

Lonely traveller in a transient world

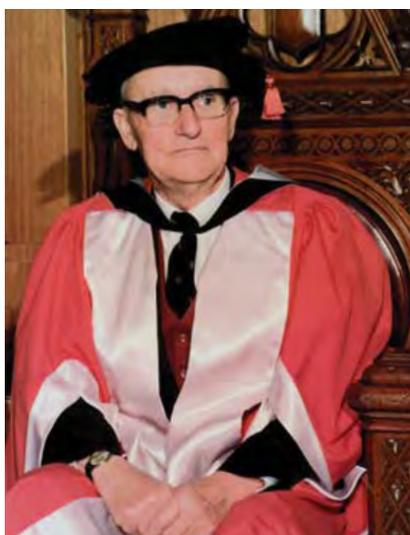
The landscape prints of Jan van de Velde II donated to the Baillieu Library by Dr J. Orde Poynton

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Introduction to the Poynton Collection

The Print Collection in the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne is unique in the sense that no other Australian university holds such a comprehensive collection of international prints dating from the 1500s through to the 1850s.¹ The collection is of international significance, both in the range of artists represented and the choice of editions and states of the prints. More research needs to be undertaken into this jewel among the University's cultural collections. The 3,700 prints donated in 1959 by Dr John Orde Poynton AO, CMG, MA, MD, HonLLD represent more than half of the total holding, and form a significant collection in their own right, worthy of research.

John Orde Poynton was born in London in 1906 and was educated at Marlborough College, Caius College (Cambridge) and Charing Cross Hospital. After being appointed senior resident medical officer at the Charing Cross Hospital, he served as health officer, research officer and pathologist in Malaya. He was in the British Army until 1946 and was a prisoner of war at Changi. In 1947 he moved to Adelaide where he was lecturer at the University of



Adelaide's medical school, and from 1950 was director of the Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science. In 1959, whilst still living in Adelaide, he presented to the University of Melbourne a significant collection of rare books and pictures, at that time the most noteworthy gift ever received by an Australian library.² He died in Melbourne in 2001.

Poynton the collector

Dr Poynton inherited from his father, Dr Frederick John Poynton (1869–1943), a lifelong interest in collecting rare books and old master prints. Many of the prints were purchased from dealers in the Charing Cross

Road area in London and at the renowned London dealer in paintings, prints and drawings, Colnaghi's. As a teenager, Orde Poynton, accompanied by his father, visited the illustrious staff of the Prints and Drawings Department of the British Museum: Campbell Dodgson (1867–1948), Arthur M. Hind (1880–1957), Arthur Popham (1889–1970) and Laurence Binyon (1869–1943). By seeking the opinion of these experts on northern European prints, Frederick and his son were able to recognise and thus acquire prints of a high standard,³ including etchings by Jan van de Velde II.

During World War 2, the Poyntons' print collection was moved from place to place for safe-keeping, including Bath where a bomb seriously damaged the house, then to a warehouse in Bristol, also damaged in bombing raids. Poynton later wrote about the prints becoming 'muddled up' and dirty as a result of these moves. Although only a few of the prints were damaged by bombs directly, wartime conditions prevented the collection from being 'organised and improved'.⁴ During this period Dr Frederick Poynton passed away and Orde Poynton became a prisoner of war. When the prints were sent to Australia in 1947 it became obvious that about 200 to 300 out of

Opposite: Norman Wodetzki, Queensberry Photography, Dr J. Orde Poynton being admitted to the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* at the University of Melbourne on 31 July 1977, photographic print, 17.5 x 12.5 cm. UMA/I/2293, University of Melbourne Archives.

Below: Jan van de Velde II, 'Evening: Travellers on a road near an inn', plate 11 from part 1 of *Sixty landscapes*, 1616, etching, 13.3 x 19.7 cm, second state. Reg. no. 1959.3931. Gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Print Collection, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.



approximately 3,000 prints were missing, including some of the best in the collection.⁵

Dr Poynton's relationship with the University started with a visit to the newly built Baillieu Library in 1959.⁶ His intention for a University print collection was to assemble a good representation of the history of printmaking and of the techniques of engraving, etching, mezzotinting and lithography, spanning the period 1500–1850, stating that the University of Melbourne would be 'the only university with such a collection yet'.⁷ Internationally, few universities hold such a comprehensive print collection as the Baillieu Library, and the

collection of the northern European prints that Poynton and his father collected are comparable and even more comprehensive than many major international university and library collections, albeit smaller.⁸

Poynton's print collection tells us about his activities as a collector and also about the wider appreciation of prints during the early 20th century. Identification of the artist or engraver is often through Poynton's inscriptions on the artwork and mounts. During my Cultural Collections Student Projects internship at the Baillieu Library in 2006, during which I undertook an inventory of the Poynton prints, an

examination of his mounts and annotations revealed various patterns of collecting. The Poynton Collection includes parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the series *Sixty landscapes* by Jan van der Velde II.⁹ Cross-referencing archival material held in the Baillieu Library, such as Poynton's register book, his annotations on the mounts and his letters to the University, reveals that Poynton's numbering follows the chronological sequence of acquisition and that he attempted to acquire the complete *Sixty landscapes*. Three of the four complete parts (1, 3 and 4)¹⁰ are numbered sequentially by Poynton, showing they were acquired as complete sets, whereas part 2 is numbered out of sequence, jumping from 585 to 661, 1227, 1228, 1229, 1230, 1774, 1776, etc., showing that he tried to assemble part 2 by buying individual prints as they came on the market. Van de Velde's landscape prints were sought after by artists during the 17th century as teaching aids and references for composition or motifs, leading to the breaking-up of many sets. Complete sets are therefore hard to find.¹¹

Jan van de Velde II etched and engraved about 500 prints, this large number serving as testament to the artist's popularity during his lifetime.¹² About 200 of his prints depict landscapes and these are his

Jan van de Velde II, 'Winter landscape with a square tower used as an inn', plate 12 of part 3 of *Sixty landscapes*, 1616, etching, 11.9 x 18.7 cm, first state. Reg. no. 1959.3966. Gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Print Collection, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

most important and original achievement.¹³ He etched more than 20 landscape series, of which the New York Public Library holds three series, only one being van de Velde's own designs.¹⁴ The National Gallery of Victoria holds only six prints by van de Velde, all after the artist Willem Buytewech (1591/92–1624),¹⁵ and the Art Gallery of South Australia has 21.¹⁶ The Rijksmuseum, on the other hand, holds around 700 van de Velde prints,¹⁷ and the British Museum also has a large number, around 370.¹⁸ The University of Melbourne has 56, comprising parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 (totalling 48 prints) of the *Sixty landscapes* series, the complete *Six landscapes* series of his own design, plus two engravings after Buytewech.

Recognising the sequence of changes in the plates between states allows us to attribute states to the University's prints. The editions of *Sixty landscapes*, parts 1, 2, 3 and 4 collected by Orde Poynton were published in 1616 and demonstrate his connoisseurship since they are the first and second states, published by the prolific Haarlem etcher, draughtsman and publisher Claes Janszoon Visscher (1586/87–1652) as the one body of work during the artist's lifetime, complete with frontispieces. The first states were



fewer plates, numbered in the lower right corner. When van de Velde created more plates in the second edition he divided them into five parts, preceded each part with a frontispiece, and re-numbered each plate at the lower right corner. Eventually the plates were acquired by the publisher P. Schenck Jr who added his own monogram.¹⁹ This later state is not in the Poynton Collection.

The frontispieces for the *Sixty landscapes* series invite the viewer to embark on a journey through a series of landscapes, observing farmers, workers and travellers. These frontispieces help structure the series,

setting a direction and organising scenes that might otherwise appear repetitious due to their reworking of common motifs. The frontispiece to part 1 depicts two men on a road passing through a portico, with other figures in the distance, drawing the viewer into a place, rather than simply presenting a realistic scene for contemplation (see front cover). Inscribed on the tympanum above is *Eerste Deel* (First Part). Three lines of Latin above the opening of the portico read:

*AMENISSIMÆ ALIQUOT
REGIUNCULÆ, A
I.VELDIO DELINEATÆ, ET A*

*NICOLAO IO:
HANNIS PISCATORE IN
LUCEMÆDITÆ.*

(‘Some very attractive little regions, drawn by Jan van de Velde, and published by Claes Visscher.’)²⁰

Jan van de Velde II and 17th century Dutch landscape prints

Around 1612 the coming together in Haarlem of a group of talented artists led to a significant change in both the perception and the representation of the visible world, through their prints of the Dutch landscape.²¹ These artists came to Haarlem for various reasons: some were attracted by the opportunities of learning from luminaries such as Haarlem’s leading printmaker, draftsman and painter Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) and the poet, biographer and artist Karel van Mander (1548–1606). Flemish immigrants were welcomed to Haarlem and, consequently, brought other family members, which also expanded the city’s artist community.²² Two such individuals were Jan van de Velde II and his cousin Esaias van de Velde (1587–1630), whom Arthur Hind named as two of the most noteworthy Dutch etchers of the first part of the 17th century.²³

Jan van de Velde II was probably born in Rotterdam between 1593 and 1597. He was the son of master calligrapher Jan the Elder whose family was originally from Antwerp. In 1613 Jan the Elder sent his son to Haarlem to undertake an apprenticeship with the master engraver Jacob Matham, stepson of Hendrik Goltzius.²⁴ Jan van de Velde II entered the Guild of Haarlem in 1614, but not as a master. He was later admitted to the Guild of Saint Luke in Haarlem to become a master in 1617, enabling him to engrave and etch freely his own and other artists’ designs.²⁵ His last engraving is dated 1633.²⁶ He moved to Enkhuizen in 1636 and died there in about 1641.

Printers and publishers in Haarlem in the early 1600s commissioned artists to produce series depicting a very saleable subject: the local landscape.²⁷ Jan van de Velde’s entire output, produced between 1613 and 1633, comprises portraits, historical plates, bookplates and landscapes.²⁸ He was the most prolific landscape etcher of his generation, establishing the popularity of Dutch landscape prints by depicting the local countryside and its residents.²⁹ He worked from his own designs (greatly influenced by the landscapes of Visscher³⁰ and Abraham Bloemaert³¹) until about

1618, after which he based his etchings on drawings by other popular artists such as Buytewech and Pieter Molijn, probably from economic necessity, as these would guarantee sales and were less time-consuming than creating original works. But it is van de Velde’s landscapes of his own designs that have made his reputation as an etcher.

Etching technique and 17th century Dutch landscape prints

The golden age of Dutch landscape art has its foundations in printmaking, in which medium it developed well before reaching its apex in painting. Prints were distributed widely throughout Europe and were used as reference material by painters.³²

Etching (from the Dutch *etsen*, to eat) is a printing technique in which a metal plate is covered with an acid-resistant ground, such as wax, and then worked into with an etcher’s needle. The exposed metal is ‘eaten’ in an acid bath, creating lines to hold the ink. The technique was invented in about 1500 and in the early 17th century became very popular among younger Dutch printmakers, being less laborious, cheaper and requiring less formal training than engraving. Artists also found that etching

Jan van de Velde II, 'Farm built against a square tower', plate 11 from part 2 of *Sixty landscapes*, 1616, etching, 13.6 x 20.1 cm, second state. Reg. no. 1959.3935. Gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959, Print Collection, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

created a direct and spontaneous image so they were more readily able to render painterly effects.³³ Van de Velde's tidy and highly stylised workmanship typifies early 17th century Netherlandish etching. The two series *Sixty landscapes* and *Six landscapes* clearly demonstrate his virtuosic technique: the variety and gradation of lines creating atmospheric effects; his wide range of graphic marks from light to dark, soft to hard, and fluid to rigid. The influence of his calligrapher father comes though in his ornamental style, particularly in his depiction of trees and clouds (see p. 15).³⁴ Trained as a professional engraver-etcher, Jan II learned from his cousin Esaias van de Velde, a pioneer in painted Dutch landscape, and other painter-etcher friends, to loosen his draughtsmanship. His etching technique evolved, not to purely imitate engraving, but to utilise etching's characteristics of texture, tone and line.

Though not etched directly from nature, van de Velde's simple views recreate the experience of walking through the Dutch landscape with its low horizon line, trees and ruins against a generous proportion of sky. The persistent journey theme and the seemingly natural subject matter invite a wide range of interpretations.



'Into the light': Symbolism in Jan van de Velde II's landscapes

Van de Velde's landscapes had a conscious purpose, demonstrated by his recurring use of particular themes and motifs. His landscapes are a sophisticated choice of style and subject matter, eliminating some elements, carefully arranging others, to create landscapes that appear spontaneous. Artists sketched the countryside *en plein air* and relied on their sketchbooks, memory and imagination back in the studio to compose the final work. It is likely van de Velde manipulated his

compositions by combining topographical motifs and representations of nature that in reality did not exist together. While the prints appear realistic, these works convey an emotional moral power by incorporating personal experience and cultural beliefs into representations of nature.

Van de Velde drew upon a bank of motifs such as bridges, dead trees, wagons, old farmhouses, taverns and dovecotes. His recurring patterns of composition, structure and motifs were conventional at the time and would have been understood by the viewer,³⁵ whether consciously or unconsciously, including their social,

economic, historical and moral references. While artists such as van de Velde did not celebrate the fundamental Calvinist teachings that emphasised the natural beauty of nature, I believe we cannot dismiss the Calvinist influence. The positive view of nature encouraged by Calvinists to study the natural world comes through van de Velde's landscapes to a certain extent. On the title page of *Sixty landscapes* the *idea* of pleasant landscapes is communicated in the Latin inscription on the portico, *AMENISSIMÆ ALIQUOT REGIUNCULÆ* ('Some very attractive little regions'), yet, rather than simply presenting a realistic scene, the portico invites the viewer to embark on a journey through a series of landscapes.

The traveller

Sixty landscapes depicts the lonely traveller in a transient world, striving for eternal bliss, negotiating temptation along the way.³⁶ The travellers, sometimes resting on the side of the road, stopping at inns, or striving towards their destination (often an ethereal city or church on the horizon, also representing the end of mortal life) draw the viewer through the series.

For example, 'Winter landscape



with a square tower used as an inn' (see p. 16) features a lone traveller negotiating a lot of activity in order to stay on the straight and narrow path. He has passed some peasants in the foreground transporting barrels of beer on sledges. On the left is a river, on which there are some skaters. Further in, someone occupies an outhouse (a symbol of dilapidation and decay),³⁷ while close by a man urinates against a tree. Across the road is a square tower that serves as a tavern or inn—the embodiment of depravity in medieval sermons. High on the tower is a dovecote, symbol of lust,³⁸ while leafless trees, signifying *vanitas*, arch over the road in a

threatening manner. On the far bank the spire of a church is iridescent in the distance.

We cannot assume that all of van de Velde's etchings possess allegorical meanings; they also serve the traditional function of landscape images: enabling the viewer to experience nature. His art oscillates between representing Haarlem and its physical surrounds (see above) and conveying contemporary moral concepts originating in medieval ideas and traditions. Van de Velde's prints do not conform to a single religious, moral or historical interpretation, nor do they illustrate precise allegories or provide a structure of indisputable

symbolic content. Their naturalism leaves them open to a wide range of interpretations, encouraging contemplation.

Kathleen Kiernan is currently writing her PhD thesis on the circulation of 17th century Dutch landscape prints and drawings in London and their influence on 18th century British landscape art. In 2007 she completed her Master of Art Curatorship (Melbourne) and in the same year was the Harold Wright Scholar at the British Museum. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in textile design (RMIT), a Bachelor of Arts in multimedia (RMIT) and a Postgraduate Certificate in Art Conservation (Melbourne). Kathleen is curating an exhibition of the etchings of Jan van de Velde II in the John Orde Poynton Collection, to be held at the Ian Potter Museum of Art in 2009.

Notes

- 1 Sarah Thomas and Eszter Szabo, 'Significance assessment: Baillieu Library Print Collection', unpublished report, University of Melbourne, November 2005, p. 1.
- 2 Anonymous, '1959: The University of Melbourne: The Poynton Collection: A notable gift to the University', typescript, 7 December 1959. Baillieu Library files.
- 3 J. Orde Poynton, 'Catalogue of the Print Collection, together with a small number of pictures and drawings, given to the University of Melbourne by Dr Orde Poynton, 1960', unpublished manuscript. Baillieu Library Print Collection.
- 4 Poynton, 'Catalogue of the Print Collection'.
- 5 J. Orde Poynton, letter to Axel Lodewycks [Librarian, University of Melbourne], 12 August 1960. Baillieu Library files.
- 6 Merete Smith, 'Dry light is best', *University of Melbourne Library Journal*, vol. 7, nos 1–2, December 2001, p. 11.
- 7 Poynton, letter to Lodewycks, 12 August 1960.
- 8 For example, after viewing the exhibition *Recent acquisitions: Old master prints* at the New York Public Library in 2006 it became apparent to me that the NYPL's holdings of van de Velde prints are less rich and comprehensive than the Baillieu Library's.
- 9 Titles of works are from Christiaan Schuckman and Ger Luijten, 'Jan van de Velde II to Dirk Vellert', in F.W.H. Hollstein, *Dutch and Flemish etchings, engravings and woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, no. 33, Roosendaal: Koninklijke van Poll, 1989, pp. 75–98. The titles used by the Baillieu Library are in the process of being updated as a result of my research. I was also able to attribute some of the Baillieu Library's prints, previously catalogued as 'unknown artist', to Jan van de Velde II.
- 10 The British Museum holds only part 5 of this series.
- 11 Daniel Franken and Johann Philippe van der Kellen, *L'oeuvre de Jan van de Velde: Graveur hollandais, 1593–1641* (originally published 1888), 2nd edition, Amsterdam: Hissink, 1968, p. 7.
- 12 Irene de Groot, *Etchings by Dutch masters of the seventeenth century*, London: Gordon Fraser Gallery, 1979, p. 6.
- 13 Christopher Brown, *Dutch landscape: The early years*, London: National Gallery, 1986, p. 173.
- 14 Roberta Weddell, wall text from exhibition *Old master prints*, New York Public Library, 2006.
- 15 National Gallery of Victoria, information generated from collection database, 2006.
- 16 Art Gallery of South Australia, information generated from collection database, 2007.
- 17 Huigen Leeflang, email to Kathleen Kiernan, 8 November 2006.
- 18 British Museum, information generated from collection database, 2006.
- 19 Franken and van der Kellen, *L'oeuvre de Jan van de Velde*, p. 111.
- 20 Piscatore is the Latinised version of the surname Visscher, literally meaning fisher or fisherman.
- 21 Brown, *Dutch landscape*, p. 34. Haarlem was the home of many important Dutch artists such as Frans Hals and Adriaen von Ostade.
- 22 Arthur K. Wheelock Jr, 'Review: *Haarlem: The seventeenth century*, Rutgers University', *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 125, no. 963, June 1983, p. 386.
- 23 Arthur M. Hind, *A history of engraving and etching* (originally published 1923), New York: Dover Publications, 1963, p. 168.
- 24 William Aspenwall Bradley, *Dutch landscape etchers of the seventeenth century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1918, pp. 10–12.
- 25 Franken and van der Kellen, *L'oeuvre de Jan van de Velde*, pp. 5–7. Dates of van de Velde's life vary between sources. Franken and van der Kellen's dates are the most widely cited.
- 26 Catherine Levesque, 'Haarlem landscapes and ruins: Nature transformed', in Susan Donahue Kuretsky (ed.), *Time and transformation in seventeenth-century Dutch art*, Poughkeepsie: Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 2005, p. 114.
- 27 de Groot, *Etchings by Dutch masters*, p. 2.
- 28 Franken and van der Kellen, *L'oeuvre de Jan van de Velde*.
- 29 Franken and van der Kellen, *L'oeuvre de Jan van de Velde*, pp. 4–7.
- 30 de Groot, *Etchings by Dutch masters*, p. 1.
- 31 Hind, *A history of engraving and etching*, p. 355.
- 32 Brown, *Dutch landscape*, p. 9.
- 33 Walter S. Gibson, *Pleasant places: The rustic landscape from Bruegel to Ruisdael*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p. 43.
- 34 Levesque, 'Haarlem landscapes and ruins', p. 54.
- 35 Lawrence O. Goedde, 'Naturalism as convention: Subject, style, and artistic self-consciousness in Dutch landscape', in Wayne E. Franits (ed.), *Looking at seventeenth-century Dutch art: Realism reconsidered*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 131.
- 36 Josua Bruyn, 'Toward a scriptural reading of seventeenth-century Dutch landscape paintings', in Peter C. Sutton (ed.), *Masters of 17th-century Dutch landscape painting*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988, p. 100.
- 37 Walter S. Gibson, 'Bloemaert's privy: The rustic ruin in Dutch art', in Kuretsky (ed.), *Time and transformation*, p. 65.
- 38 Bruyn, 'Toward a scriptural reading', p. 85.