: 'The *grisaille* technique, which involves working with a pen and indian ink over a prepared oil-base which hardened, on panel or canvas, lent itself perfectly to the accurate drawing of Willem van de Velde. Paint and colour would have lessened the fineness and quality, since they would only have blurred the detail';⁶ but the inadequacy of the term *grisaille* is plain, and – as we shall see – it is by no means certain that all the painters of *penschilderijen* used the same technique.

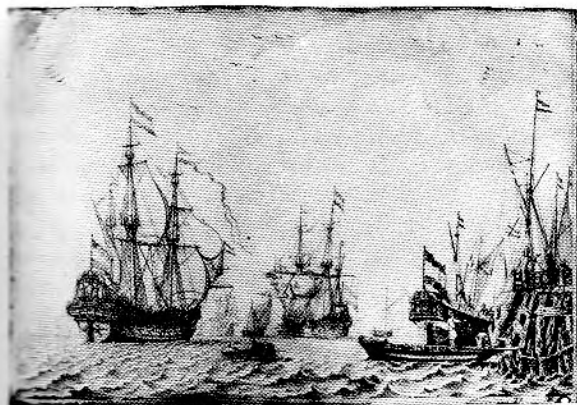
Much new evidence about the van de Veldes was brought to the fore in the course of the 1982 exhibition of their art at the National Maritime Museum

4. H. P. Baard, *Willem van de Velde de Oude, Willem van de Velde de Jonge* (Palet Serie), Amsterdam 1942, p. 18 ('De benaming *grisaille*, dikwerf aan zijn schilderijen gegeven is daarom onjuist, omdat de *grisaille* steeds een schilderachtig karakter heeft, hetgeen van van de Veldes werk nimmer gezegd kan worden. De juiste benaming, *penschilderij*, klinkt weliswaar tegenstrijdig, zij geeft echter de toegepaste techniek het

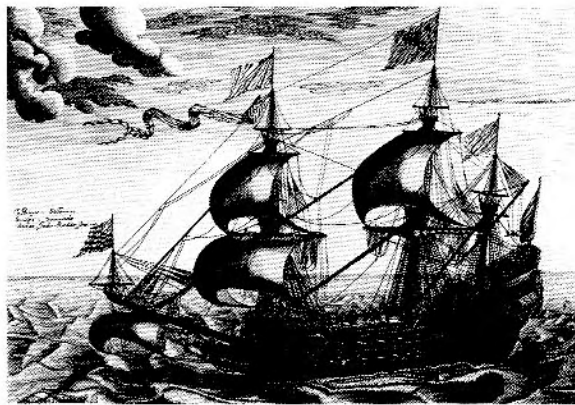
zuiverst wccr').

5. Letter to Lord Dartmouth of 8 October 1688; quoted in Haverkorn van Rijsewijk, *op. cit.*, 1902, p. 238, citing the *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Ninth Report, Appendix, Part V* (*The Manuscripts of Lord Dartmouth*), London 1887.

6. R. Preston, *Seventeenth Century Marine Painters of the Netherlands, Leigh-on-Sea* 1974 (reprinted 1980), p. 50.



65. Experiens Sillemans, *Dutch Ships and Boats near a Harbour with Figures*, pen and ink on parchment, 262 × 385 mm (Berlin, Staatliche Museen).



67. Experiens Sillemans, *A Dutch Man o' War*, engraving, 303 × 423 mm (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Horatio Greenough, Curtis Fund).

in Greenwich.⁷ Writing in the catalogue, Westby Percival Prescott made it plain that most of the *grisailles* by Willem van de Velde the Elder (his son never produced one) were produced by a combination of pen and brushwork:

... the finished work with its subtle and complicated pen hatchings could still only be reached through a number of clearly defined stages. These started with a faint drawn outline which could loosely show some of the principal ships and the position of the horizon. This was followed with pale grey washes applied with ox or squirrel brushes which brought a pale general image of the composition into being. Van de Velde used hard finely cut quills to draw the events in the picture, clearly separating the foreground, the middle distance and far distance by using strokes of varying

thickness and darkness. The illusion of close proximity was achieved by increasing the darkness of the ships in the foreground and the gradual lightening tone in the distance.⁸

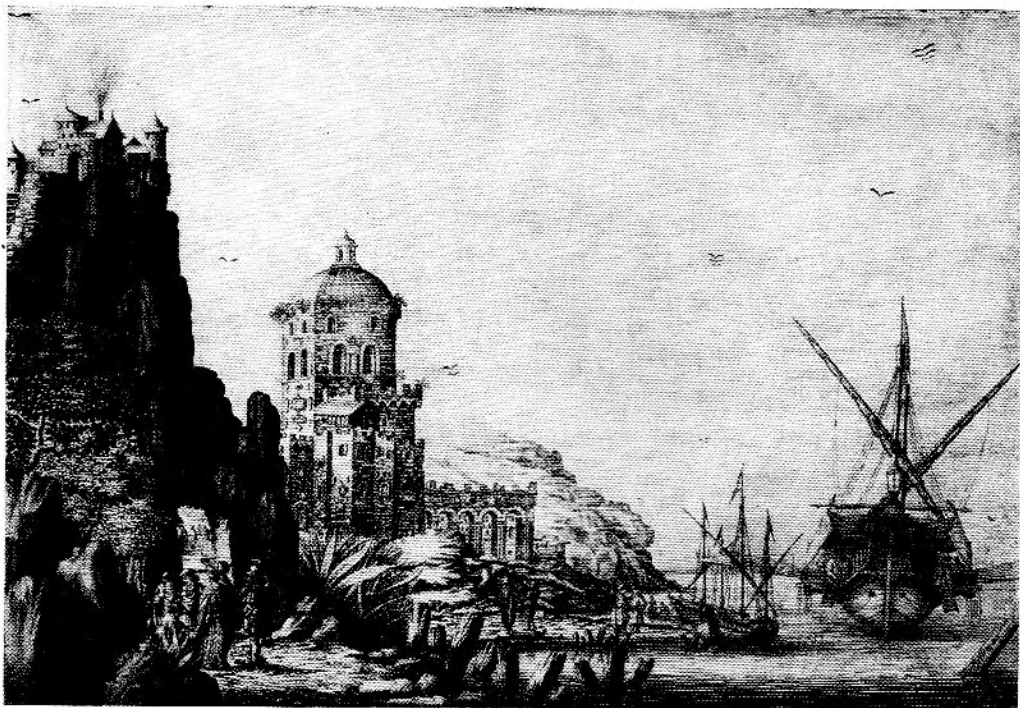
As a general description of the *penschilderijen* this seems to apply to the work of van de Velde and to that of his contemporaries and followers in the medium, from Heerman Witmont (c. 1605–after 1683) and Experiens Sillemans (c. 1611–1653), through Ludolf Backhuizen (1631–1708), down to painters like Cornelis Pietersz. de Mooij (d. 1693), Adriaen van Salm (fl. around 1700) and finally Cornelis Bouwmeester (c. 1670–1733), as well as a small number of lesser or less productive figures. They all seem to have used a combination of quill pens and brushes to draw and paint on a carefully prepared ground – usually coarse and brownish with a light priming layer of lead-white. According to Pieter Blaeu's marvellous letter of 1 January 1672 to Leopoldo de' Medici describing his visit to van de Velde, this layer was allowed to dry for two or three months, 'since otherwise the ground would not have



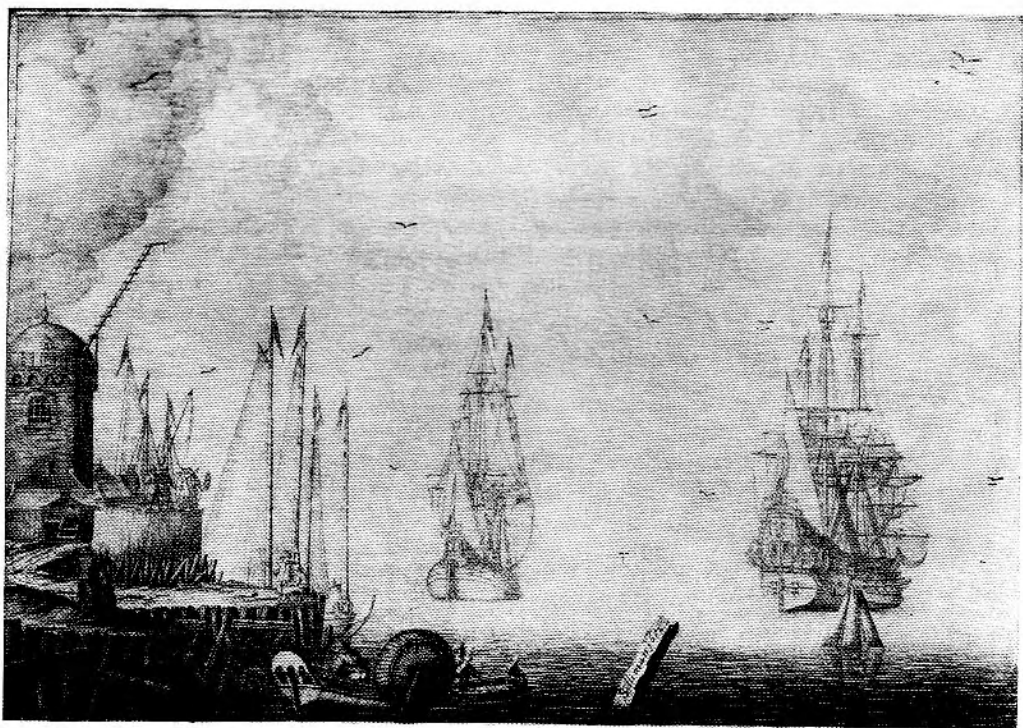
66. Experiens Sillemans, title to the *Maegde-Wapen*, signed, etching, 175 × 164 mm (from Jacob Cats, *Houwelyck*, 1642).

7. See note 1 above.

8. *The Art of the Van de Velde* (note 1), p. 24. See also the important introduction to the section on van de Velde the Elder, p. 52: 'Most grisailles were drawn with pen and brush on a prepared white ground, the support usually being an oak panel, although canvas was also used. Gradations of tone were produced by cross-hatching and the other techniques usually associated with engraving; occasionally, however, van de Velde painted in clouds and gun smoke with pale washes of grey' (my italics). For earlier more or less accurate summaries of this technique, see Baard, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–20 (here noting the importance of the varnish in achieving a parchment-like finish), and L. J. Bol, *Die holländische Marinemalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Braunschweig 1973, p. 231, reminding his readers that the 'sogenannten "Federmalereien"' are rather to be called drawings.



68. Experiens Sillemans, *Dutch Ships near a Fanciful Landscape*, signed, panel, 280 × 400 mm (London, private collection). Panel A.



69. Experiens Sillemans, *Dutch Ships and Boats near a Harbour*, signed and dated 1652, panel, 280 × 400 mm (London, private collection). Panel B.

hardened sufficiently to withstand the sharpness of the quill . . .'⁹

But where in all this may one speak of 'reed-pen etching', except in the broadest sense whereby a quill may be said to indent a recently prepared surface? It is true that the occasional observer might be tempted to think that only an etcher's needle would be capable of such extraordinary precision and *finesse* of detail, above all in the myriad complexities of the rigging of these boats and ships, with their breathtakingly controlled yet supple delicacy of execution. But the paintings are mostly on panel; and one has had to assume, both on the evidence of the few existing technical and general reports, as well as on the evidence of the naked eye, that their technical virtuosity consists precisely in the use of very fine brushes and the thinnest and sharpest of pens, in a manner that transcends the everyday capabilities of such instruments. Clearly, however, there remained much to explain. Not even the 1982 exhibition at Greenwich seemed to cover the full range of technical possibilities; and while the technique of the elder van de Velde was substantially illuminated, the variations and divergences of the other painters in this medium were largely left in the dark.

Willem van de Velde the Elder has received most attention in the meagre literature on the *pen-*

*schilderijen*¹⁰ not only because of the high quality and imaginative scope of his works in this medium, but also because of the comparative extensiveness of his *oeuvre* and his traditional position as the major pioneer of the genre. But this view of his place in its development has not been wholly unqualified. Although he may well have produced some *penschilderijen* in the early 1650s, the earliest dated examples are from 1654 and 1655;¹¹ most, however, are from the later 1650s and the 1660s.¹² It has therefore seemed possible, as both the Prestons noted, that at least two other artists may just have preceded him: Heerman Witmont and Experiens Sillemans.¹³ Of these two, more attention has been devoted to Heerman Witmont of Delft, whose prolific signed *oeuvre* may well have begun at least as early as that of van de Velde.¹⁴ The consensus of opinion was well stated in the catalogue of the 1982 Greenwich exhibition: 'It is not known who invented the grisaille process, but Heerman Witmont [fig. 63] was certainly one of the earliest practitioners in the medium . . . The two examples of his work in the collections at Greenwich are delicately executed, but they lack the assurance and command of detail shown in the masterpieces of Willem van de Velde the Elder'.¹⁵ Meanwhile E. H. H. Archibald broadly summarized the technical differences between the two

9. The relevant passage concerns the selection of a painting on the basis of 'sbozzi' shown to Blacu by the painter and their relation to the size of the finished picture, 'poi perchè il pittore non haveva tele minori apparecchiati e per apparecchiarli o sia per mettervi il color del fondo ci vuol il tempo di due o tre mesi mentre che altrimenti il fondo non è indurito assai per supportare l'acutezza della penna . . .' (my italics), cited in Geisenheimer, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 43.

10. See note 1 above.

11. For example, *Dutch Ships Coming to Anchor* (s. and d. 1654) and *The Huis te Oosterwijk Under Sail in Two Positions* (s. and d. 1654), Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, nos. 38-1657 and 27-329 respectively; and the *Battle of Scheveningen, 10 August 1653* (s. and d. 1655), Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 30-12. See also the following note.

12. The date on the *Battle of the Downs, 21 October 1639* (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, no. A1363) has occasionally been read as 1639 (c.g. in R. Preston, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 42, wrongly said to be in the National Maritime Museum), but it is in fact 1659; while the Greenwich painting of *Two Dutch Ships in a Moderate Breeze with the Catarina on the Right* (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 30-11) was not painted in 1649 (as has occasionally been claimed) but simply bears that date on the stern of the *Catarina*: the caution indicated at the end of note 14 below applies here too. But see also Robinson *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 60, for the remote possibility of earlier *grisailles* than those listed in the preceding note.

13. L. Preston, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 30 and 37; R. Preston, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 50 and 70.

14. See R. Preston, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 70, who observed of Witmont that 'it is known [sic?]' that a few of his *grisailles* are dated earlier than those of Willem van de Velde, and this prompts a suggestion that he may have initiated the method

together with Experiens Sillemans'. Preston gives 1654 as the date of the painting of *The Eendracht off Kronborg Castle* (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 30-10); but it should be noted that the inscriptions on sterns of ships (here *Anno 1654 Eendracht*) are by no means necessarily the dates of the pictures representing them; they are usually the dates of the ships and not of the paintings. A key document in the matter of priority appears to have been largely overlooked, and that is the Notarial Act of 29 April 1654 in the Amsterdam Archives (*Protocol Notaris P. de Barij*, published by Haverkorn van Rijsewijk in *Oud-Holland*, XVII, 1899, p. 35), in which van de Velde is recorded as having to look at certain drawings by Witmont at the beginning of 1653. One Barent Hommersz. wished to buy the drawings, and a question arose as to whether they could have been washed - which van de Velde denied, despite asseverations to that effect. Van de Velde declared 'hoe waer is dat int begin van den jaere XVI^e drij en vijftich hij getuijge metten requirant gegaen is ten huise van de wed^e COSTERS, bij ISAACK DE NOVILLE, commissaal aldaer ter huize, om aldaer te besichtigen seekere teijckeninge gedaen bij HENDRICK [sic] WITMONT, van Delft, welke de requirant sondt om te coopen ende deselve teijckeninge gesien hebbende dat op de redenen die voorviel[en] nopende het wasschen van dito teijckeninge, hij getuijge tegens NOVILLE seijde, dat hij getuijge niet geloofde dat men het wasschen kon, ende dat NOVILLE daerop repliceerde, dat men het al conde wasschen'. Unfortunately the rest of this tantalizing document has not been published; whether it casts any more light on the issues raised here remains to be seen, but a further perusal of the document is clearly desirable.

15. *The Art of the Van de Veldes* (note 1), p. 52, under no. 6.

painters as follows: 'Whether van de Velde can be given credit for being the innovator of this technique is in some doubt, because over at Delft Herman Witmont was doing grisailles in sepia just as early . . . In fact, the two men's techniques were very different; Witmont's being like stipple, while van de Velde's are [*sic*] more linear'.¹⁶ The works of the other member of this pioneering trio, Experiens Sillemans, have received less attention still, even though several bear signatures and dates that firmly set them amongst the incunables of the genre. These include the comparatively large *Ships near a Harbour* of 1649 in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 64),¹⁷ the pen drawing on vellum of 1650 in Berlin (fig. 65),¹⁸ and a small but not insignificant number of panels dating from 1651, 1652 and 1653 (the year of his death).¹⁹ By any reckoning he must be counted amongst the originators of the genre; but the question of how to define his role in its development has remained wholly unanswered.

Before moving on to the panels which form the main subject of this article and which illuminate all the issues raised so far, it may be worth summarizing what else we know about Sillemans's life and career. He was born in Amsterdam in or after 1611,²⁰ the son of English parents, Jeffery and Mary Silleman, who had emigrated there in 1610.²¹ From then on the documents always refer to him as a *plaetsnijder* and sometimes also as a *constmeester*. In 1633 he married Anna Wijlt or Wilt, who had herself come from

Yarmouth.²² Widowed, he was married again in 1650, this time to Evertje Theunis (Thonis);²³ but by 15 March 1653 he was already dead.²⁴ The sparse available archival evidence is only enlivened by a series of documents pertaining to an event rich in irony. In April 1642, Sillemans sued for damages in an extraordinary case. The defendant was one Jan Jacobsz. van der Beets, captain of a ship called *The Pilgrim*. Apparently a shell had been fired while the ship lay moored near the Montelbaen Tower, directly opposite Sillemans's house. The shell burst through the *façade* and flew past his bedstead, inches from where he was lying, causing such damage to his shop that it was no longer usable.²⁵ And so the marine painter who is the subject of our discussion almost lost his life and livelihood as a result of the negligence of a ship's captain, whom he was thus forced to take to court.

But was Sillemans already engaged in the representation of ships? The answer is not entirely clear. The first dated sea-picture is, as we have already seen, from 1649 (fig. 64).²⁶ Until then he seems to have been almost entirely involved in book illustration and the production of occasional prints that do not appear to be related to his marine interests. He was, for example, the etcher of three splendid illustrations (fig. 66) in the 1642 edition of Jacob Cats's *Houwelyck* (after those in the original edition of 1625),²⁷ while the Rijksmuseum possesses under

16. E. H. H. Archibald, 'The Willem van de Velde, Their Background and Influence on Maritime Painting in England', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, CXXX, 1982 (no. 5310), p. 351.

17. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, no. A1366; pen painting on panel, 770 × 1060 mm; s. and d. *Ex Silleman Fecit 1649*.

18. Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischen Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, no. 101; pen and ink on parchment, 262 × 385 mm. See E. Bock and J. Rosenberg, *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Die Niederländischen Meister. Beschreibendes Verzeichnis Sämtlicher Zeichnungen*, I, 1930, p. 273 (illustrated in II, pl. 195), where the work is compared to a related etching (unknown to us) said to be dated 1650. Its pendant (no. 102, pen and ink on parchment, 260 × 381 mm, was lost during World War II).

19. For these see figs. 79, 69, 77, 87 and 80 and notes 37 and 38. Not reproduced or discussed here are (a) the painting of *Dutch Men of War near a Jetty* sold at Christie's on 30 October 1981, no. 4 (and earlier with the Slatter Gallery, 1957 *Exhibition of Dutch and Flemish Masters*, no. 17); panel, 150 × 250 mm, s. and d. *Ex Silliman 1652*; and (b) the painting of a *Dutch Harbour with Ships* in the Amsterdam Historisch Museum, no. A38186 (earlier with the Rob Kattenburg Gallery, Aerdenhout, *Dutch Marine Paintings, Drawings and Prints, A Selection from our Stock*, 1981, repr.); panel, 258 × 383 mm.

20. A. Bredius, 'Losse Aanteekeningen omtrent Hollandsche Plaatsnijders', *Obreens Archief*, VII, 1888-90, p. 265, citing the *Prot. Not. S. van Piet*, Amsterdam, 15 March 1653: '... alhier gebooren is naar 't jaar 1611'.

21. A. D. de Vries Azn., 'Biografische Aanteekeningen betreffende voornamelijk Amsterdamsche Schilders, Plaatsnijders,

enz. en hunne Verwanten', *Oud-Holland*, IV, 1886, p. 137, citing (a) the *Puibook* for 3 April 1633: '... Jefferyn Silleman, zijn vader, en Mary Sylleman zyn moeder'; and (b) the *Kinderboek* of the *Burger-Weeshuis*, entry for 8 April 1653: '... sonc van Jefferyn Silleman, uyt Engelant, poorter geworden den 25^{en} May 1610...'

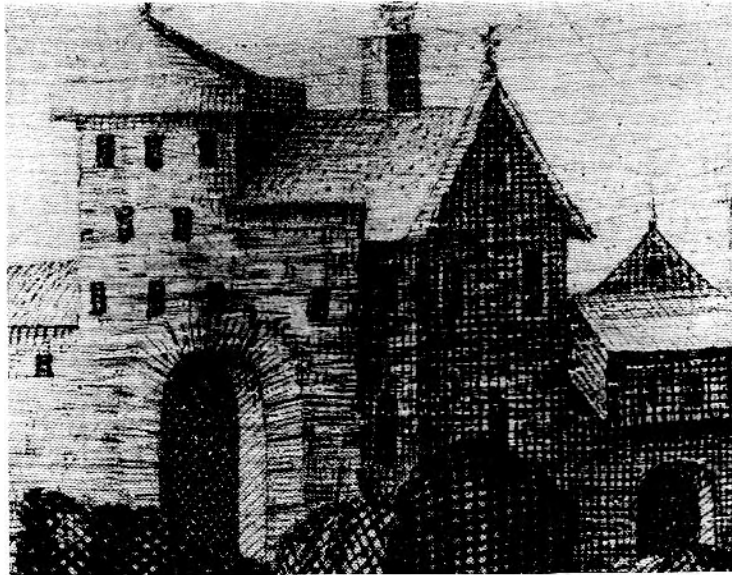
22. De Vries, *op. cit.*, p. 137, citing the *Puibook* for 3 April 1633: 'E. S. . . . en Anna Wijlt van Jermuyd'; the entry from the *Kinderboek* of the *Burger-Weeshuis* recording the admission of their three children on 8 April 1653 refers to her as 'Anna Wilt van Jarmuijen in Engelant getrouwt alhier op het stadthuys den 27^{en} September 1633'; more fully in N. de Roever Az., 'Losse Aanteekeningen betreffende Amsterdamsche Graveurs', *Obreens Archief*, III, 1880-81, p. 223, citing *Puibook* 13: 'E. S. . . . woont Jonkerstraat ondertrouwt 3 September 1633 Anna Wilt van Yarmouth, oud 18 j. . . . woont bij de oudc Regulierspoort'.

23. De Vries, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 137, citing the *Kerk. huw. proc.* for 25 June 1650: 'Experiencj Silman, van A., plaetsnyder, wed. van Annetje de Wilt, won. op de Wael, en Evertje Teunis, van A., wed. van Abraham Damus'.

24. Bredius, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 265, citing the *Prot. Not. S. van Piet* for 15 March 1653, where 'Evertken Thonis' is referred to as the widow of Experiens Sillemans.

25. Bredius, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 264, summarizes the relevant documents, beginning with Sillemans's *Attestatie van verzoek* of 14 April 1642, and concluding (here at least) with this request for compensation to the *Schepenen* on 19 April 1642.

26. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, no. A1366, panel, 770 × 1060 mm, s. and d. *Ex Silleman Fecit 1649*.



70. Detail of Panel A.

his name the signed broadsheet game entitled *Le jeu des haut-crieurs du Roy boit!t Vermackelyck drie Coningen Spel*,²⁸ and the title-page to *De Vyerighe Colom*.²⁹ Hollstein also lists three historical prints, tiny illustrations in Jan Harmansz. Krul's *Minne-beelden* of 1640 and a further title-page.³⁰ Only one marine print is known – a curiously wooden and old-fashioned representation of a Man of War flying an English flag (fig. 67), after an engraving by Hendrik I Hondius of a French Man of War said to have been made in Holland in 1626; but what significance to attach to the fact that at least one of the flags on

Sillemans's ship is English, is uncertain.³¹

There was, therefore, a variety of reasons for our interest in the two small paintings by Sillemans brought into the Courtauld Institute for examination in 1982, the very year of the van de Velde exhibition at Greenwich (figs. 68 and 69). Both are of the kind usually described as *penschilderijen*, both are on panel, and both are of exactly the same size (280 × 400 mm).³² It seemed reasonable to assume that they were intended to be pendants, and although obscured by a very dirty and yellowed varnish, they appeared to be executed in a similar

27. Namely the *Children's Games (Ex Nugis . . . Seria)* after A. van der Venne (175 × 164 mm), the title to the *Maegde-Wapen* (fig. 66, 165 × 157 mm), and the *Death of a Young Couple* (101 × 136 mm), all signed. F. W. H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, Amsterdam, 1948– (in progress); XXVII, 1983, p. 77, nos. 5–7.
28. Published by J. Danckerts, n.d. 258 × 322 mm, signed *Experiens Silliman fecit*. The sheet shows three columns of five occupations, and has quatrains in French with couplets in Dutch; Hollstein, XXVII, p. 77, no. 4; *Wurzbach* 1.
29. *De Vyerighe Colom*.|*Klaer vertoonende in vyftich onderscheydene curieuse Caarten De XVII|NEDERLANTSCHER PROVINCIEN*.|*Alsmede De Hartogen, Houwesters en Graven van Vlaenderen, Hollandt ende Zelandt*.|*Met desselfs beschrijving, tot Amsterdam*|*Bij Iacob Aertz. Colom*. 151 × 213 mm; signed *Experiens Sillemans fecit*. Hollstein, XXVII, p. 78, no. 8.
30. Namely, *The Death of Floris V*, published by C. Danckertsz., 402 × 516 mm, signed *Exper: Sillemans*; the *Jurisdiction by William the Good*, published by (I) Salomon Savcrij, (II) Hugo Allardt, 426 × 502 mm; and the *Jurisdiction by Charles the Bold*, published by (I) Salomon Saverij, (II) Hieronymus Sweerts,

406 × 505 mm (Hollstein, XXVII, p. 76, nos. 1–3); illustration to I. H. Krul *Minnebeelden*, Amsterdam (Broer Jansz.), 1640, 70 × 87 mm, signed *ex. Sillemans fecit* (Hollstein, XXVII, p. 78, no. 9); and finally the title-page to R. Scot, *Ontdecking van Toverij*, Leiden (Willem Christiaensz.), 1637, 129 × 77 mm, signed *Experiens Sillemans fecit* (Hollstein, XXVII, p. 78, no. 10). Hollstein thus records ten prints by Sillemans, to which at least one other (see fig. 67 and the following note) and possibly another (see note 18 above) may be added.

31. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 303 × 423 mm, signed *Experiens Silleman sculps*. See *Colnaghi Catalogue*, Autumn 1966, no. 16 (not in Hollstein; for the Hondius print on which Sillemans's is based, see Hollstein, IX, p. 89, no. 63). Another possible marine print by Sillemans, unknown to us, is referred to in note 18 above.
32. London, private collection. The paintings were cleaned and restored by Aviva Bernstock (panel B, fig. 69) and Alan Phcnix (panel A, fig. 68). Their Technical Reports, on file in the Department of Conservation and Technology, Courtauld Institute of Art, form the basis of the discussion of technique on pp. 158–61 here.



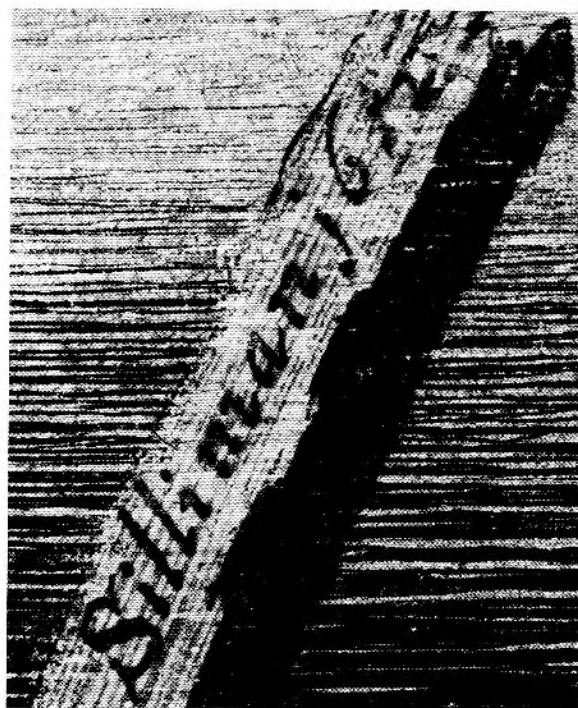
71. Detail of Panel A.



72. Detail of Panel B.



73. Detail of Panel A.



74. Detail of Panel B.

technique to each other. But further aspects of these works immediately aroused attention. In the first place, one of them bears the date of 1652 (fig. 69), which makes it a comparatively early example of the genre; they are unusually small, at least in comparison with most of those by the van de Velde (some of the undated works by Witmont, however, are of almost the same size); and instead of depicting large-scale marine scenes – usually historical battles – they are intimate and modest in conception. Panel A (fig. 68) shows a rather old-fashioned fantastic landscape with fanciful buildings, panel B (fig. 69) a simple harbour – both including a modest number of ships at anchor. In panel A an historical or biblical scene takes place on the shore, with its somewhat untidy vegetation and desultory stakes and palings, while panel B has a rustic shoreline defined by a slightly larger number of picturesquely agglomerated piles. In terms of subject-matter, therefore, these compositions do not belong to the documentary and historical mode, but rather to that distinctively Dutch way of combining buildings, figures and motifs – however imaginary or inventive they may be – into apparently realistic or recognizably local (and specifically Dutch) scenes,³³ espe-

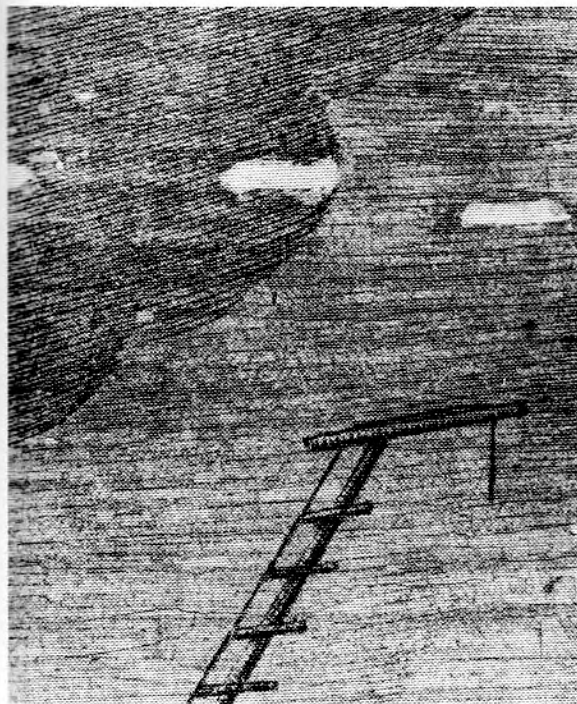
cially in the case of panel B. In both pictures the signature is inscribed on a wooden spar projecting from the water – a feature that was so insistently to be taken up in the subsequent development of the genre and which may well owe its invention to Sillemans.

But there was one further aspect of these pictures which demanded investigation. Although it seemed likely that they were intended to be pendants, they appeared to be executed in a very different manner one from another. It was clear – even upon viewing them through their layers of discoloured varnish – that panel A was executed in a manner that suggested an engraving (particularly in the cross-hatchings of the rocks and vegetation on the left); while panel B was done in much lighter ink or paint, and did not present the superficial appearance of a print. Although this kind of illusionistic suggestion of one technical medium by another was by no means unusual in the seventeenth century (notably in a whole series of engraving-like drawings and paintings by Hendrik Goltzius and one remarkable panel by Jacob Matham),³⁴ the differences between the two panels by Sillemans were sufficiently puzzling to instigate a thorough technical examination

33. See D. Freedberg, *Dutch Landscape Prints of the Seventeenth Century*, London 1980, pp. 9–11 and 15–20 for a further discussion

of these issues.

34. See p. 166 and notes 49 and 50 below, as well as fig. 89.



75. Detail of Panel B.



76. Detail of Panel B.

of each. As soon as the layers of varnish were removed, surprises began to emerge.

Panel A, for all its appearance of an engraving (at least in parts) turned out, under examination by binocular microscope, to be executed in pen and brush (figs. 68, 70, 71, 73), in the traditional manner of the *penschilderijen*. It is on a sized oak panel, with a coarse red-brown ground and lead-white/oil priming. The design is in ink, probably aqueous. Just as in the case of the van de Velde *penschilderijen*, the comparative darkness of the objects and details in the foreground is achieved by the use of thick opaque cross-hatchings done with a split pen. The progressively lighter areas in the middle- and background are done in increasingly transparent and washy hatchings, while the rocky cliffs in the far distance appear to be done with a fine brush. In certain areas, particularly in the rocks in the lower left foreground, the complex cross-hatching has been reinforced with broad washes, thus further modifying their overall tonality. Some hatchings show the characteristic double lines that result from the two halves of the split nib not having been sufficiently loaded with ink,³⁵ while the clouds, now severely abraded, appear to have been painted with a brush. All this is perfectly consistent with the technique of the *penschilderijen* of the Elder van de Velde as described in the catalogue of the 1982 exhibition and quoted above.³⁶ And while the present panel by Sillemans looks even more like a print than most of those by Witmont and the van de Velde, it was unquestionably wholly executed by a combination of pen and brush, in ink, in various states of dilution.

Panel B, on the other hand, which at first appeared to be like any other *penschilderij*, turned out to look entirely different under the binocular microscope (figs. 69, 72, 74-76). Almost every line in the composition gave the appearance of being etched. Indeed, once the discoloured layers of varnish were removed, the differences between the lines in panel A and those in panel B could even be discerned with the naked eye. This is clear not only from the paler parts of each picture, but also from more prominent elements like the landscape and the figures (see figs. 70, 71, 73 and 72, 74-76). In panel A the lines of the middle and far distance are washy, the ink pale, transparent and smooth; in panel B the lighter elements are achieved not by means of a thinner, more dilute ink, but rather by the use of finer lines

and hatchings that have clearly been etched (figs. 72, 74-75). For all the thinness of these lines, the ink remains dense and opaque; it has a granular quality when viewed through the microscope (see especially figs. 75 and 76). Rather than being uniform and continuous, as in panel A, the lines are made up of a series of minute dots such as are characteristic of printed lines; and they are rounded at the ends, suggesting an etched rather than an engraved technique. The difference between ink and lines in each is made abundantly clear when one compares background, figures and buildings in the two panels (see especially figs. 70 and 76, 71 and 72); and any scepticism as to the possibility of the differences described here is entirely laid to rest by enlargement of the signed spar in panel B (fig. 74): here one can see beyond any doubt the plain distinction between the painted signature and the etched parallel lines of the immediately adjacent sea. Furthermore, the whole surface of panel B appears to be covered with plate tone, that uneven brownish-grey toning layer which is produced when the excess ink on the surface of an etched or engraved plate is printed along with the etched or engraved pattern. In other words, panel B displays a significant overall patchiness in the form of minute dots of ink over the whole surface, a feature entirely absent from panel A. This patchiness is insoluble in most organic solvents and is of a similar appearance to the ink used for the printed image. All this is clearly indicative of plate tone, in the form of a thin wash of ink which initially adhered to the plate and was transferred, along with the image (probably *via* a flexible substrate), to the priming on the panel.

We were thus dealing not with a painted surface but with one which was printed. But how was this achieved? The etched copper-plate could clearly not have been printed directly onto the hard and inflexible panel; and so we were led to conclude that some form of counterproof process must have been used as an intermediate stage in the transfer of the image from plate to panel. This obvious hypothesis was based not only on the evidence of the plate tone, but above all on comparing panel B with other works by Sillemans, as well as by further comparisons within his *oeuvre*.

Corroboration comes from the following identities. The tall ship on the right of panel B recurs in absolutely identical form and with exactly the same

35. A similar observation was made by Mr Martin Bijl (Conservation Laboratory, Department of Paintings, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) of the large painting by Sillemans in

the Rijksmuseum, no. A1366 (fig. 64 and note 17 above) in the course of his restoration of the work in 1983.
36. P. 151 and note 8 above.

measurements on the left of three paintings in the National Maritime Museum (nos. 46-362/2, 32-47 and 43-22)³⁷ and in the centre of the two pictures said to represent *Salt Collecting on the Cape Verde Islands* in the Scheepvaart Museum in Amsterdam and in the Amsterdams Historisch Museum³⁸ (figs. 77-81); while the broader-hulled ship in the centre of panel B was re-used on the right of the latter picture. It is clear that the only way such exact reproduction could have been achieved was by means of a printing process, presumably by offsetting from an already printed sheet of paper on which the ink was still wet. This hypothesis is confirmed by further internal comparisons within the group of five pictures in Greenwich and Amsterdam.

To begin with, the ship seen in profile recurs in all three paintings in Greenwich, while there are remarkable identities between – and deceptive adjustments to – the boat in the foreground and the group of men in and around it in all five pictures. For example, three of the men – the two in the boat and the standing and pointing figure to the left – are present in all the Greenwich pictures (figs. 77-79), while a man with a telescope seated by a rock on the left occurs in nos. 46-362/2 and 32-47 (figs. 77 and 78). This latter figure then reappears along with the standing figure and one of the men in the boat (now cut off by the edge of the painting) on the right of the picture in the Amsterdams Historisch Museum (fig. 81). Indeed the left halves of the two pictures in Amsterdam are absolutely identical, with the exception of some alterations to the rocky outcrop on the extreme left-hand side; on the right of the picture in the Scheepvaart Museum, however, only the man holding a pike in one hand and pointing with the other is retained, the rest of his companions having been replaced by ships and sails (fig. 80).³⁹

Even the weakest magnification makes the

absolute identity of all these features clear, from the faint decorations on the stern of the tall ship in all the paintings, and the tiny faces on the foc's'le and prow of the ship in profile (figs. 82-85), to the hatchings on the faces of all the men (especially clear in the man with the telescope and the one seated drinking in the boat). These hatchings, like others within all the works mentioned here, do not, incidentally, show the rounded terminations of the pure etched line, but rather a swelling and tapering that suggest the use of some instrument like the *échope*, to go through the resin into the plate itself.

But there are other notable features of all five pictures which further corroborated the emerging hypothesis. By making slight adjustments to elements on or in close proximity to the counterproofed ships and figures, Sillemans almost gave himself away. Presumably he hoped to undermine similarity and suggest difference and distinctiveness, but when these pictures are viewed as a group, this mild deception – if deception it was – becomes clear. For example, the pike or boat-hook held by the standing figure in the foreground of two of the Greenwich pictures and both those in Amsterdam is shortened to a plain staff in Greenwich no. 43-22 (fig. 79); we have already noted the omission of the man with the telescope in the latter picture; while the figures at the side of the tall ship – themselves offset from a printed sheet – stand on a raft in no. 43-22 (fig. 79), on a boat in no. 32-47 (fig. 78), on the beach in the painting in the Scheepvaart Museum (fig. 80) and are entirely replaced by a pyramidal cluster of three stakes (probably painted or drawn directly onto the panel)⁴⁰ both in Greenwich no. 46-362/2 and in our panel B (figs. 77 and 69).

It seems likely that skies and clouds were also originally counterproofed from an etched plate, but identities in this area cannot be proven in all six

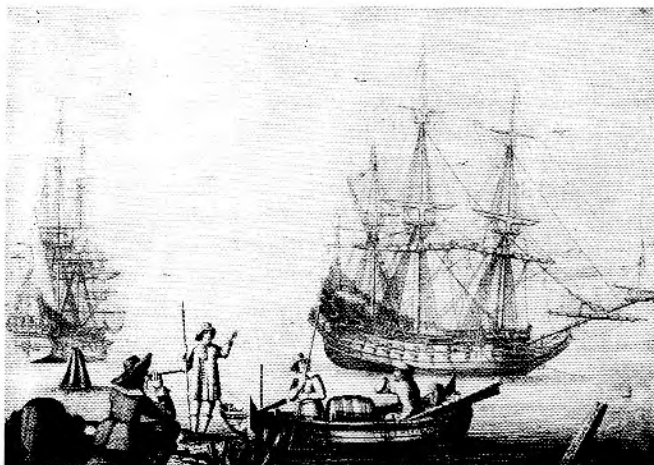
37. I. Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 46-362/2, panel, 285 × 391 mm, s. and d. 1652 (probably a pendant to no. 46-362/1 referred to on p. 162 and in note 44 below); see G. Callender, *The Caird Collection of Maritime Antiquities*, 4 vols, Greenwich 1933, I (supp.), *addenda*, p. 214; National Maritime Museum Greenwich, *Concise Catalogue of Paintings*, London 1958, p. 80. II. No. 32-47, panel 369 × 412 mm, unsigned and undated; see National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, *Catalogue of Paintings*, London 1937, p. 94, item 6 ('unidentified artist'); further literature as with 46-362/2. III. No. 43-22, panel, 292 × 393 mm, s. and d. 1651, see lit. as in 46-362/2.

38. Amsterdam, Scheepvaart Museum, no. A76 (2), panel, 290 × 400 mm, s. and d. 1652. Amsterdam, Historisch Museum, no. A38185, panel, 258 × 383 mm; see Gallery Rob Kattenburg, Aerdenburg, *Dutch Marine Paintings, Drawings and Prints, A Selection of our Stock*, 1981, n.p. (repr.); presumably a pendant to the *Dutch Harbour with Ships*, also in the

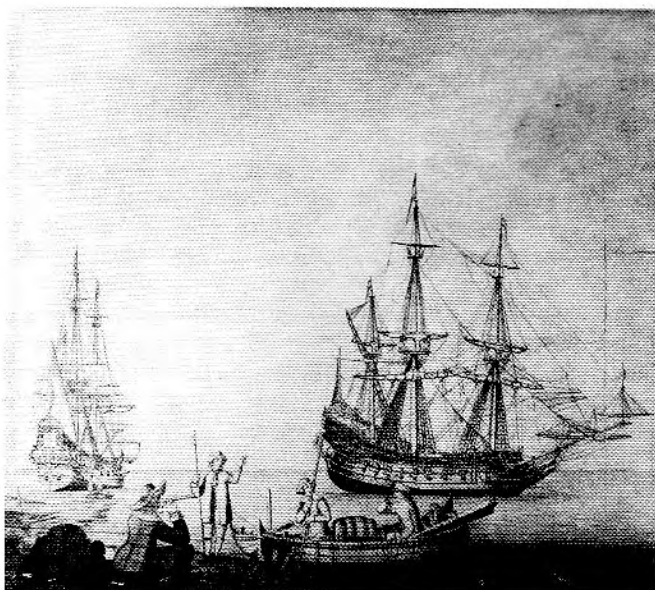
Historisch Museum, no. A38186, panel, 258 × 383 mm, also sold by Rob Kattenburg in 1981. See note 19 above.

39. Similarities and identities like these (as well as the slight adjustments to constant features as noted on p. 161 below) should alert one to the possibility of finding still further ones within the rest of Sillemans's little-known oeuvre. Here it may perhaps be noted that, with a few alterations, the jetty and figures on the left of the 1649 painting in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 64 and note 16 above) recur in the painting sold at Christie's on 30 October 1981, no. 4 (note 19 above) – but on a much smaller scale.

40. The ink of these stakes is of an entirely different colour from that of the lines of ships, figures, sky etc. It is considerably browner than the black ink characteristic of the counterproofed lines in the rest of the panel and is more like the colour of the ink in panel A. This brown tonality is probably attributable to the greater discolouration of the medium.

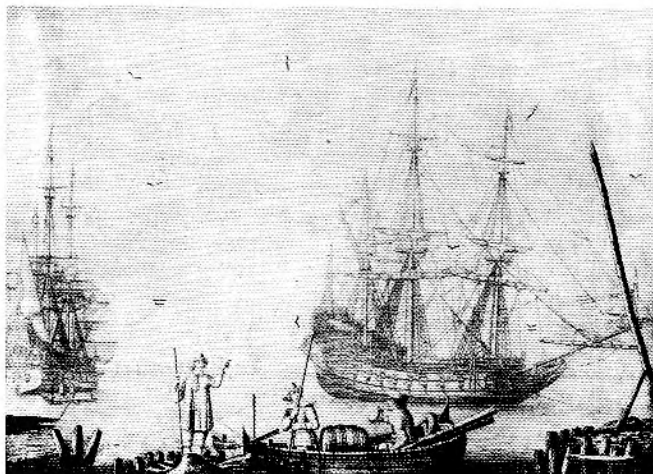


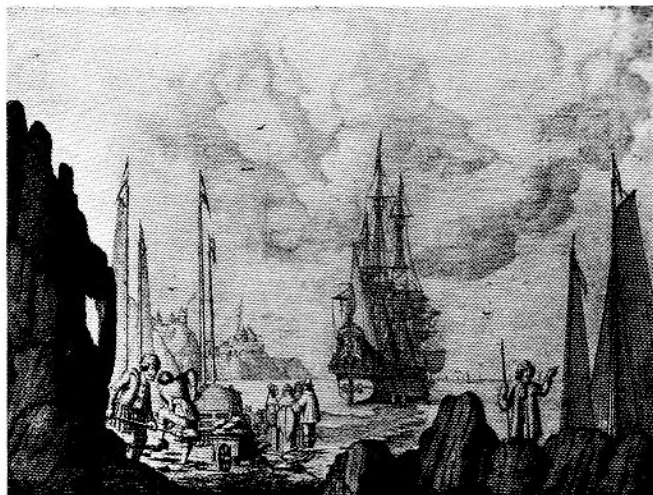
77. (above) Experiens Sillemans, *Two Ships and a Boat near the Shore*, signed and dated 1652, panel, 285 × 391 mm (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 46-362/2).



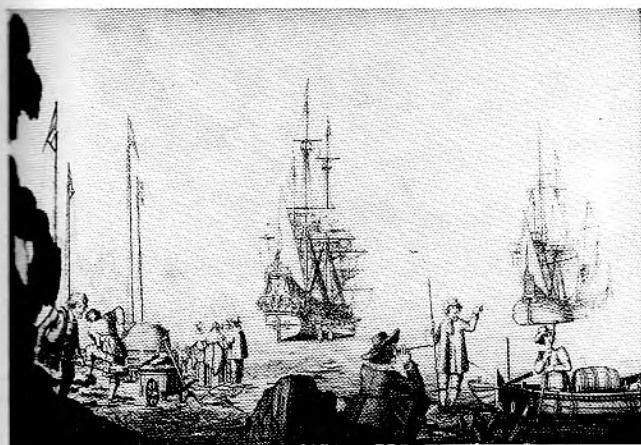
78. (left) Experiens Sillemans, *Two Ships and a Boat near the Shore*, panel, 369 × 412 mm (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 32-47).

79. (below) Experiens Sillemans, *Two Ships and a Boat near the Shore*, signed and dated 1651, panel, 292 × 393 mm (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 43-22).





80. (right) Experiens Sillemans, *Ships with Salt-Collectors on the Shore*, signed and dated 165?, panel, 290 × 400 mm (Amsterdam, Scheepvaart Museum).



81. (left) Experiens Sillemans, *Ships with Salt-Collectors on the Shore*, panel, 258 × 353 mm (Amsterdam, Historisch Museum).

panels, owing to surface wearing and abrasion in most of them.⁴¹ On the other hand, the fact that the hatched details of faces and ships (especially in the foreground figures on left and right) are barely present at all in Greenwich no. 32-47 (fig. 78) must be attributable not to surface abrasion but rather to the fact that the plate was either less well-inked (or possibly even worn), or to less strong and effective use of the counterproofing process.

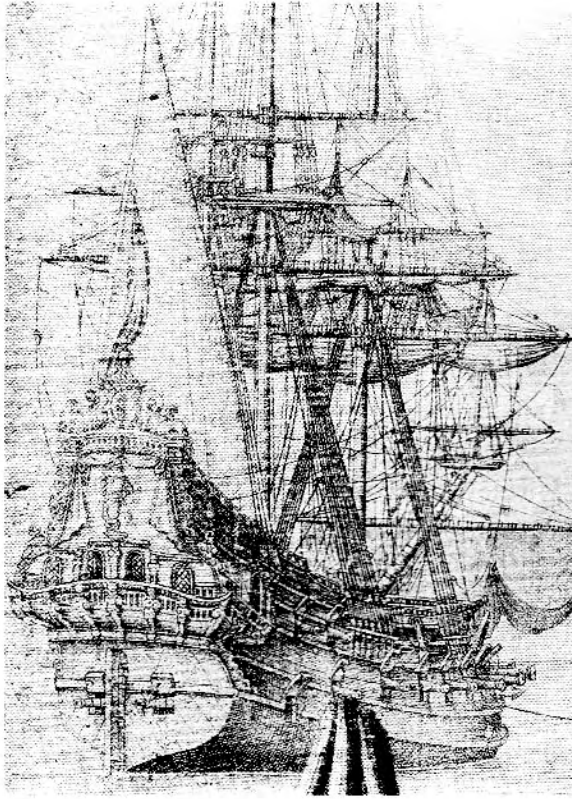
In any event, there now seems well-nigh conclusive proof of the hypothesis that emerged, tentatively at first, with the examination of the second panel by Sillemans brought into the Courtauld

Institute in 1982: that he used a method of counterproofing to produce at least some of the elements within his pictures; that the surface, thus printed – and not drawn or painted – was then added to or gone over in pen and ink, as well as with the brush (particularly in the washed areas); and that instead of printing from an impression of a single plate, he must have used separate pieces of printed paper (either cut up from a single impression or made from small pieces of etched copper plates)⁴² to print individual figures, ships and boats in different positions, as in the six panels discussed here.

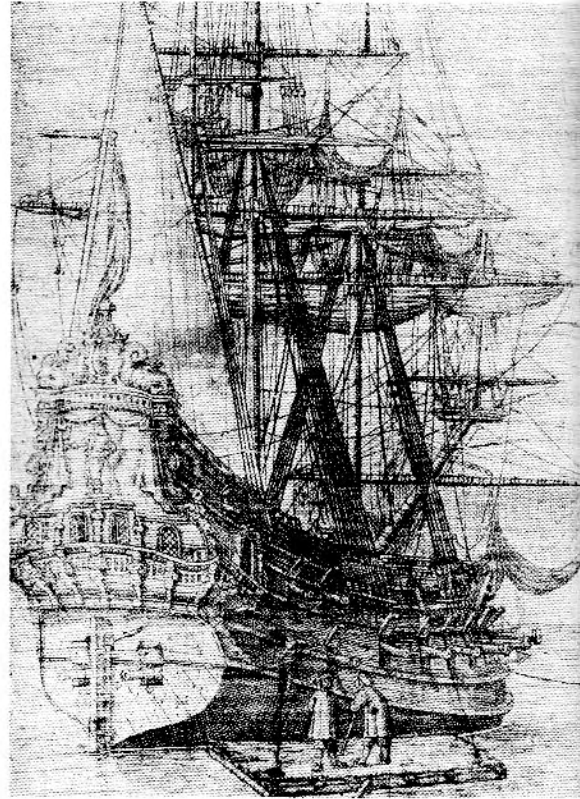
41. A further puzzling aspect of the condition of some of these panels (especially panel B, fig. 69, and the painting in the Scheepvaart Museum, fig. 80 and note 38 above) is the presence of large (c. 0.5 mm) and irregular patches of discoloured ink; although larger than the minute dots of ink over the whole surface attributable to plate tone (see p. 158 above)

these – presumably – are a further consequence of the offsetting technique suggested here.

42. Whatever plate-marks these may have produced could easily have been painted out so that they would not show on the finished panel.



82. Enlarged detail of figure 77.



83. Enlarged detail of figure 79.

Two remaining panels by Sillemans in the National Maritime Museum should be mentioned briefly, as they cast some light on the foregoing.⁴³ The *Dutch Ship in a Storm* (no. 46-362/1; fig. 86)⁴⁴ shows a frigate tossed about on turbulent waves, with its splendidly broken and entangled rigging flying wildly in the gale. This work, which is unusual for Sillemans but perfectly traditional in conception, may well have been intended as a pendant to the painting of *Two Ships with Four Men and a Boat* (no. 46-362/2; fig. 77), and appears to have been largely executed in pen and brush. In this respect, at least, a parallel may be drawn with the pair brought into the Courtauld – one panel looks like a printed surface, but is not; its pendant, however,

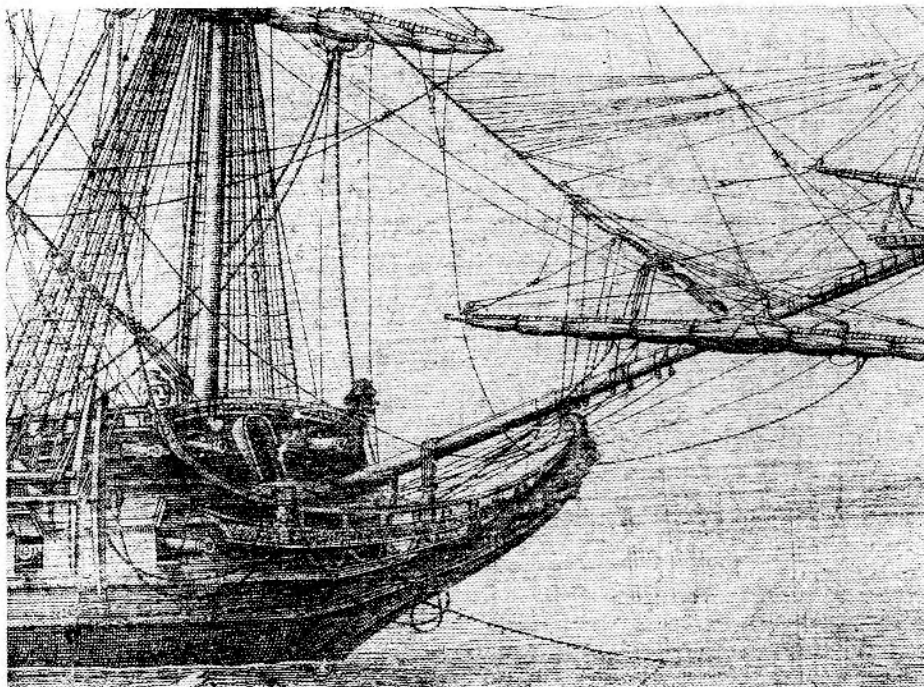
is. Number 51-44 at Greenwich (fig. 87)⁴⁵ is a tiny panel, but its faintly-depicted background of a shoreline with yachts and boats (barely visible with the naked eye) is made up of a wonderfully free and spontaneous network of the most delicate lines that could only have been produced by means of etching (again one has to assume that the lines were transferred from plate to panel by means of counterproofing).

The discovery outlined in these pages has considerable implications for the development of the so-called *grisaille* sea-piece, but it also raises a number of further and crucial questions about the way in which these pictures were viewed and sold. We will return to these later, but first it is worth recalling

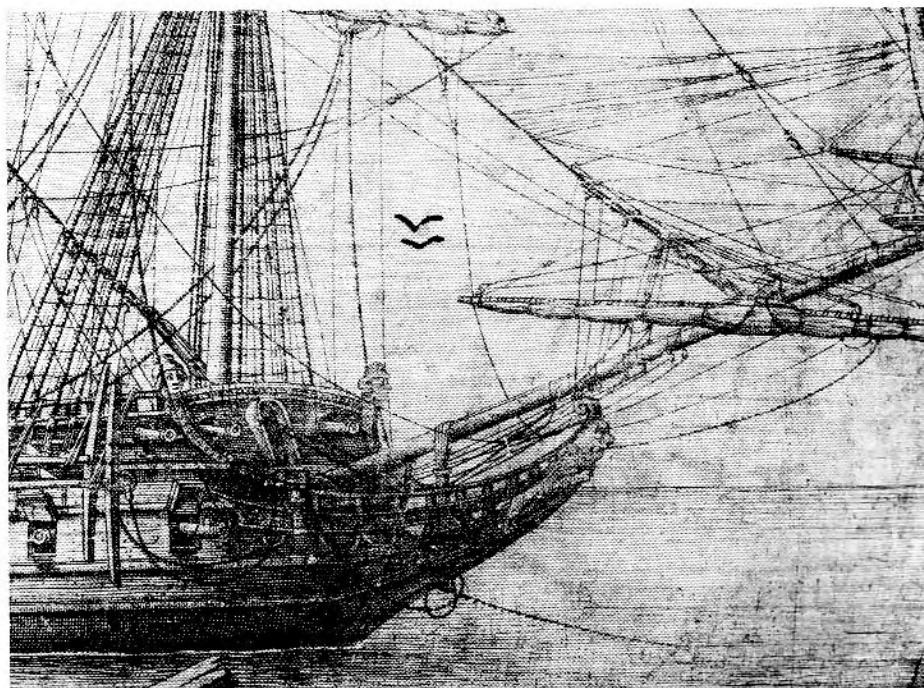
43. A third painting, that of *A Kaag Ashore* (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 32-45) is still labelled as Sillemans and has occasionally been reproduced as such (eg. in *Vereeniging Nederlandsch Historisch Scheepvaart Museum te Amsterdam, Tweede Jaarverslag*, 1918 (1919), pp. 46-47, and L. Preston, *op. cit.* (note 3 above), plate 50), but it is certainly not by him. It is signed (falsely?) *W. V. Velde 168(25)3*, is on panel, measures 180 × 300 mm, and shows Enkhuizen in the background.

44. Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 46-362/1, panel, 283 × 389 mm, signed *Silliman* on a wave in the lower centre, undated; probably a pendant to no. 46-362/2 (fig. 86; see note 37 above; see Callender, *op. cit.* (note 37 above), I (supp.), *addenda*, p. 214; *Concise Catalogue*, 1958, p. 80.

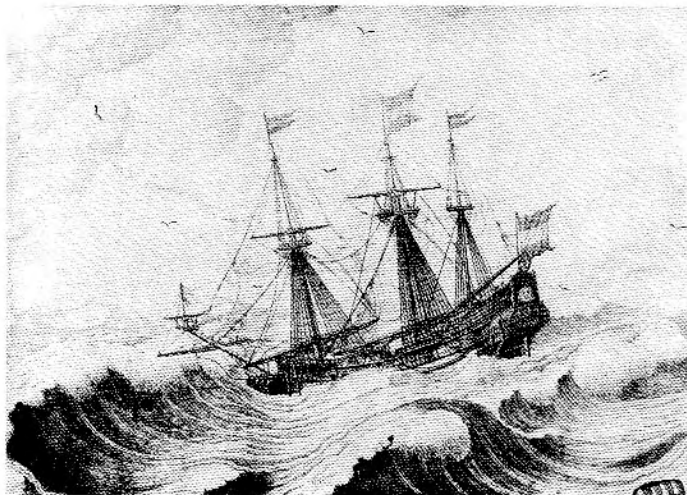
45. Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 51-44, panel, 147 × 207 mm, signed and dated *Silliman 1652* on the spar on the lower left.



84. Enlarged detail of figure 77.



85. Enlarged detail of figure 79.



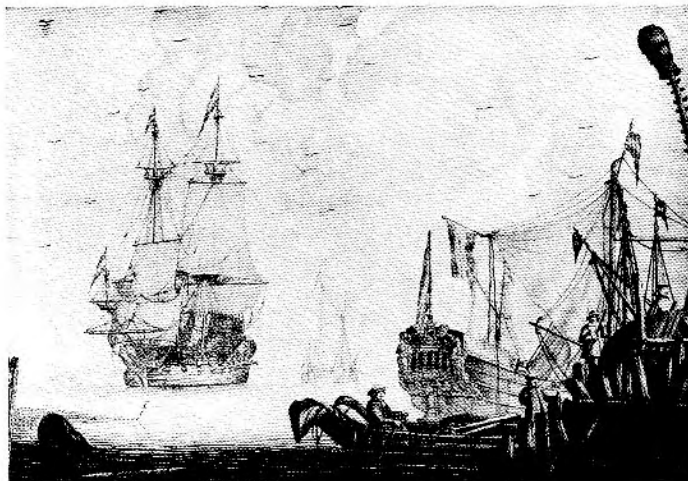
86. Experiens Sillemans, *Dutch Ship in a Storm*, signed, panel, 283 × 389 mm (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 46-362/1).

how important a role the process of offsetting played in the work of both the Elder and the Younger van de Velde. Both made a number of offset *drawings*, either from the original drawing, or by copying the original drawing in reverse and then returning it to its original direction 'by rubbing the back of the copy over a fresh piece of paper. The offset drawings could be used in the reversed form or in the second offset

positive form. Offsets could be improved at a later stage, with additional drawing, or finalised with the application of grey washes.⁴⁶ In the latter respect the van de Velde's method of finalizing the offset drawing is not so different – in principle – from Sillemans's manner of treating the offset elements in his paintings. The process of offsetting reaches unexpected heights of ingenuity in at least two remarkable

46. W. Percival-Priscott, in *The Art of the Van de Veldes* (note 1), p. 26. Robinson, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 18, notes that 'by 1648 Van de Velde had begun his practice of making offsets when his original drawings became too untidy with corrections. By placing a clean sheet of paper over his drawing and rubbing it on the parts covering the drawing underneath with some such instrument as the wooden handle to his pencil he obtained a transfer in reverse on which his heavier correcting

lines showed up in reverse. He then started afresh on his offset with clean pencil and wash, sometimes correcting the coats of arms and sometimes leaving them in reverse.' The earliest dated sea-picture by Sillemans we have discovered is from 1649 (fig. 64 and note 17 above); to what extent, one may ask oneself, did the basic principle for his novel technique come from van de Velde's use of offset drawings? The matter awaits further investigation.

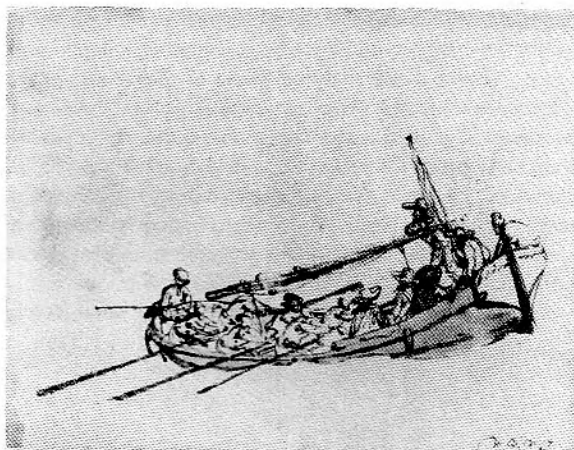


87. Experiens Sillemans, *Three Ships and a Boat near a Harbour with a Distant Shoreline*, signed and dated 1652, panel, 147 × 207 mm (Greenwich, National Maritime Museum, no. 51-44).

drawings by the Younger van de Velde – in Rotterdam and Cambridge (fig. 88)⁴⁷ – where an extant *painting* served as their physical basis:

Both these drawings which are carried out in a thin brown paint, were taken from the surface of the painting at a stage when the paint had become sufficiently tough for such an offset to be made without damaging the original. Ingeniously adapting a technique normally used for the transfer of a printed engraving to glass, van de Velde the Younger drew over two incidents in the painting (of the *Royal Visit to the Fleet in the Thames Estuary*) and then applied thin paper which was pasted to the surface of the painting. One must assume that the next stage would be the wetting of the paper with spirits of turpentine which partially dissolved the newly drawn image and enabled the transfer to be made. Following the redampening of the paper with water, the resultant offset was removed as a reversal of the original image. Van de Velde the Younger improved both of these drawings with a few spirited lines and accents.⁴⁸

By the 1670s and 1680s, then, a variety of processes of offsetting were used in the production of boat and ship drawings in several media; but with Sillemans offsets were made from an impression of a copper-plate to produce what appear to be paintings on panel. The question that inevitably arises is the extent to which Sillemans himself contributed to the interest in marine offsets, if at all. Or did he simply gain his idea of making offsets from copper-plates – which are, of course, much more easily and resiliently reproducible than drawings or even paintings – from a variety of offsetting processes that were already in fashion? More importantly, was he the only one to use the process outlined above in the production of paintings, or are there other artists who used the technique? How many other *penschilderijen* that have until now been assumed to be executed in pen and brush may in fact have been produced by offsetting impressions of engraved or etched plates? Questions like these must wait in abeyance until the *penschilderijen* of other painters have been subjected to microscopic examination, but Sillemans's role in the origins and presumably the popularization of the genre can hardly be doubted.



88. Willem van de Velde the Younger, *A Ship's Boat*, grey wash on brown paper, 324 × 420 mm (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum).

Furthermore, now that we have seen how he used counterproofing as a means of reproducing elements within his paintings we may well want to ask ourselves these questions: to what extent did Sillemans make use of the technique as a convenience or as a comparatively swift and cheap means of making *penschilderijen*? And was the technique intended to be detected or not? Here it should be remembered that not a single marine print by Sillemans survives – except for the adaptation of the Hondius ship (fig. 67) – and one may well wonder whether the evidence for the use of the technique on panel was not simply suppressed or destroyed. Perhaps the means was deliberately kept secret? On the other hand, the fact that the group of six paintings discussed above are all enclosed by a thin *painted* black line should give pause for thought. Is it possible that a double illusion was involved here? The black framing line may well have been intended to suggest a printed surface; but the works all appear to be paintings; and yet they are largely printed. Could it be that they were intended to be admired for the skill by which a painting seemed to look like a print, or for the virtuosity of making what seemed to be painted lines look, at first glance, like engraved or etched ones? By the middle of the seventeenth century such illusionistic skill would not have been so unusual: one has only to think of Goltzius's engraving-like

47. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, no. 811-1963, *A Ship's Boat*, grey wash on pale brown coloured paper, 324 × 420 mm, signed *W.V.V.J.* (repr. in *The Art of the Van de Veldes*, p. 29, fig. 10); Rotterdam, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, *A Royal Yacht before the Wind*, brown ink with a little wash over pencil, 463 × 279 mm (repr. in *The Art of the*

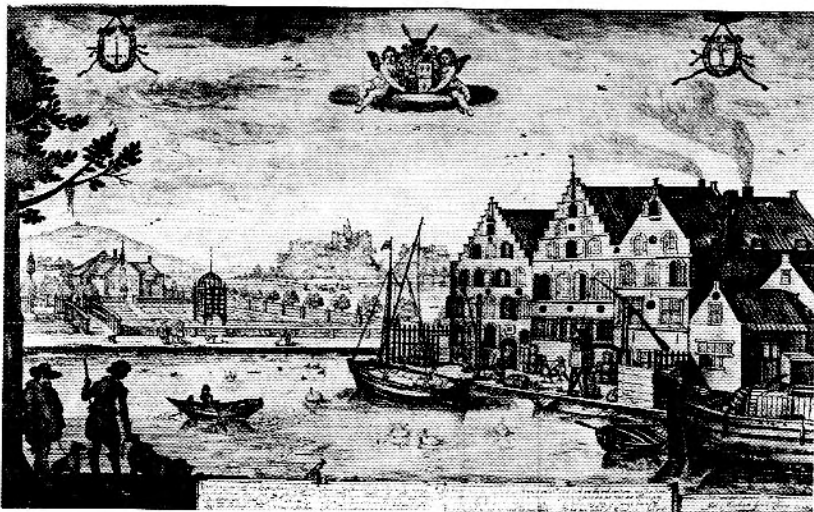
Van de Veldes, p. 28, fig. 9).

48. W. Percival Prescott, in *The Art of the Van de Veldes*, p. 29. It is worth reflecting here how much simpler the offsetting process must have been when its basis was an etched copper-plate, which could have been used for replication much more often than a freshly (or comparatively freshly) painted panel.

drawings and paintings (although these were on canvases)⁴⁹ and of Jacob Matham's extraordinary panel of the *Brewery and Country House of Jan Claesz. Loo* which looks exactly like a print (fig. 89)⁵⁰ – to say nothing of Abraham Bosse's virtuoso attempts to make an etched line look like an engraved one.⁵¹ The irony, of course, is that the six paintings by Sillemans were precisely what they were intended to look like, even though the aim was to suggest that they were not.

It is true that a number of authorities have either

hinted at or suggested the possibility of the technical means used by Sillemans in the paintings described here. Even Admiral Preston, in the unclear and confused account quoted at the beginning of this article, may, by the very use of the word 'etching' (in the phrase 'reed-pen etching'), have wished to convey some such notion. Almost half a century later, in his *Dictionary of Sea Painters* (1980), E. H. H. Archibald noted that 'a curious aspect of his [Sillemans's] work was his experiments with printing on to the gesso ground, then putting in a foreground by hand to give



89. Jacob Matham, *The Brewery and Country House of Jan Claesz. Loo*, signed and dated 1627, panel, 71 × 116 mm (Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum).

49. Goltzius appears to have started making these from the end of the 1580s onwards, but they were largely figural. See the drawings in an engraved manner, usually on parchment in pen and brown ink, in London (*Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus*), Vienna (*Lamentation and Bacchus*), Amsterdam (*Birth of Adonis*), Oxford (*Head of Mercury*), Rotterdam (*Doctrina*), Besançon (*Woman's Head*), Lucca (*Venus and Cupid with two Satyrs*), formerly van Regteren Altena collection, Amsterdam (*Goltzius's Hand*), etc. etc.; E. K. J. Reznicek, *Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius (Utrechtse Kunsthistorische Studien VI)*, Utrecht, 1961, nos. 129, 47, 115, 111, 119, 163, 360, 131 and 165–166 respectively. The three drawings in London and Vienna are presumably to be identified with those mentioned by Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck*, Haarlem, 1604, fol. 285 *recto*. The London drawing (Reznicek, *op. cit.*, no. 129) is also certainly the one referred to in a remarkable passage in chapter VII of van Mander's *Grondt*: 'Van dese sachten op Attalus vliessen/In Linearis Const, verciert met druiven, Vinde-wijn, Gheve-Lust, Sorgheverliesen/Bij Overvloedt, om niet laten verfriscen' etc. and in *margin*: 'Dit was een groot stuck op pergament metter pen, een Venus, Bacchus en Cercs, daer Cupido t'vyer blaest' (van Mander, *op. cit.*, fol. 33 *recto*, stanza 48; see Karel van Mander, *Den Grondt der edel vry schilder-const*, edited by H. Miedema, 2 vols, Utrecht 1973, p. 529, as well as O. Hirschmann, 'Beitrag zu einem Kommentar von Karel van Manders "Grondt der Edle Vry Schilder-Const"', *Oud-Holland*, XXXIII, 1915, pp. 84–86, who first connected the London drawing of 1593 with this passage. Also on fol. 285 *recto* and *verso*, van Mander notes that since he found such drawings on parchment, no matter how large they were, too small for his great and important conceptions, Goltzius turned to making pen drawings on spe-

cially prepared canvases: 'Hier nae quam Goltzio in den sin, op gheprimuerde oft van Oly-verwe bercyde doecken metter Pen te teykencn: want hoe groot de Pergamenten waren, sy vielen hem nae zijn groot voorneem en gheest noch veel te cleen. Des gingh hy toe, en teykende met de Pen op eenen passelijcken grooten gheprimuerden doeck een naeckte Vrouwcn beeldt, met eenen lachende satyr . . .' It is perhaps significant in the context of this article that even the experts have been uncertain as to whether or not Goltzius used a brush in the execution of works like the Leningrad *Sine Cerere et Baccho friget Venus* of 1604 (pen and dark and lighter brown ink on prepared canvas, 228 × 170 mm, Reznicek, *op. cit.*, no. 128; see his comments on p. 285 for his decision that it is in fact carried out in pen). Goltzius appears to have heightened many of the drawings on parchment and canvas with paint and then varnished them; and in thus bringing their appearance still closer to that of more traditionally conceived paintings (which looked like engravings but were actually drawn), he must be regarded as the most important precursor of the marine *penschilderijen* discussed in this article.

50. Haarlem, Frans Halsmuseum, no. 206, panel, 71 × 116 mm; see the comments by S. Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, Chicago and London 1983, p. 31, where she also refers to pen-painting as 'another Dutch borderline medium'.

51. For commentary on this aspect of Bosse's work, see A. Blum, *Abraham Bosse et la société française au dix-septième siècle*, Paris 1924, especially chapter VII ('Le graveur et le théoricien de la gravure') with appropriate references to Bosse's own *Traité des manières de graver en taille douce . . .*, Paris 1645, translated into Dutch in Amsterdam in 1662 and into English in the same year (published by William Faithorne).

variety. This was apparently an attempt to put a cheap form of grisaille on the market.⁵² As is evident from our discussion, the basic assumption is justified, but the rest of this assessment is not quite right; while the possibility that Sillemans may in fact have been the first to put the *grisaille* sea-piece on the market is not even suggested. It was Harley Preston, who in his remarkable but unfortunately unpublished check-list of the *penschilderijen* in Greenwich (compiled from 1972 onwards) appears to have come closest to the facts of the matter when he noted that 'it may well be that Sillemans, who was an etcher, used freshly pulled impressions of his etchings to offset, while still wet, on the prepared surface of his panels, retouching these in small matters of detail'.⁵³

This insight may now be corroborated and given further weight by the technical evidence presented above. No longer will it be possible to describe every *penschilderij* simply as a *grisaille* on panel or canvas; it is clear that one cannot in any case speak of a single *grisaille* manner, but that there are different means of achieving the meticulous and monochromatic effects of all these pictures. The questions raised by the reconsideration of Sillemans's *oeuvre* and the discovery of the technique he employed in at least six of his panels are multifold. We have already posed some of them. Was he the first to produce the marine *penschilderij*? Did he use the offsetting technique as a cheap and easy means of producing such paintings, or for subtler illusionistic reasons? What, indeed, is the status of such works – are we to regard them as paintings, pen drawings or prints? How many of the other *penschilderijen* were produced in this manner? This last question, of course, raises the further issue of whether the offsetting technique specifically used by Sillemans was kept secret: we remember that no composition as a whole was ever repeated; that no

impression on paper of any of these compositions survives; and that he appears to have gone to extraordinary lengths to mask his technique, by ensuring that elements in each panel were gone over in pen and brush, or by adding further elements – from birds to signature – with the point of the brush.

Certainly there are several instances of the use of pen and ink – and even brush and oils – to imitate the appearance of an engraving long before the rise of the monochromatic sea-piece. We have already noted the phenomenon – on paper, vellum and even on specially-prepared canvas – within the work of Hendrik Goltzius,⁵⁴ that 'monarch in the handling of the pen', the '*super-magister* of penmanship', as van Mander and Balthasar Gerbier respectively called him,⁵⁵ long before the advent of the one master – Willem van de Velde the Elder – who might also have aspired to such an appellation; while Goltzius's son-in-law Jacob Matham executed at least one panel (fig. 89) which perhaps comes closer than any other object in the seventeenth century to the appearance of a print.⁵⁶ Moreover, we have Samuel van Hoogstraten's richly evocative description of how Hercules Segers 'painted or printed on his shirts and on the sheets of his bed (*since he also printed painting*)'.⁵⁷ But within the work of Segers the 'printed painting' conveys an utterly different effect from the infinitely more straightforward inventions of Sillemans: with Segers, printing was indeed used, often, to convey the effect of a painting;⁵⁸ with Sillemans, printing techniques were used in such a manner as to give the effect of a painted print, and not of painterly appearance *tout court*. But did anyone else use anything at all akin to Sillemans's technique? Fortunately there is one document which provides both an affirmative answer and an almost wholly unexpected confirmation of the possibility of procedures

52. E. H. H. Archibald, *Dictionary of Sea Painters*, London 1980, p. 178.

53. A similar suggestion was made by Sally Wakclin of the Conservation Department at the National Maritime Museum, when she noted in her 1981 *Technical Record* on no. 43-22 (fig. 79 and note 37 above) that 'part of the design in this picture is to all intents and purposes identical to another by the same artist. The measurements of the ships are the same as the number of hatching lines in each area. It is possible that the image in each case was transferred on paper from an engraved plate.' Once again we must record our thanks to Harley Preston, not only for his abundant assistance in the preparation of this article, but also for so generously allowing us access to his personal files on the *penschilderijen* at Greenwich.

54. See note 49 above.

55. Reznicek, *op. cit.* (note 49 above), p. 285. See Balthasar Gerbier, *Eer ende CLAGHT-DICHT Ter Eeren van . . . HENRICUS GOLTZIUS . . .*, The Hague (Aert Meurs) 1620, for one of the most extravagant tributes to any artist in the seventeenth cen-

tury. This extremely rare work (only two copies are known) has not yet received the attention it deserves; for some discussion see D. Freedberg, 'Fame, Convention and Insight: On the Relevance of Fornerbergh and Gerbier', *The Ringling Museum of Art Journal (Papers presented at the International Rubens Symposium, April 14-16, 1982)*, 1983, especially pp. 240-57; see also O. Hirschmann, 'Balthasar Gerbiers Eer ende Claght-Dicht ter Eeren van Henricus Goltzius', *Oud-Holland*, XXXVIII, 1920, pp. 104-25.

56. See note 50 above.

57. My italics. 'Want schoon hij zijn hemden en de lakens van zijn bedde verschilderde of verdrukte (*want hij drukte ook Schilderij*) hij bleef in d'uiteerste armoede . . .', Samuel van Hoogstraeten, *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst*, Rotterdam 1678, p. 312; see Arnold Houbraken, *De Grootte Schouburg der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen*, II, Amsterdam 1719, p. 137.

58. For the best account of Hercules Segers's immensely complex techniques, see E. Haverkamp-Begemann, *Hercules Segers: The Complete Etchings*, Amsterdam-The Hague 1973.

such as the one that forms the focal point of this article.

On 22 October 1799 and 22 January 1800, Bernardus de Bosch Jer.z gave two lectures to the Amsterdam societies *Concordia et Libertate* and *Felix Meritis* on the subject of his illustrious ancestor Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712),⁵⁹ the great townscape painter and inventor (amongst other things) of notable firefighting techniques and a system of urban streetlighting.⁶⁰ In them de Bosch reflected on the inventive ingenuity of his forefather, and adduced as an instance the large number of paintings which he subsumed under the name of *prentschilderijen* ('print-paintings'). 'For these', according to de Bosch,

he used a number of small copper plates, of different shapes and sizes, on which he had etched or engraved doors, window-frames and stoops, as well as masonry and brickwork – either seen directly from the front, obliquely, from the side, or from around the corner – just as was required to represent the different parts, either more summarily or in more detailed a way. He knew how to work skilfully with these little plates, shifting them around, or joining them to each other, above and below and next to each other, in such a way as to produce an attractive whole. Having filled the grooves with paint, these fragments of plates were printed on paper, which had previously been attached to the ground on the panel. He then knew how to colour and paint everything in (without the paint being taken up by the paper), to such an extent that all unevennesses on the panel were removed by thinning and thickening the paint; and by adding air, ground and figures, and whatever else was necessary to complete the pic-

ture, these *prentschilderijen* (of which many are still to hand), present all the appearance of really detailed paintings.⁶¹

When Mrs van Eeghen published this account in her 1973 article on the descendants of Jan van der Heyden, she asked: 'Is this yet another legend, arising from the recurrent buildings in wholly different positions in the paintings that are still known?'⁶² We may answer 'almost certainly not', even though the paintings of van der Heyden still require the kind of technical analysis necessary to corroborate de Bosch's exposition.⁶³ Although the procedure he attributed to van der Heyden is evidently not exactly the same as the one Sillemans used – there is, above all, no suggestion of an offsetting technique – it does provide further evidence for a set of techniques that all break down the traditional borderlines between painting and prints; and it further enhances the position of Sillemans as an innovator of more than usual interest. It is perhaps not surprising to find Haarlem printmakers like Hendrik Goltzius, Jacob Matham and Hercules Segers experimenting with the mixing of picturmaking and printmaking; but it seems to have been the almost forgotten Experiens Sillemans who, more than any other, turned the lessons of printmaking into a means of producing paintings of a kind that were, for at least fifty years after his death, to corner a substantial portion of the Dutch market for pictures. His methods may not have been extensively followed, but if it is true that he started (or even boosted) the vogue for the all too neglected but compellingly skilful group of paintings that was to find its greatest exponent in Willem van de Velde the Elder, then the attention we have devoted to him will be justified.

59. On van der Heyden see H. Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden 1637–1719*, Amsterdam-Haarlem 1971.

60. Wagner, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–12 summarizes van der Heyden's inventions.

61. 'Voor dese stukken, bediende hij zich van een aantal kleine koperen platen, van verschillende gedaante en grootte, waar in hij deuren vensterramen en stoepen, ook muurwerk, 't zij vlak van voren, afwijkende, op zijde, of overhocks te zien, geëst of gegraveerd had, zoo als zulks vereischt wierd om de part partijen, achtelozzer, of meer uitvoering, te verbeelden. Met deze plaatjes verstond hij kunstmatig te arbeiden, verschuivende, of voegende dezelve, boven en onder, of naast elkander, zoodanig, dat er een fraai geheel ten voorschijn kwam. De diepsels, met verve gevuld zijnde, wierden deze brokken van platen afgedrukt op papier, hetwelk vooraf in lijngrond op het paneel, was vastgehegt. Vervolgens wist hij, zonder vlocijen, alles zeer geestig te kleuren en bij te schilderen, zoo dat alle oneffenheden op het paneel, door het verdunnen en verdikken der verwen, wierden weggenomen: hier bij luchten, gronden en beelden gevoegd

hebbende, en 't geen verder ter aanvulling vereischt wierd, kregen zoodanige *Prentschilderijen* (waarvan nog velen voorhanden zijn) het voorkomen van wezenlijke uitvoerige tafereelen', in I. H. van Eeghen, 'De Nakomelingen van Jan van der Heyden', *Amstelodamum*, LX, 1973, 6 (November–December), p. 133.

62. 'Of het weer een legende is naar aanleiding van de telkens terugkomende gebouwen in geheel verschillende situaties op de schilderijen, die nu nog bekend zijn?', *ibid.*

63. How close and yet how far Helga Wagner was in the following passage on the extraordinary delicacy and detail of van der Heyden's technique: 'Tatsächlich müssen seine Bilder mit unendlicher Geduld und grenzenlosen Fleiss gemalt sein . . . Man fragt sich gelegentlich wie diese Feinheit in der Praxis erzielt wurde. Houbraken berichtet denn auch von der möglichen Benützung eines von van der Heyden erfundenen Hilfsgrätes. Wie aufgedruckt, etwa mit Hilfe einer Kupferplatte, sehen die Linien allerdings doch nicht aus. Grösse und Farbe der Zeichnung bleibt selbst bei grösseren Flächen zu lebendig um mechanisch hergestellt zu erscheinen', Wagner, *op. cit.* (note 59 above), p. 29.