

CARL DAHL

1812–1865

137. *The Frigate Thetis, a Danish Naval Brig and a Brig under American Flag off the Coast of Gibraltar* (early 1840s)

(*Fregatten Thetis, dansk orlogsbrig og brig under amerikansk flag ud for Gibraltar*)

Oil on canvas, 19 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (49 x 65 cm)

Not signed nor inscribed

PROVENANCE: Bruun Rasmussen, Vejle, Auction 113, 2008, lot 323, ill.

For this marine painting, Carl Dahl chose the waters near Gibraltar, the huge mountain in southern Spain opposite the town of Tangier on the African coast. The Straits of Gibraltar have a great strategic importance, as this narrow passage is the only one connecting the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Since 1713, Gibraltar has been a colony of the British crown, and so it remains today.

In 1840, the artist took his first trip on a Danish man-of-war, traveling from Denmark to Lisbon in Portugal, where he depicted some American frigates in the waters outside the harbor. The journey went farther south, and it is believed that this painting is a result of studies he made on board.

The dominant feature of the painting is the tall Danish frigate *Thetis* seen from backboard aft. A fresh northeastern wind fills its brown sails as it makes its way to the Atlantic Ocean following some other ships, which are seen at a distance. It has just passed a brig sailing under the American flag and heading for the Mediterranean. The full starboard side of this brig is visible, and the sunlight and shadow in the curving white sails are beautifully rendered. The wind is rather strong and there is white spindrift on the water's surface.

The horizon in the painting is fairly low, permitting us to see the ships clearly against the sky. The painting technique and colors chosen are much influenced by C. W. Eckersberg, especially the dark green water and the huge clouds giving life to the motif. In the distance between the two main ships the cliffs of Gibraltar add a dramatic note to the motif, contrasting with the lower coastline of Spain at either side.

The frigate *Thetis* was built in Copenhagen in 1840, measuring 155 x 38 feet. It served during the Second Schleswig War and ended its service the same year, 1864, being cut up ten years later. It did not sail in the Mediterranean before 1842, so obviously Dahl painted this Gibraltar sea scene after returning home, using sketches made at sea. The artist had studied nature closely and learned how to make use of his sketch material so well that he conveys the idea of tall, speedy vessels on a fresh, windy day in the Straits of Gibraltar.

E.F.