

## *Six landscapes series*



Among the most naturalistic of Jan van de Velde II's landscape prints are the *Six landscapes*, dated c. 1613–15, which are direct scenes of the landscape of Haarlem and its surrounds. Van de Velde used motifs from his *en plein air* sketches in his landscape etchings to create an impression of the experience of walking through the Dutch landscape, with its low horizon line against a vast sky. The subject matter of familiar landmarks made the prints attractive to collectors. His series of local landscape views were also sought by artists as teaching aids and used as references for compositions and motifs.

Etching, from the Dutch and German words meaning 'to eat' or 'to corrode', was invented around 1500. Being less laborious and much cheaper than engraving, etching became very popular among young Dutch printmakers in the early seventeenth century. The process offered artists a wide range of effects to create a more direct and spontaneous image.

Through their rich variety of line, texture, and tone, the *Six landscapes* series captures Jan Van de Velde II's vision of the Dutch landscape. Trained as a professional engraver, van de Velde learned from his painter-etcher friends and his cousin Esaias van de Velde to loosen his draughtsmanship. Van de Velde's tidy and highly stylised workmanship typifies early seventeenth-century Netherlandish etching. The influence of van de Velde's formal training as an engraver and of his calligrapher father, Jan the Elder, is evident in his ornamental depictions of trees and clouds.

The print editions that Dr Orde Poynton collected from the *Six landscapes* series demonstrate Poynton's connoisseurship; they are the states published by the contemporary Haarlem publisher Claes Jansz Visscher. These very fine impressions show Dr Poynton's careful consideration of quality and condition.

## Journeys and places: etchings by Jan van de Velde II

*Journeys and places* is the first exhibition to present Jan van de Velde II's prints held in the University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library Print Collection. Donated in 1959 by Dr John Orde Poynton, this group of fifty-four works is the most comprehensive collection of the artist's prints held in Australia.

The golden age of Dutch landscape art reached its zenith from 1650 to 1675. The new perception and representation of the visible world had its foundations in the experimental techniques and concepts of Dutch printmaking in the early part of the seventeenth century. Jan van de Velde II (1593–1641) was the most prolific etcher of his generation and his depictions of the Dutch landscape contributed to the development of this distinctive school of Dutch art.

Born in Rotterdam, Jan van de Velde II was the son of master calligrapher Jan the Elder. In 1613, after the family immigrated to Haarlem, Jan the Elder sent his son to undertake an apprenticeship with the master engraver Jacob Matham (1571–1631), stepson of printmaking luminary Hendrik Goltzius (1558–1617).

More complex than mere imitations of nature, the ambiguity of van de Velde's etchings encourages viewers to seek to interpret allegorical and metaphorical symbols. Exhibited here are parts 1–4 from the *Sixty landscapes* series (dated 1616), which combine the artist's personal experience and beliefs with representations of the local Dutch landscape. Also displayed are six earlier works from the *Six landscapes* series (c. 1613–15) which are more naturalistic scenes.

The inclusion of biblical travellers Tobius, Abraham and Hagar, and the Prodigal Son in the *Sixty landscapes* series are cues for morality messages on the value of repentance, obedience, prudence and the quest for enlightenment. The anonymous travellers steer a path through a transient world of temptation, along roads arched by threatening leafless trees, signifying *vanitas*, and dotted with taverns and inns, the embodiment of depravity in medieval sermons. The travellers negotiate barrels of beer, outhouses, and even a man urinating against a tree, as they strive towards their final destination, often a church or an ethereal city on the horizon, which represents the end of mortal life and the attainment of eternal bliss in the after-life.

Kathleen Kiernan  
Guest curator