

CARL LOCHER

1851–1915

80. *Fishermen by a Wreck Near Kandestederne, 1872*

(Fiskere ved vrage ud for Kandestederne)

Oil on canvas, 34²/₃ x 49¹/₄ in. (88 x 125 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: Carl Locher 72

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 453, 1983, lot 121, ill. p. 51

While Locher was a pupil of Holger Drachmann (1846–1908), the two together visited the northernmost point of Denmark, Skagen, which was very popular among marine artists even before it became a real artists' colony. Christian Blache (1838–1920) and Fritz Thaulow (1847–1906) painted there, and in 1870 Carl Neumann (1833–1891) enjoyed success with a painting of fishermen hauling a seine on the north shore at Skagen (Statens Museum for Kunst). A number of small pictures which Locher painted there in 1872 have been preserved, demonstrating his passionate interest in things maritime. This large painting, on the other hand, is a carefully composed work demonstrating that Locher was progressing towards a more academic mode of expression. He often returned to Skagen.

The easiest way of reaching Skagen at that time was by sea. There was no railway from Frederikshavn and the road only went half way, as far as Aalbæk. From there, visitors had to proceed in an open wagon carrying the mail, which went along the east coast shore in all kinds of weather. Locher painted this coast on repeated occasions. There were no cobbled streets in the village of Skagen in those days, and the village consisted of a modest number of houses in Vesterby and Østerby, where Brøndum's hostelry was situated. After an 18th-century catastrophe caused by sand drift, houses were built down among the dunes, where further drifting had been stopped by the planting of special varieties of grass such as galea and lyme grass. Skagen Point, which divides the North Sea from the Kattegat, consists of sand and dunes with low vegetation, and the climate is far harsher than farther south in Denmark. Shipwrecks off the shores around the point were inevitable in former times despite charts and the lighthouses (which are still in existence today). Grenen, the extreme east-pointing tip, constitutes an especially dangerous reef which over the years has cost the lives of many a seaman.

At Skagen, the marine artists found a host of motifs in the sea, the shore and the weather, which is at its roughest on the north-facing coast and gentler on the south. In addition, there were many ships that could be seen sailing past, as well as numerous wrecks providing the artists with suitable subjects for painting. In 1850, the frequent shipwrecks led to a rescue service being established by law. It was the duty of the local population to go to the assistance of shipwrecked crews and, if possible, to save the cargoes. Some wrecks were sold and cut up; there was a lack of wood at Skagen, and the old houses were usually built of timber from stranded ships. Other wrecks were left on the shore as sombre monuments to countless tragedies.

In this picture, Locher has chosen to paint two wrecks on the stormy north coast near Kandestederne, a lonely stretch of shore some ten kilometres (6¹/₄ miles) to the west along the North Shore. The serious nature of the motif is underlined by the dramatic dark cloud formations and the sinking sun, and thus corresponds closely to the ideals of marine painting at the time.

E. F.