

# Jan van Goyen

1596–1656

BORN ON 13 January 1596, Jan Josephsz. van Goyen began training as an artist in his native city of Leiden at the early age of ten. The series of teachers with whom he studied included, according to Orlers' near-contemporary account, Isaac van Swanenburgh (c. 1538–1614). Orlers also says that Van Goyen spent a year in France before going to Haarlem, where he is known to have been a student of Esaias van de Velde (c. 1591–1630) in 1617. His early works closely resemble those by Esaias.

By 1618, Van Goyen had returned to Leiden, where that same year he married Annetje Willemsdr. van Raelst. His name occurs frequently in Leiden documents between 1625 and 1632. In 1625 he bought a house on the Sint Peterskerkstraat, which he sold in 1629 to the marine painter Jan Porcellis (c. 1584–1632). Probably in the summer of 1632 he moved to The Hague, becoming a citizen two years later. Although he also worked in Haarlem in 1634, at the house of Salomon van Ruysdael's brother Isaack (1599–1677), he is thereafter only recorded in The Hague. He bought a house there on the Wagenstraat in 1635 and built another the following year on the Dunne Bierkade, where Paulus Potter (q.v.) is known to have lived from 1649 to 1652. Although a prolific and successful painter, Van Goyen engaged throughout his life in various business ventures, usually unsuccessfully; these included art dealing, auction sales, and speculation in real estate and tulip bulbs.

During the 1630s, Van Goyen, along with the Haarlem artists Pieter Molijn (q.v.) and Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/1603–1670), developed a new approach to the representation of landscape that focused on local subjects and utilized a tonal palette, initiating what has come to be recognized as the golden age of Dutch landscape painting. Van Goyen was a highly respected figure in the artistic community of The Hague. In 1638 and 1640, he was chosen to be *hoofdman* of the painters' guild, and received further official recognition in 1651, when he was commissioned to paint a panoramic view of the city for the burgomaster's room in the Town Hall. In 1649, both his daughters were married to artists, Margaretha to Jan Steen (q.v.), and Maria to the still-life painter Jacques de Claeu (d. after 1665).

Despite his artistic success, he died insolvent in The Hague on 27 April 1656.

## Bibliography

Orlers 1641: 373.  
Houbraken 1753, 1: 166, 170; 2: 111, 235; 3: 13.  
HdG 1907–1927, 8 (1927): 1–323.  
Van de Waal 1941.  
Beck 1972–1973.  
London 1977a.  
Amsterdam 1981b.  
Amsterdam 1987: 317–332.  
Beck 1987–1991.  
Brown/MacLaren 1992: 143–144.

1978.11.1 (2720)

## *View of Dordrecht from the Dordtse Kil*

1644  
Oil on oak, 64.7 x 95.9 (25 x 37¾)  
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

## Inscriptions

On the stern of boat at center: *VGoyen 1644*

**Technical Notes:** The support is a thin oak panel composed of three horizontally grained boards of equal width joined horizontally. The support has been mounted onto another thin panel and cradled, with a slight dislevel along the upper join of the original panel. Paint is applied over a thin white ground with low, fine brushmarking, in thin semi-transparent darks and thicker opaque lights.<sup>1</sup> In the sky and light areas of water, the buildings and boats were painted over a thin, pale underpaint layer. A thicker, more opaque upper layer was then applied, passing around the boats and townscape.

Small amounts of repaint cover the panel joins, edges, and areas of slight abrasion. In a prior restoration, four undamaged areas in the central sky were overpainted to make the clouds appear denser.

**Provenance:** (Possibly E. Glaenzer, New York and Paris, by 1906).<sup>2</sup> Baron V. de Gunsburg, Paris; by inheritance to his family; (Heim Gallery, Paris, by 1978).

ON A CALM DAY with overcast sky a sailboat stops across from the city of Dordrecht to take passengers from a rowboat. This sailboat, heavily laden with travelers, served as a ferryboat, one of a number of types of boats that transported people along the



Fig. 1. M. Merian, *Map of Dordrecht*, from *Neuwe Archontologia Cosmica*, Frankfurt, 1646, Washington, Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division

many inland waterways of the Dutch republic. In the foreground another passenger boat, a rowboat filled with men, women, and children, heads across a wide body of water known as the Dordtse Kil.

Van Goyen has situated the viewer southwest of Dordrecht on the bank of the Dordtse Kil. The spit of land on the left, on which the fisherman stands while attending his traps, is actually the northwestern tip of this shoreline and marks the juncture of the Dordtse Kil with another river, the Oude Maas. The sailboat, which is behind this spit of land, is on the Oude Maas at the point where it joins with the Dordtse Kil and begins to flow north around Dordrecht.

Dordrecht was an old and extremely important city in the Dutch republic. By 1644, when Van

Goyen painted this view, it had become a major mercantile center. Dordrecht's importance grew as a result of its favorable geographic situation, at the juncture of a number of major inland waterways. The conservative character of the city's rich patrician class was reinforced by the formidable presence of the Dutch Reformed church that resulted from the victory of the Counter-Remonstrants at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618–1619.<sup>3</sup> The real and symbolic center of the church's power in the city was the Groote Kerk, the large cathedral with the unfinished spire that rises in the distance.

Van Goyen traveled frequently throughout the Netherlands during his long and productive career. On these trips he would fill sketchbooks with scenes that he later amplified in paintings executed in his

Fig. 2. Jan van Goyen, *View of Dordrecht*, c. 1648, black chalk, white wash, Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kupferstich-Kabinett





Jan van Goyen, *View of Dordrecht from the Dordste Kil*, 1978.11.1

studio. Working from such sketches he painted over twenty views of Dordrecht from the southwest between the years 1644 and the early 1650s.<sup>4</sup> These paintings contain, in various combinations, many of the same compositional elements: the passenger sailboat, rowboats, the fisherman, boats sailing along the distant shore, as well as buildings associated with the city profile itself. Without exception Van Goyen featured the activities of the ferryboat loading and unloading passengers as it passed the juncture of the Oude Maas and the Dordtse Kil. He seems to have been intrigued as much by the activities associated with the site as by the dramatic view of Dordrecht that it offered.

This painting comes at the beginning of the series and is exceptional in the extraordinary stillness of the water. Reflections of the boats, buildings, and even the sky create subtle patterns across its surface. Van Goyen suggested the translucency of the water in the immediate foreground by allowing the ochre-colored ground to be visible through the thin brownish glaze laid on top of it. This painting technique, in which one looks through the surface to an underlying layer, parallels the experience of viewing water in nature.

The thinly painted distant view of Dordrecht in this painting is conceived in these terms. The softly undulating tones and suggestive brushwork create the sense that the buildings, rather than sharply defined solid masses, are enveloped in a misty shroud. This painting, however, is not a pure "tonal" painting such as those executed by Van Goyen in the late 1630s and early 1640s; instead, it marks a transition to his later "classical" style. The sky is relatively densely painted, and areas of blue peek through the cloud cover. Touches of local color—blues, reds, and pinks—appear on the clothes of the figures.

Many elements of Dordrecht's architecture in this painting can be found on contemporary maps. The windmills to the right, the walled bulwark visible before the Groote Kerk, the ships clustered at the Vuylpoort beyond the bulwark, and the round bas-

tion at the south bank of the Sagerspoort, for example, are visible on the 1646 bird's-eye-view map of Dordrecht (fig. 1) in M. Merian's *Neuwe Archontologia Cosmica* (Frankfurt am Main, 1646). The windmill on the bastion near the north end of the Nieuwe Haven visible on the map is seen in the painting along the distant left edge of the Dordrecht coastline. While Van Goyen has accurately recorded the general disposition of the topographical elements, he has exaggerated the distances between them. If one compares this scene with a drawing of Dordrecht found in a sketchbook Van Goyen made around 1648 (fig. 2),<sup>5</sup> one sees that the architectural elements were in reality more compactly grouped when seen from that vantage point. Van Goyen sought to give the view a panoramic character by stretching out the topographical elements. The eye scans across the horizon instead of being thrust into depth. It is not fortuitous that the large sailboat in the foreground is situated over the natural vanishing point of the scene. Through compositional decisions that minimize the effects of deep recession into space, Van Goyen thus sought to enhance the peaceful nature of the scene, encouraging his viewer to partake of the quiet mood engendered by the delicate atmospheric effects.

#### Notes

1. Pigment analysis is available in the Scientific Research department, 4 August 1982.
2. Cited by Beck 1987–1991, 3: 177.
3. For an account of the Remonstrant/Counter-Remonstrant dispute see Geyl 1966, 38–63.
4. Beck 1972–1973, cats. 290–317.
5. The Dresden sketchbook is published in full by Beck 1972–1973, 1: cat. 846. An illustration of the comparable view of Dordrecht, cat. 846/72, is found on page 278.

#### References

- 1981 Juffermans: 594–595, repro.
- 1984 Wheelock: 14–15, repro.
- 1985 NGA: 185, repro.
- 1986 Sutton: 305.
- 1987–1991 Beck, 3 (1987): 177, no. 296A, repro.
- 1992 NGA: 120, color detail, 125, color repro.