Public access description
Ludolf Bakhuizen (1630-1708) was born in Emden (Germany) and moved to Amsterdam around 1650, where he started to execute pen and ink drawings in the manner of Willem van de Velde the Elder. He is said to have learnt to paint in oil from the marine painters Hendrick Dubbels and Allaert van Everdingen. He joined the Amsterdam Guild of St Luke in 1663 and became the leading Marine painter in Amsterdam after the departure of Willem van de Velde father and son.

This painting is a good example of Bakhuysen's output of the mid 1660s when the atmosphere of his paintings became more dramatic and his palette brighter with ominous cloudy skies. The fishing boat or wijdschip in the foreground is dangerously close to a prominent rock on the top of which is seated a figure chatting with another figure cut off on the edge. A ray of light outlines the dangerous proximity between the rock and the boat while on the far left background is hardly distinguishable a Dutch man-of-war ship. The composition is typical of Bakhuysen's dramatic invention. This painting was cleaned in 1968 and revealed the rock and the two figures of the original composition.

Descriptive line
Oil painting, 'Ships off Shore in a Stormy Sea', Ludolf Bakhuizen, ca. 1665

Physical description
Ships off shore in a stormy sea with a figure seated on a top of a rock on the right hand-side

The horizontal crack in the middle may indicate that the painting was transferred from panel on to canvas, for, whereas such cracks are common on panel, they would appear on canvas only if it were actually cut or folded in half. At any rate the surface has been reduced at some stage, for the figure on the extreme right is cut off at the edge of the canvas. A new foreground was then painted in, probably to avoid the unsightliness of the damaged edge.

Dimensions
Height: 33.4 cm estimate, Width: 43.5 cm estimate

Museum number
346-1878

Object history note
Bequeathed by George Mitchell, 1878

Historical significance: This painting is typical of his stormy seascapes, and shows his interest in atmospheric effects.

When this picture was cleaned in 1968 it was found that the right foreground had been extensively repainted. Two crudely painted figures, a mast and some planks were removed by surface cleaning (methyl chloride), revealing the rock and the two figures of the original composition. The quality of the painting was so improved by the reappearance of the original foreground that the attribution to Bakhuizen, which had been abandoned, now seems acceptable, especially as the signature remained firm when the overpaint was removed.

Historical context note
Ludolf Bakhuizen (1630-1708) was born in Emden (Germany) and moved to Amsterdam around 1650, where he made drawings in the manner of Willem van de Velde the Elder. He studied painting from the marine painters Hendrick Dubbels and Allaert van Everdingen. He joined the Amsterdam Guild of St Luke in 1663 and became the leading Marine painter in Amsterdam after the departure for England of his principal rivals Willem van de Velde, father and son. His style was widely emulated and his pupils included Jan Claesz. Rietshoof (1652-1719), Pieter Coopse (active 1657/8) and Michiel Maddersteeg (ca. 1659-1709). He developed a large repertory of marine subjects, from naval battles to harbour views, ships in stormy weather and shipwrecks. Only occasionally did he paint calms. He also painted portraits, allegorical and religious subjects.

Marine painting emerged as a major genre in the 17th-century Dutch Republic. It was initiated by Vroom and developed by Porcellis, de Vlieger and van de Cappelle. The Anglo-Dutch Wars (1652-74) revived interest in major historical marine subjects, and when Willem van de
Velde and his son became painters to Charles II, the market in marine painting moved to London. JMW Turner was inspired by Dutch marine painters and this genre was continued by English specialists, such as Edward William Cooke (1811-80), and Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867).

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O132082/ships-off-shore-in-a-oil-painting-bakhuizen-ludolf/