

# *Bijl-Van Urk*

**Jacob Gerritsz Cuyo**

1594 - Dordrecht - 1652

*A Carpenter Having Lunch*

Oil on canvas 72.7 x 63.6 cm

Signed upper right: “JGK[in ligature]uypp”

Datable ca. 1618-29

**Provenance**

Sale Brussels (Nackers), 16 October 1963, lot 115, ill.

Mr and Mrs Dechamps, Brussels, 1967

The present painting was hitherto unknown to scholars.<sup>1</sup> Its rediscovery means that a highly intriguing painting can be added to Jacob Cuyp’s known oeuvre. The theme of our painting, a carpenter enjoying his lunch-break, is highly unusual in Dutch seventeenth-century painting. The painting is not intended as a portrait but, no doubt, Cuyp did paint a real person, and it cannot be ruled out that the painter’s model actually was a carpenter. We can only speculate as to what inspired Cuyp to paint this “tronie”, which is the period and correct term for genre-like representations of real people of this kind.

The subject of a carpenter is not at least out of place in the context of Dordrecht, where Cuyp lived and worked for virtually his entire life. Sitting in the Meuse-Rhine basin on the river Merwede, which connects the North Sea with the many inland waterways of the Meuse, Waal and Lek, Dordrecht developed from the late thirteenth century onwards as a leading trade and distribution centre of wood. Although its importance diminished somewhat from about 1550 onwards, for merchants coming down the Lower Rhine, Waal and Meuse, Dordrecht remained the most important port of call by far and an important node in the network of intra-regional trade in the Republic until well into the seventeenth century. Rotterdam, Zaandam and Hoorn had overtaken Dordrecht’s

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shipbuilding industry in the course of the seventeenth century, but the wood industry remained important for Dordrecht nonetheless.

Apart from Joseph, the most famous carpenter in history who is as a rule depicted accompanying Mary and the Christ Child, the subject of a carpenter never took off in Dutch painting. This is surprising given the huge numbers of people earning a living in the wood industry in the Netherlands. Woodworkers have been given their due space, though, in Johannes and Caspar Luyken's *100 Verbeeldingen van Ambachten*. In this emblematic work the "schrynerwerker", "de Boom maker", and "De Scheepstimmerman" were included.<sup>2</sup> Which of these specific professions did our carpenter perform we do not know. In the background we see men sawing beams of wood. It could be a shipyard, but the artist apparently did not feel the need to specify the kind of wood-yard. Ironically, all Cuyp's paintings of this and similar sizes are on wooden panel, but the present painting is on canvas, which is highly unusual for the artist. Cuyp portrays the carpenter in a romanticized guise, in a painterly beret and with a cloak elegantly draped over his one shoulder.

Jacob Cuyp, who was active from 1617 to 1652, the year of his death, mastered a great variety of styles.<sup>3</sup> One of the predominant sources of influence in his early work is Abraham Bloemaert, his presumed teacher. The formula in the present painting of a large figure depicted to the waist, bears a strong resemblance to similar works, in turn faintly echoing Caravaggio, by both Abraham and Hendrick Bloemaert. The strong Bloemaert influence would argue for an early date for our painting.

Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp was born into a family that produced many successive generations of artists. He was the second son of Gerrit Gerritsz, a glass painter and his first wife Geerten Matthijsdr. According to his biographer Arnold Houbraken, Jacob was a pupil of Abraham Bloemaert in Utrecht. By 1617 he was back in Dordrecht and joined the local Guild of Saint Luke. That same year he received a prestigious commission to paint a group portrait of the Holland Mint (Dordrecht, Museum Mr Simon van Gijn). The following year he married Aertken van Cooten from Utrecht, who bore him his only child, a son named Aelbert, who would become one of the most famous Dutch landscape artists. Jacob Gerritsz became a member of the council of the Walloon Church in his native town. His connections helped him to obtain yet more portrait commissions, from his fellow council members as well as from preachers. Cuyp was a highly respected artist in Dordrecht and his successes had made him a prosperous man already at a still relatively young age. By 1622 he was able to purchase a sizable home at the Nieuwbrug, which he then had renovated at great cost. Cuyp fulfilled leading positions within the guild, acting as the bookkeeper in the years 1629, 1633, 1637 and 1641, but in 1642 was one the driving forces behind the foundation of the competing

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“Confrerie”. In addition to a great number of portraits, Cuyp painted religious and mythological themes, genre pieces and numerous still lifes. Jacob’s son, Aelbert, his half-brother Benjamin, Adriaen Hubertsz Verveer, and presumably Paulus Lesire were his pupils.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Our painting was not included in the *catalogue raisonné* that was compiled and included in S. Paarlberg et al., *Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp (1594-1652)*, exh. cat. Dordrecht (Dordrechts Museum) 2002, pp. 169-199.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes en Caspaares Luiken, *100 Verbeeldingen van Ambachten*, Amsterdam 1995. See also M. Wagner, *Jan Luiken. Het Menselyk Bedryf*, Haarlem 1987.

<sup>3</sup> See for this W. Kloek, ‘Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp, de Dordtse Proteus’, in Paarlberg 2001, pp. 45-62.