

# Maritime painter Peter J. Sterkenburg

(18-12-1955 - 23-04-2000)

*Peter J. Sterkenburg, born in Harlingen, was self-taught. He did not feel at home at the art academy and chose to develop his own skills as a painter. After a difficult early period, sometimes he paid his meals at Hotel Zeezicht and Anna Casparii in Harlingen with a painting, he started receiving assignments from a small circle of lovers of his seascapes. That was the reason that he was less known in large circles at the time. Sterkenburg was a "wet" painter which meant that he did not wait until the paint had dried completely. Oil painting was his preference and together with his brushwork, sometimes 25 layers on top of each other, a specific Sterkenburg was created. You hear waves rustling, the clouds seem to move and every ship, whether it was a 17th century VOC ship or a modern lifeboat, was painted with the utmost precision.*

In addition to a huge collection of books about ships, Peter had a photographic memory. This is reflected in all his paintings. Everything is correct. After he was discovered by Ton van der Werf, he was invited by KLM to exhibit in Hong Kong and became a true celebrity in the Far East. Yet he remained a modest, almost shy, person. Nearly all of his paintings were sold at four different exhibitions in Asia, organized by KLM including the first one in Hong Kong in 1992. And back in the Netherlands, countless follow-up assignments ensued.

The development in his work, as a result of his travels to the Far East, can be clearly seen by comparing his "Brown Period" to later much lighter periods. A crown on his work was the assignment for the "Amsterdam" a new cruise ship of the Holland America Line. A painting of seven meters long, representing East Indiamen off Amsterdam. Unfortunately, Peter was unable to complete it as he died on April 23rd, 2000. Nevertheless, we can still continue to enjoy his legacy now and in the distant future when admiring his unique maritime paintings.

## Beacon on the rocks

Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm, painted in 1996

*The narrow passage through the Strait of Singapore, the large number of islands, the sunken reefs and the changing tides around the island of Singapore made careful navigation with the help of an experienced pilot necessary in the 19th century. About 15 km before the narrow passage to the harbour, the ships sailed between the mainland and a whole series of islands that drew closer and closer, so that in the end it seemed that further progress was impossible. Access to Singapore was formed by a channel that was so narrow that only two large ships could pass at that point. Construction of the Raffles, Horsburgh, Sultan Shoal, and other lighthouses in the 19th century significantly reduced the risk of grounding. The Horsburgh Lighthouse, pictured here, was built in 1851 on a reef off the coast called Pedra Blanca. The painting shows one of the first British steam sailing ships in the distance that still used sails when there was enough wind. A Chinese junk is sailing on the right. The year is 1860. The artist got his data about the lighthouse from a book with old prints from Singapore.*



# The IJ at sunset

Oil on canvas, 100 x 180 cm Painted in 1992



*A number of merchant ships are anchored in the 17th century with Amsterdam in the background. They were owned by the United East India Company, the VOC, which was founded in 1602 to break the monopoly of the Portuguese in Asia. A lot of money was available in the northern Netherlands and on April 2, 1595, four merchant ships sailed eastward under the command of Cornelis de Houtman to arrive on the island of Java in Indonesia 15 months later. In early 1597, the three surviving ships, except one called the 'Amsterdam' which had remained in Asia due to lack of manpower, returned to the Netherlands. Of the original 240 men, only 87 were still alive, but the Dutch had discovered the way to the Far East. Soon, countless other ships, varying in length from 37 to 42 meters, sailed towards "India" as the Dutch called Indonesia. In the two centuries of its existence, the Company built nearly 1500 ships. The high profits achieved in the 17th century on the trade in Asian products brought so much wealth that this century was called The Golden Age.*





**An emerging storm** Oil on canvas, painted in 1990

*A strong wind is blowing and the crests of the waves of the Zuiderzee foretell a storm. The decktjalk, with the spritsail, in the foreground has just left the harbour and the skipper and his mate are occupied with the sails. The lee boards have already been raised because such a strong wind on open water can easily damage them. The tjalk on the right, with the trysail, intends to enter the harbor and her skipper apparently counts on a free passage. He keeps his course and full to prevent running aground or colliding with the embankment. The realistic way in which water and air are depicted is again proof of the artist's fabulous technique.*

Henri van der Zee en Ton van der Werf. Bound to the sea, Peter J. Sterkenburg. A maritime painter (1955-2000). Stichting Maritieme schilderijen Peter J. Sterkenburg. (2001). Bound format 24,5 x 31,5 cm; 128 pages; approximately 100 images of paintings. Edition no. ISBN 90-9014897-1. [www.petersterkenburg.nl](http://www.petersterkenburg.nl) and a special offer for readers of De Blauwe Wimpel.

Peter Sterkenburg was a modest person, obsessed with painting, a natural talent. That is the image that the writers manage to evoke. The art school was nothing for him. After a short period he decided to develop his own skills. In the early days he could barely keep his head above water, but later he got so many assignments by a small circle of enthusiasts that people sometimes had to wait a long time for their painting. A major turnaround came when KLM General Manager Ton van der Werf discovered him and KLM invited him to exhibit in Hong Kong. At his subsequent exhibitions in the Far East, almost all of his paintings were sold during the exhibitions. Yet, he remained a levelheaded Frisian, fascinated by everything that had to do with ships and seas. His brushwork and how a Sterkenburg came about are described in detail in this book. The progression in his work is clearly visible in the images of his work, provided with striking texts by Ton van der Werf. The book, like Peter's paintings, is a valuable legacy from one of the greatest maritime painters of the twentieth century. Instead of the normal price of € 29.90 + € 10 packaging and shipping costs, a special offer applies for the readers of De Blauwe Wimpel of € 23.50 including shipping costs. There is also the unique possibility to have a personal wish written in the book for a maximum of ten words. Signed by Ton van der Werf, one of the authors. Unfortunately, the other writer Henri van der Zee passed away. The amount of € 23.50 can be transferred to NL32RABO0132846411 in the name of the Maritime Paintings Foundation Peter J. Sterkenburg. At the same time, please send an e-mail confirmation of your payment to [tonvanderwerf@home.nl](mailto:tonvanderwerf@home.nl) on which, in addition to the De Blauwe Wimpel promotion, you specify which text (up to ten words) you wish. And of course, don't forget the address where you want to receive the book.