Cornelis Claesz. van Wieringen

Cornelis Claesz. van Wieringen, although one of the foremost early practitioners of Dutch marine painting, remains somewhat obscure because of the general presupposition that his oeuvre derives from that of Hendrick Vroom. Vroom is indisputably the more important marine painter but Van Wieringen's contribution remains uncharted; his activity and the range of his interests have never been defined adequately. For better or for worse Hendrick Vroom and Van Wieringen have always been treated together. Van Wieringen's relatively rare marine paintings are influenced strongly by Vroom. However, whereas Vroom has left few drawings, Van Wieringen produced scores of pen sketches diverse in subject-matter. His drawings, characterized by a distinctive and spirited penwork, reveal a personal interpretation of the world. Van Wieringen perceived nature in partially imaginary terms in which intimacy is combined with phantasy. These drawings rarely served as preparatory studies but recorded passing ideas. Their vivacity reflects an impetuous and unorthodox view of the world. One may characterize them as Manneristic but Van Wieringen repeatedly explored new subject-matter and perceived nature in a fresh and highly personal idiom. Imaginary features play a substantial role but invariably merge with his ever growing interest in a type of landscape that would have seemed familiar to his Dutch contemporaries because it evoked the world in which they lived. Van Wieringen's struggle to perceive nature in expressive terms was relevant to artists such as Claes Jansz. Visscher, Esaias and Jan van de Velde, Hercules Seghers and Willem Buytewech who succeeded in transforming the conventions of 16th century landscape art into a concept that embraced the salient characteristics of what is generally termed 'realistic'. Van Wieringen's perception of nature was nurtured and tempered by the artistic ambient of Haarlem where several other artists, Van Mander and Goltzius for instance, were dealing with the same issue. Goltzius' accomplished landscape drawings inspired artists of the subsequent generation in their quest toward a realistic idiom of landscape.

The parallel Van Wieringen offers to Goltzius is not coincidental. Close study of Van Wieringen's drawings indicates that he was not an acolyte of Hendrick Vroom but was, in all likelihood, a student of Goltzius. This fascinating connection raises several questions which we shall investigate but first we must turn to the few known biograph-

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1 This study is based largely upon my research on Hendrick and Cornelis Vroom which I completed in 1975. I have referred to the artist as Van Wieringen throughout the text because it is the manner chosen by L. J. Bol and H. van de Waal. Because of this precedent I felt that it would be confusing to call him Cornelis Claesz, in spite of the fact that this nomenclature is, in many respects, more correct. However, citing our artist as Van Wieringen also avoids confusing the marine painter with Cornelis Claesz, the cartographic publisher of Amsterdam.

I am deeply indebted to Mr. J. Nicuwstraten whose many valuable editorial suggestions have been gratefully incorporated into the present essay. The author wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance of the staff of the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie. Indeed, its photographic archives of Dutch marine drawings provided the core for the present provisional list of Van Wieringen's drawings.


3 This may not be coincidental. Presumably the majority of Vroom's drawings were working studies for paintings or tapestry cartoons and, in all likelihood, would have been mutilated beyond repair.

ical facts documenting Van Wieringen's life and subsequently discuss his documented and undocumented oeuvre. Although Van Wieringen's date of birth is not known, it is generally placed at about 1580. He is first mentioned in 1597 and died on September 29th, 1633. He must have been a trusted friend of Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem because Van Wieringen is cited repeatedly as a witness to the several last wills and testaments drawn up by Cornelis Cornelisz. In Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem's final will (ironically for which Van Wieringen was not a witness), Van Wieringen was bequeathed a Crucifixion by Karel van Mander. In 1631, Van Wieringen, currently one of the deans of the Haarlem Guild of Saint Luke, signed the Ordinance of the Rules, Regulations, Provisions, and Privileges of the reorganized guild. He had a son, Claes, also a painter by profession. Claes was listed in the Haarlem guild in 1636 but died young.

Unfortunately, few works by Cornelis Claesz. van Wieringen are dated and only one surviving drawing is signed (illus. 12). His reputation rests largely on his signed marine paintings that comprise only one significant aspect of his art. They show his achievement as a painter but we must not permit this aspect of his activity to eclipse his other pursuits.

Van Wieringen's earliest surviving dated picture is The Battle between an English Ship and a Dutch Privateer before La Rochelle, monogrammed and dated 1616, panel, 87.5 × 166.5 cm. Greenwich, National Maritime Museum.

Claes may be considered the author of the remarkable signed Monastic Chapel in a Landscape in the Museum Bredius (inv. 210-1946 - A. Blankert, Museum Bredius Catalogus van de Schilderijen en Tekeningen, 1978, p. 148, repr. (As Cornelis Claesz. van Wieringen) and the closely related drawing in Hannover, Kestner-Museum: C. von Heusinger, Handzeichnungen des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts, 1960, cat. 135, repr. To this drawing may be added others that bear the distinctive CIW monogram: Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett, Zacchaeus, the Publican in the Tree, pen, ink and wash, 181 × 220 mm.; Haarlem, Teylers Stichting, A Quay, pen and wash, 272 × 525 mm., repr. in Amsterdam, Historisch Museum, 'Opkomst en bloei van het Noordnederlandse stadsgewicht in de 17de eeuw', 1977, cat. 95, repr. and Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, A Putto Riding a Dolphin, pen and brush and black ink, 108 × 147 mm., inv. y17 Klein 1.

Paris, Fondation Custodia (Coll. F. Lugt) - catalogue 51 of the accompanying provisional list of van Wieringen's drawings.

5 A. Breduis, Künstler-Inventar, VII, 1922, pp. 89-92 (documents n, r, t, w). Van Wieringen is referred to as 'Meester Schilder' and in the will of 1628 as 'Cornelis Claes van Wieringen syn goeden bekenden vriend'.
6 Ibid, pp. 92-93. Possibly this picture may be equated with that appearing in the sale of Caspar Netscher, A. Schooman and others, The Hague, 15-7-1749. A Crucifixion fitting this general description was recently owned by Gallery P. de Boer: Amsterdam, Gallery de Boer, 'Collection', 1974, cat. 3, repr.
8 Claes may be considered the author of the remarkable signed Monastic Chapel in a Landscape in the Museum Bredius (inv. 210-1946 - A. Blankert, Museum Bredius Catalogus van de Schilderijen en Tekeningen, 1978, p. 148, repr. (As Cornelis Claesz. van Wieringen) and the closely related drawing in Hannover, Kestner-Museum: C. von Heusinger, Handzeichnungen des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts, 1960, cat. 135, repr. To this drawing may be added others that bear the distinctive CIW monogram: Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett, Zacchaeus, the Publican in the Tree, pen, ink and wash, 181 × 220 mm.; Haarlem, Teylers Stichting, A Quay, pen and wash, 272 × 525 mm., repr. in Amsterdam, Historisch Museum, 'Opkomst en bloei van het Noordnederlandse stadsgewicht in de 17de eeuw', 1977, cat. 95, repr. and Otterlo, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, A Putto Riding a Dolphin, pen and brush and black ink, 108 × 147 mm., inv. y17 Klein 1.