

Journeys and places  
landscape etchings by Jan van de Velde II



# foreword

The word 'journey' is currently one of the most corrupted in our language. A favourite among sports commentators, lifestyle journalists and spin doctors, 'journey' crops up whenever there's a need to embellish a competition, a career, or a campaign. In this bastardised form, 'journey' suggests that an athlete, reality TV show contestant, or emerging backbencher is on a self-improving pilgrimage rather than looking after number one. Where once 'journey' evoked stupendous passages (Marco Polo), carried deep religious significance (the Hadj) or plumbed the depths of melancholy (Burke and Wills's expedition), it now reeks of life coaches and PowerPoint presentations.

This exhibition is an opportunity to rediscover the moral and conceptual power of the journey. As Kathleen Kiernan reveals in her careful research into Jan van de Velde II's prints, a true journey is never merely the passage from point A to point B, rather it is a sequence of allegorical landscapes showing the artist's voyagers encountering the challenges and lessons of life. These prints evoke behaviours and responses still familiar to today's travellers: an openness to the new and unfamiliar, a fascination with both the sweep and the minutiae of the land, a sense of curiosity and vulnerability as home territory is left behind, a desire to end the journey as a better (or at least different) person. In decoding and celebrating these prints, Kiernan reminds us that the reflective traveller embarks on the greatest journey of all, a journey to the interior of the self.

Our guest curator's research suggests, in its own way, the beginning of such a journey. Completed as part of a master of art curatorship degree, Kathleen Kiernan's project heralds an intellectual and professional itinerary traversing archives, museums and libraries. In her research, she has been accompanied by significant guides and supporters, including Professor Jaynie Anderson, and Special Collections staff at the University Library. The preparation of these artworks for display has been greatly assisted by the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund, and the Leslie Moira Henderson Bequest funded image digitisation. The exhibition is also a reminder of the enduring legacy of the late Dr John Orde Poynton who donated these prints to the library.

**Dr Chris McAuliffe**  
Director, the Ian Potter Museum of Art

**Jock Murphy**  
Director Collections, University Library

# Journeys and places

## landscape etchings by Jan van de Velde II

This is the first Australian exhibition to focus on the work of Jan van de Velde II, one of the most important Dutch printmakers working in the early seventeenth century. Van de Velde's landscape etchings held in the University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library Print Collection are regarded as his finest works; the series highlights van de Velde's etching technique at its most skilled and illustrates his role as a pioneer of modern landscape art.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection is one of international significance. The collection of approximately 7,000 prints is unique in that no other university in Australia holds such a comprehensive collection of international prints dating from the 1500s through to the 1850s. In 1959 Dr John Orde Poynton AO (1906–2001) formed the basis of the collection by donating around 3,700 prints to the University of Melbourne. The Jan van de Velde II etchings are among many of the old master prints donated by Dr Poynton.

The golden age of Dutch landscape painting reached its apex from 1650 to 1675. Unlike previous European artists who created history paintings of fantasy landscapes, the generation of Dutch artists working in the second half of the seventeenth century painted the flat Dutch countryside scattered with recognizable fields, waterways, dunes and windmills. This significant shift in the depiction of landscape was initiated by the printmakers of Haarlem in the earlier part of the century through their experimental etching techniques and revolutionary approach to composition and subject matter.

### Biography

Jan van de Velde II was born in Rotterdam around 1593.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of master calligrapher Jan the Elder (1569–1623) who immigrated to Haarlem from Antwerp in the late sixteenth century, attracted by the opportunities of this cultivated and aesthetic city. In 1613 Jan the Elder sent his son to undertake an apprenticeship with the master engraver Jacob Matham (1571–1631), stepson of Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617).

From his painter-etcher friends and his cousin Esaias van de Velde (1587–1630), van de Velde learned to loosen his engraving draughtsmanship and utilise etching to create atmospheric effects through texture, tone and line. The influence of his calligrapher father is evident in van de Velde's ornamental depictions of trees and clouds, as seen in the print *Evening: travellers on a road near an inn* (cat. no. 17).

In just over two decades van de Velde produced more than 500 prints of which about 200 are landscape etchings based on the local scenery of Haarlem and its surrounding countryside. These landscapes were very popular and sold well. They were also sought by other artists as teaching aids and used as references for compositions and motifs. Jan van de Velde II's last print is dated 1633. He moved to Enkhuizen in 1636 and died there in about 1641.

### Symbolism

The motifs Jan van de Velde II used in his landscape prints were collected from his *en plein air* sketches, as well as from literature and stories that were circulating at the time. While van de Velde's works were naturalistic—recreating the experience of walking through the Dutch landscape with its low horizon line against a vast sky—he also used conventional motifs such as bridges, ruins, dead trees, travellers, shepherds, wagons, old farm-houses, taverns, churches and dovecotes. His compositions show a sophisticated approach to the choice of subject matter, demonstrated by his repetitive use of particular themes and his careful arrangement of motifs to create scenes that appear spontaneous. The purposeful placement of motifs with social, economic, historical and moral significance within his compositions was conventional at the time and would have been understood by contemporary viewers.

The frontispiece to each part of the series *Sixty landscapes* (1616) helps structure the series, setting a direction and organising scenes. *An antique gate* (cat. no. 7) invites the viewer to embark on a journey: it depicts two men on a road passing through a portico, with other figures in the distance. The translation of the three lines of Latin above the opening of the portico reads:

Some very attractive little regions drawn  
by Jan van de Velde and brought into  
the light by Claes Jansz Visscher.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Biblical and classical stories**

Van de Velde's prints of biblical and classical stories include iconography similar to earlier European art. The inclusion of figures such as the model traveller Tobius (who shunned his sins on his dangerous journey in the world), Abraham and Hagar, and the Prodigal Son, are cues for morality messages on the value of repentance, obedience, prudence and the quest for enlightenment.

The etchings titled *Abraham casting out Hagar and Ishmael* (cat. no. 41), *Tobius and the angel* (cat. no. 37), and *Mercury and Herse* (cat. no. 46) allude to the traveller theme, and are associated with stories of the pious soul negotiating the journey of life with all its temptations. The theme of life on earth as a dangerous journey towards the eternal afterlife is one that was common in Medieval and Renaissance literature. The anonymous travellers depicted throughout the *Sixty landscapes* series were generated from similar biblical and classical stories.

#### **A mortal traveller through a world of temptation**

The journey theme, consistent throughout the etchings in the *Sixty landscapes* series, could be considered a metaphor for the journey of life. The works depict lonely travellers striving for eternal bliss in a transient world, negotiating temptation along the way. The travellers take the viewer on a journey through the series; sometimes resting on the side of the road, stopping at inns or striving for their destination, often an ethereal city or church on the horizon.

For example, *Winter landscape with a square tower used as an inn* (cat. no. 42) depicts a lone traveller negotiating wayward 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 frozen river where people ice-skate. Further in, someone occupies an outhouse (a symbol of dilapidation and decay), 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, a symbol of lust, while the leafless trees that arch over the road in a threatening manner signify *vanitas*. On the far bank of the river, the spire of a church is iridescent in the distance.

#### **The bridge**

Many of van de Velde's etchings are composed of crossroads, rivers, signposts and bridges to indicate that the traveller must make choices. The emblematic representation of the bridge as a symbol of the way of Christ is based on sixteenth-century iconography often used to illustrate verses 5–6 in chapter 14 from the Gospel of Saint John. The symbol of the bridge and crossroads as the way between this world and the eternal afterlife is sometimes emphasized in van de Velde's etchings by the placement of a cross on or next to these motifs.

#### **Six landscapes series**

Many of the scenes and motifs in the *Sixty landscapes* series are derived from the earlier series *Six landscapes* (c. 1613–15). The *Six landscapes* etchings are more directly scenes of the local landscape, with naturalistic themes, whereas the larger and complex suite of *Sixty landscapes* includes more contrived compositions.

*Winter landscape* (cat. no. 1) from the *Six landscapes* series is a more realistic scene with the Zijlpoort (city gate) of Haarlem in the distance. When comparing this print with *Frozen river with skaters* (cat. no. 54) from *Sixty landscapes* there is undoubtedly a similarity in motifs between the earlier

and later prints. *Frozen river with skaters* is almost a mirror image of *Winter landscape*, with reversed windmills, bridge, and gentlemen in the foreground. This may be a result of the artist copying elements from the *Winter landscape* print onto the plate before it was etched.

The repetitive use of motifs derived from the earlier, more realistic, landscapes was probably a result of Van de Velde's prints being produced in high volume for markets rather than commissioned by individuals. The subject matter of familiar landmarks and countryside also made the prints more attractive to collectors.

### Conclusion

Jan van de Velde II's etchings oscillate between representing Haarlem and its physical surrounds and conveying contemporary moral concepts originating in Medieval and Renaissance art and literature. Little is known of van de Velde's religious views and we should therefore be careful defining his art in the light of any particular Christian denomination. However, from letters van de Velde received from his father we can assume he was from a most pious upbringing and did not practice Calvinist teachings. On the other hand, we cannot dismiss the Calvinist influence that emphasised the beauty of nature and the fundamentalist beliefs Calvinists held against idolatry. Van de Velde's prints do not conform to a single religious, moral or historical interpretation, nor do they provide a structure of indisputable symbolic content. Their naturalism leaves them open to a wide range of interpretations, encouraging sustained contemplation.

Jan van de Velde II's landscape prints provide a key to mapping the basic changes in the history of landscape art—from seventeenth-century landscapes that describe the rituals of a modest life, through to eighteenth-century composed scenes depicting Romantic ideals, to realistic descriptions of nineteenth-century living. Whatever form landscape depiction takes, it is a means of identification with one's homeland, even in the case of landscapes that are imaginary.

The landscape genre can also illustrate the artist's desire to improve and pioneer techniques, which often result in new directions of the genre. Van de Velde's etchings of worn, decaying subject matter in natural surroundings and their atmospheric qualities are characteristic of the realism of seventeenth-century Dutch landscapes, and give the viewer an appreciation of the artist's execution of the subject matter purely on a formal level.

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1. Dates of Jan van de Velde II's life vary between sources. Birth and death dates that are most widely cited are from Franken D & JPH van der Kellen, *L'oeuvre de Jan van de Velde: graveur Hollandais, 1593–1641; avec additions et corrections par Simon Laschitzer*, GW Hissink, Amsterdam, 1968.

2. Transcription reads:  
AMENISSIMÆ ALIQUOT REGIUNCULÆ, A  
I.VELDIO DELINEATÆ, ET A NICOLAO IO:  
HANNIS PISCATORE IN LUCEM ÆDITÆ.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Ian Potter Museum of Art staff, especially Joanna Bosse, for their guidance and support of this exhibition. I would also like to thank Professor Jaynie Anderson, my masters thesis supervisor in the School of Culture and Communication; Dr Alison Inglis, Head of Cultural Management, School of Culture and Communication; and Dr Belinda Nemeč, Cultural Collections Coordinator, at the University of Melbourne, for their encouragement.

**Kathleen Kiernan**  
Guest curator

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The Ian Potter Museum of Art  
The University of Melbourne  
Victoria 3010 Australia  
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<http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au>

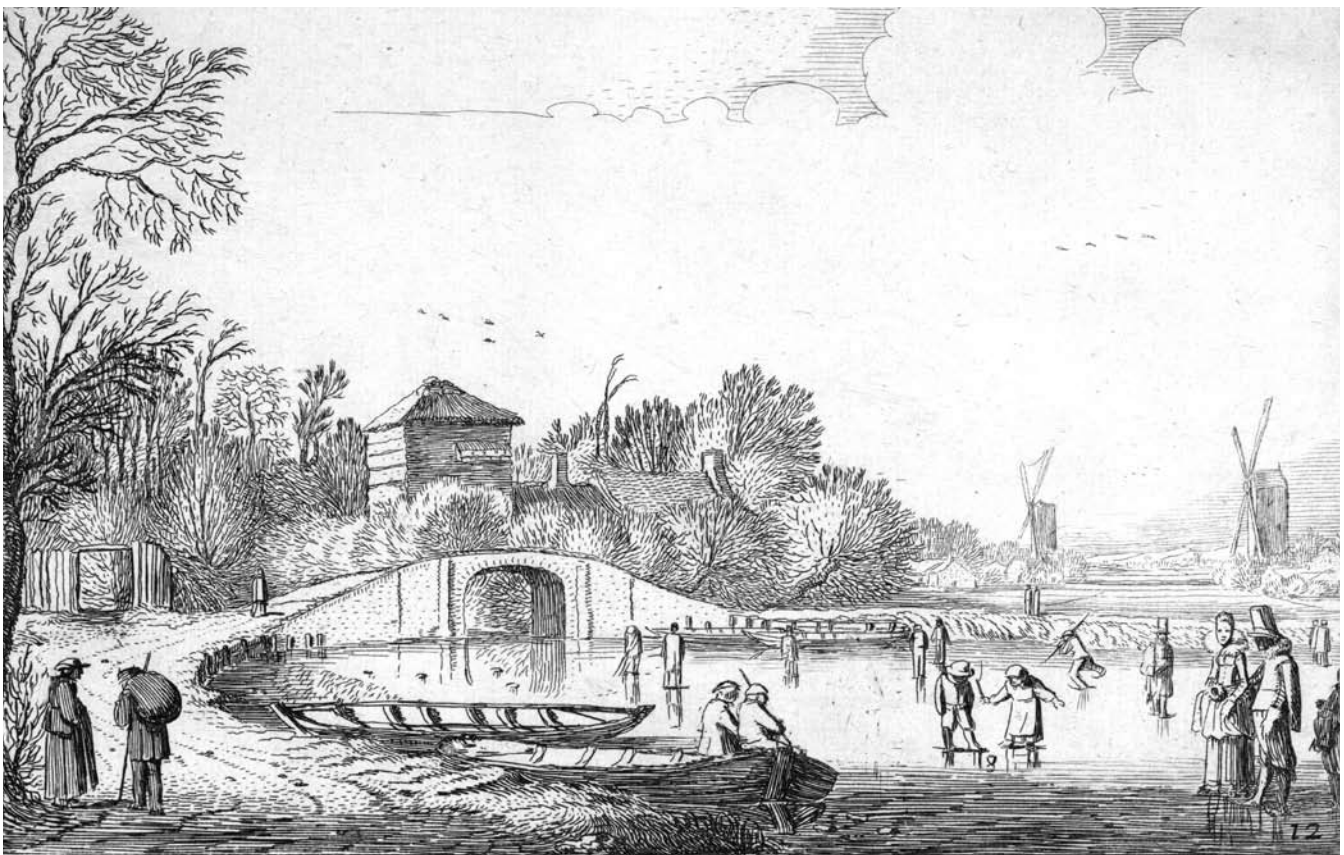
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Front cover image: cat. no. 7

cat. no. 54



# Catalogue of works

## Jan van de Velde II

born Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 1593; died Enkhuizen, the Netherlands, 1641.

All works are etchings on paper.

Dimensions are given for image size, height before width.

All works are held in Special Collections, Baillieu Library, the University of Melbourne. Gift of Dr John Orde Poynton 1959.

## Six landscapes, c. 1613–1615

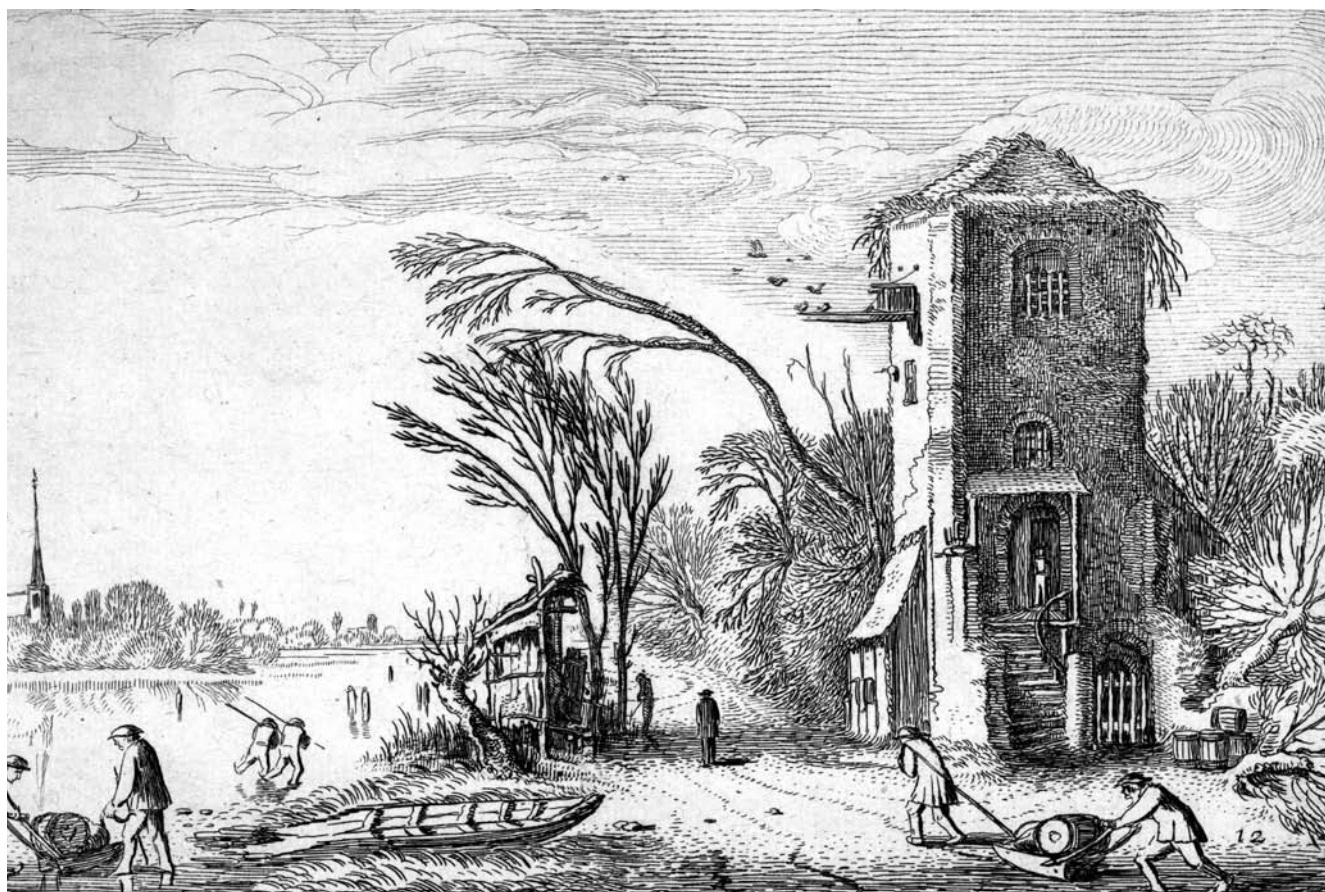
1. *Winter landscape*  
9.9 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3937
2. *Landscape with hunters and hay-carts*  
9.9 x 19.7 cm  
1959.3938
3. *A little chapel by a pond*  
9.9 x 19.9 cm  
1959.3939
4. *Landscape with pigs and two pedlars*  
9.9 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3940
5. *Lime-kiln in stormy weather*  
9.9 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3941
6. *Spaerwouder or Amsterdamsche Poort at Haarlem*  
9.9 x 18.9 cm  
1959.3942

## Sixty landscapes Part 1, 1616

7. *An antique gate [frontispiece]*  
13.4 x 19.9 cm  
1959.3921
8. *Brewery along a frozen river*  
13.4 x 19.9 cm  
1959.3922
9. *Farmyard with square ruined tower used as barn*  
13.4 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3923
10. *Inn at a square tower*  
13.1 x 19.4 cm  
1959.3924
11. *Inn at a square tower*  
13.3 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3925
12. *Inn at a round tower*  
13.5 x 19.7 cm  
1959.3926
13. *The prodigal son feeding the swine*  
13.2 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3927

## Sixty landscapes Part 2, 1616

14. *View of a town*  
13.8 x 20 cm  
1959.3928
15. *Ruins of a castle surrounded by a moat*  
13.5 x 19.7 cm  
1959.3929
16. *The castle*  
13 x 19.7 cm  
1959.3930
17. *Evening: travellers on a road near an inn*  
13.3 x 19.7 cm  
1959.3931
18. *Draw-well built against a tower*  
13.1 x 19.6 cm  
1959.3932
19. *A market scene [frontispiece]*  
12.3 x 19.3 cm  
1959.3969
20. *Country road along a dilapidated church*  
13 x 19.9 cm  
1959.4379
21. *The dovecot*  
13.2 x 20.5 cm  
1959.4385
22. *Dilapidated barn*  
12.8 x 19.8 cm  
1959.4380
23. *Old tower used as a lighthouse*  
12.9 x 20.1 cm  
1959.4381
24. *A winter landscape with skaters on a canal*  
13.6 x 19.8 cm  
1959.4382
25. *Ferry in front of a stone bridge*  
13.4 x 19.7 cm  
1959.4383



*Sixty landscapes  
Part 3, 1616*

26.  
*Landscape with square tower*  
13.6 x 19.8 cm  
1959.1230
27.  
*Bastion with tower and chapel*  
13.6 x 20 cm  
1959.3933
28.  
*Walled castle*  
13.6 x 19.9 cm  
1959.3934
29.  
*Farm built against a square tower*  
13.6 x 20.1 cm  
1959.3935
30.  
*Het Huis te Kleef*  
13.5 x 19.8 cm  
1959.3936
31.  
Not titled  
[frontispiece]  
11.9 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3955
32.  
*Ruins of Brederode Castle*  
12 x 19 cm  
1959.3956
33.  
*Wooded landscape with horseman on a path*  
12.1 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3957
34.  
*Roman ruins in wooded surroundings*  
12 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3958
35.  
*Farmyard with inhabited ruins*  
12 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3959
36.  
*Travellers on a road near a village*  
12 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3960
37.  
*Tobius and the angel*  
12 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3961

*Sixty landscapes  
Part 4, 1616*

38.  
*Country road through a village*  
11.9 x 18.5 cm  
1959.3962
39.  
*Cascade under a stone bridge*  
12 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3963
40.  
*Stone bridge near an inn*  
12 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3964
41.  
*Abraham casting out Hagar and Ishmael*  
12.1 x 18.9 cm  
1959.3965
42.  
*Winter landscape with a square tower used as an inn*  
11.9 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3966
43.  
Not titled  
[frontispiece]  
12.3 x 19.2 cm  
1959.3943
44.  
*Farm along a country road*  
12 x 18.9 cm  
1959.3944
45.  
*Landscape with a round tower*  
12 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3945
46.  
*Mercury and Herse*  
12 x 18.9 cm  
1959.3946
47.  
*Road leading to a stone bridge*  
12.1 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3947
48.  
*Inn along a country road*  
12 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3948
49.  
*The Zijlpoort at Haarlem*  
12.1 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3949
50.  
*Dilapidated church tower surrounded by houses*  
12.2 x 18.9 cm  
1959.3950
51.  
*Beacons at the banks of a river*  
12.3 x 18.9 cm  
1959.3951
52.  
*Spaernewouder or Amsterdamsche Poort at Haarlem*  
11.9 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3952
53.  
*Water-mill left of ruins*  
12.1 x 18.7 cm  
1959.3953
54.  
*Frozen river with skaters*  
12 x 18.8 cm  
1959.3954

