

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "Aelbert Cuyp/A Pier in Dordrecht Harbor/early 1640s", Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century, NGA Online Editions, <http://purl.org/nga/qa/collection/artobject/100922> (Mar 20, 2014)



Cuyp, Aelbert
Dutch, 1620 - 1691

A Pier in Dordrecht Harbor early 1640s

oil on panel
overall: 44.5 × 75.9 cm (17 1/2 × 29 7/8 in.)
framed: 63.5 × 93.66 × 4.45 cm (25 × 36 7/8 × 1 3/4 in.)
Gift of George M. and Linda H. Kaufman 2012.73.1

ENTRY

Aelbert Cuyp's numerous views of river life are extremely varied and demonstrate a remarkable sensitivity to the changing light and water conditions encountered on inland waterways.[1] He could comfortably set boats in the water, even as he visually contrasted water's translucent and changing surface with the physical presence of heavy wooden hulls and weighty canvas sails. Cuyp's pictorial sensitivities were also directed toward human and animal activities revolving around the water, which added visual and thematic interest to the inherent beauty of his river scenes.

This luminous painting, executed in the early 1640s, depicts his native Dordrecht from the west as seen from a pier near the village of Zwijndrecht, situated on the opposite bank of the river Maas ([fig. 1]).[2] The three small, wooden fishing skiffs tied up at the rough-hewn pier help give the painting its unpretentious, rustic charm. Across the river Maas rise Dordrecht's city walls, with the thin spire of the Groothoofdspoort, a major gateway into the inner harbor, prominently at the left. Sailboats or rowboats, which operated constantly, provided ferry transportation across the river to Dordrecht's neighboring villages.

Through the figures' costumes, Cuyp has effectively captured the differing character of the lands on either side of the Maas. A small rowboat ferrying two burghers, distinguishable by their mode of dress, approaches the Zwijndrecht pier

where travelers await the voyage to Dordrecht. Whether rural folk or city dwellers dressed for an outing—the man holding a rifle presumably has gone hunting—those at the pier wear clothing suited for activities in the countryside.

During the early years of his career, Cuyp was particularly intrigued with life along the piers, perhaps because of the variety of scenarios that could be portrayed in this setting.[3] Cuyp's inspiration may have been the Rotterdam painter Simon de Vlieger, who also starkly contrasted the architectural forms of piers and adjacent buildings with vigorous skies and sun-filled, distant river views ([fig. 2]).[4] De Vlieger, however, never focused as much on the human aspect of the scene as did his Dordrecht counterpart.

The forceful, even monumental character of Cuyp's painting comes largely from the juxtaposition of the boldly modeled foreground forms with the light-filled riverscape beyond them. It is reinforced by the strong emphasis on the horizontal, not only of the pier and the distant horizon, but also of the ripples in the water. With this solid framework firmly established, the sailboats seem to glide effortlessly back and forth, catching the light winds that fill the air. This controlled yet vigorously executed manner of painting is one of Cuyp's most distinctive characteristics, and is unlike that of any of his contemporaries. Given the freshness of his touch, it is always surprising to discover that Cuyp often repeated compositional elements in different paintings. For example, the rowboat and oarsman in this work are identical to the workman and boat hauling peat in Cuyp's *Cattle and Cottage Near a River* from the early 1640s ([fig. 3]).

ENTRY NOTES

[1] This text is based on Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 8.

[2] In Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Aelbert Cuyp* (Washington, DC, 2001), no. 8, 189, the site is wrongly identified as being a pier near the village of Papendrecht, which is located to the northwest of Dordrecht on the far side of the river Merwede, a branch of the Maas river delta upstream of the city.

[3] See Stephen Reiss, *Aelbert Cuyp* (Boston, 1975), 29, no. 4 for an illustration of Cuyp's earliest known depiction of a pier, *The Melkpoortje on the Dordrecht Harbor*, 1639. For further information about this painting, see

Alan Chong, "Aelbert Cuyp" in *Dictionary of Art*, vol. 8 (London, 1996), 268, no. 4.

- [4] Stephen Reiss, *Aelbert Cuyp* (Boston, 1975), 56, was the first author to suggest De Vlieger's influence on Cuyp for the depiction of such scenes. However, as Henriette Rahusen has noted (personal communication), Cuyp's view follows a strong cartographic tradition dating back to the late 16th century. See, for example, Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, Amsterdam, 1572, where the panoramic view of Dordrecht, as seen from across the river, depicts three people in the foreground standing on a spit of land, seemingly awaiting a ferry to take them back to town.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a wood panel made from two boards joined horizontally. It has been backed and cradled. Wooden strips have been added to the edges. The thin, off-white ground does not fully cover the color or the grain of the wood. The paint was applied in various thicknesses, sometimes very thinly so that the wood remains visible, and in other areas, the lighter passages in the foreground, for example, the paint is thicker. The sky has been painted more thinly, and sometimes the texture of the artist's brush is discernible, particularly where he used the end of the bristles to give texture to the clouds. Cuyp applied the paint wet-into-wet, but also manipulated semi-dry layers in some areas, such as the reflections in the water.

The panel is in good condition and is not warped. Some tented paint runs along the grain just above the heads of the figures. Numerous small areas of inpainting are found in the sky, some of which has discolored slightly. It is likely that this inpainting was applied to lessen the dominance of the wood grain, which becomes more pronounced because the paint and ground become more transparent with age. The varnish is even but slightly yellow.

PROVENANCE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

(Sale, by De Vries, Roos, and Brondgeest, Amsterdam, 10-12 May 1853, 2nd day, no. 16); (Lamme).[1] Herman de Kat, Dordrecht; (his estate sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 2-3 May and 7-8 May 1866, no. 17); Louis Viardot [1800-1883], Paris; (his estate sale, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 30 April 1884, no. 2). Alfred Thieme, Leipzig, by 1889.[2] (Galerie Sedelmeyer, Paris).[3] private collection, Basel;[4] (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 30 November 1973, no. 124); (Brod Gallery, London). (Julie Kraus, Paris), in 1976.[5] private collection;[6] (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 18 April 1985, no. 2); George M. [1932-2001] and Linda H. Kaufman, Norfolk, Virginia; Kaufman Americana Foundation, Norfolk; gift 2012 to NGA.

[1] This might be A.J. Lamme, an auctioneer in Rotterdam, or D.A. Lamme, an art expert in Paris.

[2] Thieme lent the painting to an exhibition in 1889 in Leipzig.

[3] The 1973 sale catalogue lists Sedelmeyer in the provenance, and there is a red wax seal in the bottom right corner on the reverse of the painting impressed with the words "Galerie Sedelmeyer Paris."

[4] The painting is described as "the property of a Basle [sic] collector" in the 1973 sale catalogue.

[5] This information is given in *Aelbert Cuyp*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2001-2002, New York and London, 2001: no. 8, 189.

[6] The painting is described as "the property of a gentleman" in the 1985 sale catalogue.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

 NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century

1889 Ältere Meister aus sächsischem Privatbesitz, Leipziger Kunstverein, Leipzig, 1889, no. 44.

2001 Aelbert Cuyp, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2001-2002, no. 8, repro.

2008 Pride of Place: Dutch Cityscapes of the Golden Age, Mauritshuis, The Hague; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2008-2009, not in catalogue (shown only in Washington).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1907 Hofstede de Groot, Cornelis. *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*. 8 vols. Translated by Edward G. Hawke. London, 1907-1927: 2(1909):190, no. 635, 198, no. 662.
- 1975 Reiss, Stephen. *Aelbert Cuyp*. Boston, 1975: 49, 210.
- 1992 Chong, Alan. "Aelbert Cuyp and the Meanings of Landscape." Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1992: 284-285, no. 28.