

PAN

AMSTERDAM

KUNSTGALERIJ ALBRICHT



Sea with Sandbank

Oil/canvas
80,5 x 100 cm

Signed lower left "C. Fernhout Toorop" and "C. Toorop"
1916

Charley Toorop's *Sea with Sandbank* reflects her early search for a personal artistic style, independent of her famous father Jan Toorop. Having grown up close to the sea, she transformed the coastal landscape into a nearly abstract spiral of sea and sand, rendered in cool colours and rhythmic, hatched brushstrokes. The painting was made during a difficult period in her life, shortly after the birth of her daughter and amid the breakdown of her marriage. Exhibited in 1916 with the artists' association Het Signaal, *Sea with Sandbank* exemplifies Toorop's pursuit of a spiritually charged rendering of visible reality.

The more abstract qualities of the sea, its infinite gradations of colour, the singular coastal light, the shifting forms of water and sand, the horizon, present an ultimate challenge to any painter. For the Toorop family, this was particularly

true.

The sea was never far removed from the life of Charley Toorop. She spent part of her childhood in Katwijk, where her father, the renowned painter Jan Toorop, created a celebrated series of seascapes. For years she accompanied him into the dunes of Domburg to draw side by side. Later, Charley's son, the painter Edgar Fernhout, would also devote himself intensively to the subject.

In July 1916, Charley Toorop spent time with her father in Zeeland, not in Domburg, where Jan Toorop formed the vibrant centre of an artists' colony each summer, but in Oostvoorne, then a seaside resort popular with visitors from Rotterdam.

There she painted three works, including *Sea with Sandbank*. She had recently given birth to her daughter and was still recovering. Shortly before, her father had written to her: "I was very sorry to hear you are not yet well. You must nourish yourself properly and regain your strength," enclosing seventy-five eggs with his note.

It was not an easy period in her life. Her marriage to Henk Fernhout had effectively collapsed due to his alcoholism and aggression; she now had three children to support, and establishing a serious artistic career had become an urgent necessity.

In 1916, *Sea with Sandbank* was exhibited at the inaugural exhibition of the artists' association Het Signaal at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Within this group Charley found like-minded artists. The newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* described her work as "tragic in character" and spoke of a "tender merging of melancholy colour."

The painting was acquired by a close acquaintance of the Toorop family, Charles Drabbe, brother of the Domburg artist Mies Elout-Drabbe, whose studio functioned as a meeting place for artists and as the centre of the artists' colony there, with Jan Toorop as its focal point.

Sea with Sandbank is a powerful example of Charley Toorop's early search for an independent style, distinct from that of her famous father, with whom she was constantly compared. The seascape has evolved into an almost abstract composition.

Sea and sand are rendered as a great spiral, executed in cool tones with abundant white and black, enriched by ochre, purple, and blue. The hatched brushstrokes she employed during this period recur frequently in her work. They lend the landscape a radiant, almost otherworldly presence, as though emerging from another dimension. Without the three small vessels sailing in succession through the channel, heading towards threatening storm clouds, the painting would scarcely be recognisable as a landscape.

"Is natural appearance reality, or is the form we can touch merely the most unreal aspect of what appears to us? This unreality, which is the most real," Charley wrote in 1917, in response to the founding of De Stijl by Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondriaan, who advocated a wholly abstract art. Such an approach did not appeal to Charley Toorop.

She remained committed to visible reality. The artist, she believed, must strive to realise a "spiritually animated vision" of the real. This conviction is already evident in this early painting, and she would adhere to this principle throughout her life, a principle she formulated at the age of just twenty-six.

The year 1916 proved pivotal in Toorop's development. Not only did she join Het Signaal, but the collector Helene Kröller-Müller acquired one of her paintings through the art advisor H.P. Bremmer. Bremmer recognised in Charley Toorop an exceptional talent and even described her as a successor to Van Gogh, particularly in the unflinching intensity with which she rendered reality. "She is someone who dares to face life," he remarked, "as only very few possess the capacity to do."