



Jan van der Heyden

Gorinchem 1637 - 1712 Amsterdam

Panoramic View with a Medieval Town and the St. Cecilia of Cologne

Oil on panel 45.2 x 59.5 cm

Remains of a signature lower left on the ruinous stone block

Datable second half 1660s

Provenance

Likely to have been acquired by Thomas Hibbert II (died 1817), thence by descent in the collection of the Hibbert family at Chalfont House in the parish of Chalfont St. Peter, Buckinghamshire, to Major General Hugh Hibbert of Chalfont, 1952
Sale London (Bonhams), 8 December 2016, lot 22

Exhibited

London, Royal Academy, *Dutch pictures 1450-1750*, 1952-53, nr. 514
Utrecht, Centraal Museum, *Nederlandse architectuurschilders 1600-1900*, (cat. by H. Jantzen) 1953, nr. 46

Literature

H. Wagner, *Jan van der Heyden 1637-1712*, Amsterdam 1971, nr. 156, p. 102

A medieval town dominated by sturdy brick structures and protected by thick walls sits on the bank of a river, enveloped by verdant slopes and hills that punctuate the blue sky. Formations of cumulus clouds drift over the landscape, dwarfing the architecture painted with fastidious precision.

Jan van der Heyden is arguably the greatest cityscape painter of the Dutch Golden Age. His views of Amsterdam and other Dutch towns are iconic and adorn the walls of the great museum galleries across the globe. From early on Van der Heyden also found inspiration for his art outside the Netherlands. He was captivated by German cities near the Dutch border, such as Emmerich, Kleve, Xanten, Düsseldorf and Cologne, which he visited as a youngster with his family. The present view freely combines motifs from Cologne with a more superficial resemblance to old German towns.

As Helga Wagner already observed in her monograph on the artist, the large church in the hearth of the town in our panoramic view is the still existing St. Cecilia of Cologne, which Van der Heyden showed in several others of his paintings as well.¹ The

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impressive tower with its overgrown top is reminiscent of Cologne cathedral. Its towers were far from completed in Van der Heyden's day.² The double-gate structure forming the entrance to the city was typical for cities in the region of the Lower Rhine.

Although Van der Heyden will have returned from his German trips with drawings recording all of the cities' main elements, he never used them to slavishly reconstruct a certain place in paint; his ingenious imagination was key to his artistry and also proved leading in his painted depictions of German cities.

Imaginary landscapes with fancy architecture, such as the present, were a novelty in the seventeenth century and Van der Heyden has been credited for inventing the genre of architectural capriccio. In this capacity he had paved the way for the architectural fantasies of the eighteenth-century Italian *vedute* painters such as Canaletto and Francesco Guardi.

Van der Heyden's aim here was to evoke the soul of an old city. Our painting in particular attests to the artist's admiration for Romanesque structures with their bold forms and Van der Heyden delighted in emphasizing their age by subtly describing the state of dilapidation. Although the painter occasionally juxtaposed new and old buildings for the sake of dramatic contrast, the focus here is entirely on the ancient town, partly neglected but still inhabited and at any rate uncorrupted by later architectural additions. The renaissance palace in the right far distance does not disturb this Romanesque reverie at all.

Van der Heyden shows his town on a sunny day and a hunter with his wife on horseback attracts our attention in particular. Sportsmen directing a pack of dogs accompany them. At the right, men bathe and further down the stream and in the left middle zone men are fishing. Figures walk up and down the drawbridge and a gentleman passes the first gate. These figures are by Johannes Lingelbach (1622-74), who was regularly called upon to add figures to landscapes by fellow artists active in Amsterdam, among them Jacob van Ruisdael, Johannes Hackaert and Johannes Wijnants.³ Lingelbach's staffage figures seamlessly merge into Van der Heyden's setting. Van der Heyden may have asked Lingelbach to include a hunting party as a focal point in the scene as hunting as an aristocratic pastime had a feudal connotation, which fits in with the town's medieval character. Indeed, the cast of figures in Van der Heyden's pictures is never coincidental. Not only do the figures, as the great connoisseur Cornelis Hofstede de Groot put it, often increase the picture's 'artistic charm', the Van der Heyden scholar Peter Sutton perceptively added that they 'confer an evocative human dimension and interest to both his urban and rural scenes'.⁴ Van der Heyden's townscape evokes the long-past age of chivalry, when towns were rare safe-havens in a Europe full of turmoil. The sandy road in the foreground leading up to the city-gate invites the beholder to enter this mysterious town that breathes history, and explore its secrets.

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Panoramic views with an entire city seen from a distance occupy a small but important place in Van der Heyden's preserved output. The earliest mark a turning point in the artist's development from a painter of landscapes to a specialist of city-views.⁵ Highly comparable to our painting are undated but most likely early panoramic views in the collection of Viscount Gage (Firle Place), two in the Hermitage (St. Petersburg).⁶ Our painting also shares with many presumed early works the almost obsessed interest with the rendering of dense patterns of mortared masonry of brick buildings.⁷

Van der Heyden's paintings are usually difficult to date more precisely with other means than going by the figures' dress. Here it is the dress of the horseman, especially his hat and jabot, that gives away an approximate date between 1665 and 1670. It was in these years that Van der Heyden painted 'the majority and best of his works', according to Van der Heyden's biographer, Arnold Houbraken.⁸ In our painting we observe Van der Heyden's finest qualities, such as the sensitively rendered sky and the meticulous finish.

It is unknown with whom Jan van der Heyden trained. He probably enjoyed some drawing lessons in the Amsterdam studio of his eldest brother Joris, who made and sold mirrors. Painting occupied relatively little of Van der Heyden's time, but he did pursue it throughout his life and his paintings were avidly collected during his lifetime even across the borders. He owed his prosperity largely to his success as an inventor, engineer and municipal official. He designed and installed a comprehensive street lighting scheme for Amsterdam, which remained in service from 1669 until well into the nineteenth century and was adopted throughout the Netherlands and abroad. In 1672, together with his brother, he invented a horse-driven fire engine with pump-driven hoses, which increased the efficiency of fire fighting. He died a wealthy man with a collection of over seventy paintings. Chiefly known as a specialist of city views, Van der Heyden also made some peculiar still life pictures.

Notes

¹ He often took liberties in rendering the building's details. See for views on Cologne featuring this church, Wagner, *op. cit.* (see literature), nrs. 53-55, p. 80.

² And the artist used this same motif in paintings that are topographically more accurate. For instance Wagner, *ibid.*, nrs. 45-52, pp. 77-78. See for Van der Heyden's portrayals of Cologne and the reception of Cologne by Dutch seventeenth-century travellers: J. Bikker, 'Cologne, the "German Rome," in Views by Berckheyde and van der Heyden and the Journals of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Tourists', *Simiolus* 32 (2006), pp. 273-290.

³ Helga Wagner already suggested Lingelbach as the author of the figures, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁴ For Hofstede de Groot and Sutton's quotes see: P.C. Sutton (ed.), *Jan van der Heyden (1637-1712)*, exh. cat. Greenwich (Bruce Museum); Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) 2006-07, p. 57.

⁵ Apart from a few early portrait drawings on parchment Van der Heyden seems to have started his career with painting wooded landscapes in oil on glass (*verre églomisé*). For a recent



discussion of Van der Heyden's glass painting in the Rijksmuseum, see Taco Dibbits' entry in Sutton, *op. cit.*, nr. 1, p. 106.

⁶ Wagner, *op. cit.*, nrs. 153-157, p. 102.

⁷ For an assessment of Van der Heyden's early works, see: Sutton, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-36. Compare also Wagner, *ibid.*, pp. 54-59.

⁸ See: A. Houbraken, *De groote schouburg der nederlandsche konstschilders en schilderesen*, vols., Amsterdam 1718-21, vol. 3 (1721), p. 82 ('Overzulks zyn zyne meeste en voorname werken gemaakt, tusschen de jaren 1660 en 70.').