

ANTON MELBYE

1818–1875

90. *Sailing Ships and Steamship*, 1864

(*Marine med flere sejlskibe og en damper*)

Oil on canvas, 17 $\frac{2}{3}$ x 26 $\frac{2}{3}$ in. (45 x 68 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: Anton Melbye 1864

PROVENANCE: Friis (Fritz?) Warb(u?)rg Altona 3 (according to partly illegible slip of paper on the reverse); Arne Bruun Rasmussen, Auction 452, 1983, lot 158, ill. p. 53.

Although he only needs to smell seaweed for a new painting to emerge from his imagination, it is gratifying to see that even in the midst of this redoubtable productivity Melbye never repeats himself; the lyrical atmosphere is ever different: sometimes it is heavy clouds gathering over a tempestuous Atlantic Ocean, sometimes an early daybreak as if it were being cradled on cheerful, recently awakened waves, sometimes the cold, golden light of evening against a clear sky while a biting cold strong breeze furrows the dark waves.

So wrote one of the leading art critics, Karsten Wiborg, on Melbye's paintings at the 1844 Charlottenborg exhibition.¹

That year, Anton Melbye exhibited seven sea pieces, for the first time including a picture of a steamship in a gale. (Among Melbye's patrons he could count such distinguished names as King Christian VIII, Thorvaldsen's Museum, Count Scheel, Count Trampe, a certain Etatsraad Mansa and an agent by the name of G. Carstensen, who bought the 1844 painting of the steamship.)

Also in 1844 Melbye began some long voyages. He was given permission to sail to Morocco on the very recently acquired naval paddle steamer "Hekla,"² and later that year he sailed on the frigate "Gefion" when it went to Livorno in Italy to fetch Thorvaldsen's last works back to Copenhagen.

The year 1864 was a fateful one for the Danes. Prussia and Austria declared war on Denmark and were victorious. At the Peace of Vienna on 30 October that year, Denmark had to surrender the duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenburg to Prussia and Austria. Though the country was not materially destroyed by the war, the economic balance was undisturbed, and shipping remained unaffected, Anton Melbye did not send any paintings to Charlottenborg. No sea pieces by him are to be found in the exhibition until 1866, when he showed two. This Loeb collection marine painting (in which the vessel in the background was perhaps one of the 43 steamships that Denmark owned as early as 1862), might have been one of these.

S.L.

¹K.F. Wiborg, *Konstutstillingen i 1844*, Copenhagen 1844, p. 47.

²The *Hekla*, named after the famous Icelandic volcano, was built in England in 1842; it was 50 metres long (164 ft.), 8.5 metres wide (28 ft.), had 637 tons displacement and was armed with seven guns. The ship played a decisive role on several occasions in the war against the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein 1848–1850. It sailed for the last time in 1875 and was broken up in 1882.