

ANTON MELBYE

1818–1875

89. *Fishing Boat Reefing its Sails*

(*Marine med fiskekutter der reber sejlene*)

Oil on panel, 6 x 9²/₃ in. (15 x 24,5 cm)

Signed lower left: Anton Melbye

PROVENANCE: Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 453, 1983, lot 134

The customs officer Lieutenant Jacob Buntzen Melbye and Anna Marie Christina Løehts had three sons: Anton, Vilhelm and Fritz; all became recognised marine artists. The boys' affinity for and love of life at sea derived from their home, for Jacob Melbye is known to have painted ships' portraits.¹ The Loeb collection has two works by the eldest and most famous of the brothers, Anton Melbye.

Anton was a private pupil of C.W. Eckersberg for a year or so, (the artist's father Jacob, was a friend of Eckersberg)² but the young artist was not much influenced by his teacher's art. Eckersberg's manner of working was far more closely related to the accurate reproduction of motifs by ship portraitists.

For a marine artist, depicting light, weather and the ever-changing waves was often of greater importance than the actual presentation of the ships at sea. The marine artist's paintings were considered to be works of art. They were usually exhibited, their success subject to the view of art at the time, and the demand for them did not necessarily emanate from maritime environments.

This fairly small oil sketch painted on wood, contains no information as to either date or place. Consequently, it cannot be said whether the portrayal of the fishermen at work is a study for a larger work, or whether it was merely intended to remind the artist later of a morning at sea just before dawn. With its diagonal composition and its richly varied colouring of the light, the work in the Loeb collection is fully in accordance with the Romantic style of painting that was in vogue with many of the young Academy pupils at the end of the 1830's and beginning of the 1840's.

S.L.

¹A ship's portrait is a painting of a specific, named vessel in which the main emphasis is placed on presenting the ship as exactly as possible. A ship portraitist produced his paintings to commission for shipowners or skippers. The occupation was a recognised expertise that was much in demand and should not be confused with marine painting.

²On 22 December 1851, Eckersberg noted in his diary: "Visit from Melbye's father, who brought a drawing by Anton of a North American brig." Quoted from Hanne Westergaard in *C.W. Eckersberg og hans elever*, Statens Museum for Kunst 1983, p. 123.