



Jan van der Heyden  
Dutch, 1637 - 1712

## *View Down a Dutch Canal*

c. 1670

oil on panel

overall: 32.5 × 39 cm (12 13/16 × 15 3/8 in.)

Inscription: lower right on the boat, in ligature: IVH

Gift of George M. and Linda H. Kaufman 2012.73.2

---

### ENTRY

Jan van der Heyden had a remarkable ability to capture the flavor and feeling of Amsterdam and its many canals, even in fancifully conceived images such as this one. He understood the sense of the city one gains by wandering along them: the glimpses of imposing buildings behind trees lining the Herengracht and Keizersgracht; the ever-varied vistas as the canals follow their semicircular course around the city center; and the countless activities found on the quays and on boats along the still waters. He also introduced marvelous effects of light that enliven a city so defined by its topography: billowing clouds that suggest the freshness of the air, bright sunlight accenting the colors and architectural details of the buildings, and reflections in the water that mirror the physical reality above.

The joy of this painting is the quiet rhythm of daily life in this urban setting. The linden trees lining the canals provide shade, greenery, and, most of all, a pleasant ambiance for those who stroll beneath them. [1] In Van der Heyden's world, men and women stand and watch or go about their daily chores, but they do not hurry. Trees soften architectural structures but do not entirely eclipse them: handsome, brick-red buildings, partially obscured by their verdant foliage, provide glimpses of dwellings that hint of both the individual wealth and the communal bonds of their

inhabitants. The pace of the viewer's eye as it gazes along the gently receding canal is visually slowed by large wooden barges tied along the waterway's brick walls and by a bridge over which passes a horse-drawn carriage.

Van der Heyden's views of Amsterdam canals from the late 1660s and early 1670s often reflect the character of the city without portraying a particular site. [2] Although the three large and imposing buildings at the left are reminiscent of residences designed by Hendrick de Keyser (1565–1621) along the stately Keizersgracht, their imaginatively articulated decorative gables, as well as their windows and doorways, vary from the actual architecture. [3]

Quite remarkably, the massive stone church tower rising just beyond these brick dwellings is not an Amsterdam building at all. Van der Heyden based this tower on that of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk in Veere, a formidable Romanesque structure that Van der Heyden often ingeniously inserted into fancifully conceived city views [fig. 1]. [4] Exactly when Van der Heyden visited Veere and why he developed such a predilection for depicting this church in a small Zeeland town is not known, although Veere was a marquisate of the House of Orange, which meant it had a certain historic significance within the Dutch Republic. Otherwise, no family or business connections to Veere have been identified that would have taken him there. Van der Heyden clearly knew the church well, and must have relied on drawings he made on-site when he came to execute this work or other paintings. One can speculate that the painter found the massive, somewhat squat, stone structure appealing as a visual contrast to the more refined, seventeenth-century dwellings that lined Amsterdam's most prominent canals. This Romanesque church grounds the painting's compositional structure, serving as a firm apex to the receding diagonal that draws the viewer's eye, however slowly, into the distance along the canal banks. [5] Finally, the age and venerability of the church tower provide a sense of historical continuity to this urban landscape that presumably had great attraction for the artist's contemporary patrons.

One of the marvels of Van der Heyden's paintings is the remarkably realistic character of his brickwork. A notable inventor (see his biography), Van der Heyden devised a way of depicting mortar so that it would appear to be part of the buildings' structure. So remarkable was his manner of painting bricks and mortar that his contemporaries wondered about the secret technique he must have devised to create effects that "seem impossible with the customary ways of painting." [6] Even today, the manner in which Van der Heyden achieved these effects is not fully understood, although it is clear that he did not represent mortar

in the “customary” way, that is, solely with painted lines. Seen under a microscope, the lines of the mortar, which sit on the surface of the red color of the bricks, have a soft, fluid character comparable to that found in counterproofs. It, thus, appears that Van der Heyden devised an offset process to create these lines.

It is possible that Van der Heyden created his offset process by designing mortar patterns on separate supports. He may have painted these patterns on small pieces of paper or wood, or perhaps even etched them into copper plates. [7] It appears that the artist pressed these designs (or impressions of these designs, if he created them as etchings) when still wet, onto the reddish brick color after the paint had dried. [8] The application of these grid patterns came rather late in the artistic process, for mortar lines occasionally lay on top of the foliage of nearby trees [fig. 2]. Where he felt that his offset process needed reinforcing, Van der Heyden selectively applied light gray brush to indicate mortar. [9]

This technique, which has been found in a small number of Van der Heyden’s paintings dating from the late 1660s and early 1670s, was originally thought to provide a means for the artist to paint his brick patterns more quickly than if he executed them solely with a brush. [10] This process, however, must have been very labor-intensive and would not have speeded completion of the painting. s. Van der Heyden clearly thought carefully about the mortar patterns so that they would accurately reflect the perspective and scale of the structures to which he applied them. It is more likely that Van der Heyden invented this process to create very detailed yet diffused lines of mortar that do not appear to sit on top of the red bricks but instead become integral parts of a building’s structure.

Van der Heyden’s inventiveness is not limited to his brickwork. Microscopic examination also raises the possibility that the artist stippled his foliage by dabbing on paint with moss or a sponge rather than with a brush.

Despite the well-deserved fame of Van der Heyden’s remarkably detailed techniques, his paintings ultimately succeed because he successfully integrated architecture and natural forms to create atmospheric scenes. He carefully recorded the reality of the world around him—whether it be the earthy bricks and mortar, the glimmering reflections of water, or the tips of branches flickering in the light of a summer’s day—and brought them to life in a subtly-crafted visual experience that speaks to very basic human emotions of peace and harmony.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

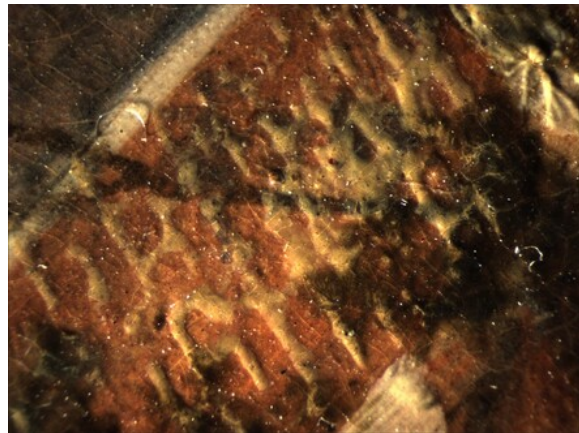
April 24, 2014

---

## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Jan van der Heyden, *The Church at Veere*, oil on canvas, Royal Picture Gallery, Mauritshuis, The Hague



**fig. 2** detail of the façade of the second building from the left, Jan van der Heyden, *View Down a Dutch Canal*, c. 1670, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of George M. and Linda H. Kaufman

---

## NOTES

- [1] Helga Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden, 1637–1712* (Amsterdam and Haarlem, 1971), 87-88, convincingly attributes the figures to Adriaen van de Velde, who, prior to his death in 1672, often painted staffage figures in Van der Heyden's paintings.
- [2] See Peter C. Sutton, *Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712)* (Greenwich, Conn., and Amsterdam, 2006), 140-141, no. 15.
- [3] As noted by Broos in Ben P. J. Broos, *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (The Hague and San Francisco, 1990), 281.
- [4] Helga Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden, 1637–1712* (Amsterdam and Haarlem, 1971), 82-83, nos. 72-76. Sutton, in Peter C. Sutton, *Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712)* (Greenwich, Conn., and Amsterdam, 2006), 140-141, no. 15, identifies six other instances in which Van der Heyden depicted the church at Veere in his paintings. Five of these paintings place the church within

Veere, albeit somewhat imaginatively, and one places it in an entirely fanciful construct. This is the only instance in which he incorporated it into a view that reflects the architectural character of Amsterdam.

- [5] Van der Heyden made a careful underdrawing for this composition, including the position of the boats. He may have worked out the perspective with the aid of a preliminary drawing, but none is known. Only one drawing by the artist still remains, a red chalk counterproof of the composition, in reverse, of *The Oudezijds Voorburgwal and the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam*, c. 1670 (Mauritshuis, The Hague). The counterproof, which is in the Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap, Amsterdam, is discussed and illustrated by Ariane van Suchtelen in Ariane van Suchtelen and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Pride of Place: Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age* (The Hague, 2008), 126-128.
- [6] Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 3:80 (“Waar omtrent men nu nog gelooft, dat hy een byzondere konstgreep, of middel heeft uitgevonden gehad, om dat het aan allen die het gebruik van ’t penceel kennen, onmogelyk schynt dat het op de gewone wyze van schilderen geschieden kan.”). The English translation is taken from Arie Wallert, “Refined Technique or Special Tricks: Painting Methods of Jan van der Heyden,” in Peter C. Sutton, *Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712)* (Greenwich, Conn., and Amsterdam, 2006), 92. Wallert’s excellent article provides much information about Van der Heyden’s working methods.
- [7] Arie Wallert. “Refined Technique or Special Tricks: Painting Methods of Jan van der Heyden,” in Peter C. Sutton, *Jan van der Heyden (1637–1712)* (Greenwich, Conn., and Amsterdam, 2006), 98-99, suggests that Van der Heyden transferred the lines from an impression made on paper from an etched copper plate. Thus, he suggests that the lines are executed in ink, which does not seem to be the case.
- [8] See Ariane van Suchtelen in Ariane van Suchtelen and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Pride of Place: Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age* (The Hague, 2008), 128, for a close analysis of the technique as it appears in Van der Heyden’s *The Oudezijds Voorburgwal and the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam*, c. 1670, in the Mauritshuis, The Hague. The offset lines in that painting differ slightly from those in the Washington work. In the Mauritshuis landscape small globules of concentrated paint that formed along the “mortar” lines help to create the irregular character of real mortar.
- [9] There is no evidence that Van der Heyden reused the same offset mortar patterns in multiple areas of the painting; each seems to have been carefully designed for a specific location.
- [10] Van der Heyden probably used this technique more frequently than is

currently recognized, as undoubtedly will be discovered as more of his paintings are examined with a microscope.

---

## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a single plank of vertically grained hardwood with a prominent grain. It was prepared with an extremely thin, white ground. The ground has oozed onto the edges of the painting, indicating that the panel retains its original dimensions.

Infrared reflectography at 1.0 to 2.5 microns shows a loose, freehand drawing marking the architecture, the boats, and some of the figures and trees. [1] The bell tower of the large church was drawn shorter than in the final version, and an additional boat is seen in the foreground to the left of center.

The composition was thinly painted with delicate impasto in the highlights and leaves. It appears as though Van der Heyden began by blocking in the various areas of the painting with color. Then he painted the details wet-over-dry on top of the blocked color, and continued adding the details wet-into-wet into one another. Van der Heyden used stippling to create the leaves. He may have made the bricks using some sort of printmaking technique because no brushwork is visible, nor do the lines taper in the manner typical of painted strokes (see this object's entry).

The painting is in excellent condition. A few nicks are found at the edges of the panel, but it remains in plane, with no checks or splits. The ground and paint are stable and secure. An extremely fine craquelure pattern exists throughout, which may be limited to the varnish layer. The paint exhibits very fine shrinkage wrinkling, mostly in vertical lines in the sky. Some discreet, recent inpainting has been applied along the edges, in vertical lines along the wood grain in the sky and water, in the center tree branch where it extends onto the buildings, and in the upper tree branches along the left edge. The varnish is clear and even.

[1] Infrared reflectography was accomplished with a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with H, J, and K astronomy filters.

---

## PROVENANCE

Henry Fitzalan-Howard, 15th Duke of Norfolk [1847-1917], by 1880;<sup>[1]</sup> by inheritance to his son, Bernard Marmaduke Fitzalan-Howard, 16th Duke of Norfolk [1908-1975]; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 11 February 1938, no. 99); B. de Geus van den Heuvel [1886-1976], Nieuwersluis; (his estate sale, Sotheby Mak van Waay B.V. at Round Lutheran Church, Singel, Amsterdam, 26-27 April 1976, no. 23); (David Koetser, Zurich); private collection, West Berlin; on consignment with (Hoogsteder-Naumann, New York); purchased 1986 by George M. [1932-2001] and Linda H. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia; Kaufman Americana Foundation, Norfolk; gift 2012 to NGA.

[1] The painting was lent by the duke to the 1880 Winter Exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. It is not yet known when or where the Dukes of Norfolk acquired it. See the entry on the painting by Ben Broos in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, exh. cat., Mauritshuis, The Hague; The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, The Hague and Zwolle, 1990: no. 31, 280-284.

---

## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1880 Exhibition of Works by the Old Masters, and by Deceased Masters of the British School. Winter Exhibition, Royal Academy, 1880, no. 76, as *A Landscape and Buildings*.

1938 Meesterwerken uit Vier Eeuwen, 1400-1800, Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1938-1939, no. 15, repro.

1951 Schilderijen uit de zeventiende, achttiende, negentiende en twintigste eeuw der nederlandse school uit de verzameling van B. de Geus van den Heuvel, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, Schiedam, 1951-1952, no. 22a.

1952 Schilderijen der nederlandse- en franse school uit de verzameling van B. de Geus van den Heuvel, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum het Prinsenhof, Delft, 1952-1953, no. 35.

1955 Kunstschaten uit Nederlandse Verzamelingen, Museum Boymans, Rotterdam, 1955, no. 74, repro.

## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

*Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*

1956 Er was eens: ons land gezien door schilders in vroeger tijden, Stedelijk Museum het Prinsenhof, Delft, 1956, no. 164.

1958 Kunstbezit rondom Laren, 13de-20ste eeuw: schilderijen-beeldhouwwerken, N.H. Singer Museum, Laren, 1958, no. 102.

1960 Collectie B. de Geus-van den Heuvel, Gemeente Museum, Arnhem, 1960-1961, no. 23, repro.

1984 Holländische Malerei aus Berliner Privatbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 1984-1985, no. 24, repro.

1990 Great Dutch Paintings from America, Mauritshuis, The Hague; The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, 1990-1991, no. 31, repro., as *An 'Amsterdam' Canal* (shown only in The Hague)

2006 Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712), Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2006-2007, no. 16, repro., as *An Imaginary Canal with the Church of Veere*.

2008 Pride of Place: Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age, Mauritshuis, The Hague; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2008-2009, no. 25, repro., as *An Amsterdam Canal View with the Church of Veere*.

---

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1907 Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. 8 vols. Translated by Edward G. Hawke. London, 1907-1927: 8(1927):no. 305.
- 1971 Wagner, Helga. *Jan van der Heyden, 1637-1712*. Amsterdam and Haarlem, 1971: 83, 87-88, no. 91.
- 1990 Broos, Ben P. J., ed. *Great Dutch Paintings from America*. Exh. cat. Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The Hague and Zwolle, 1990: 280-284, no. 31, color repro. 282.
- 2012 Paul, Tanya, et al. *Elegance and Refinement: The still-life paintings of Willem van Aelst*. Exh. cat. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; National Gallery of Art, Washington. New York, 2012: 42, fig. 6.



 NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS  
*Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*

**To cite:** Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Jan van der Heyden/*View Down a Dutch Canal*/c. 1670,” *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/135093> (accessed April 11, 2025).