

28. **Professor Alexander William Bickerton**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery

Professor Bickerton (1842-1929) was the first professor of Chemistry and Physics at Canterbury College. In teaching, his methods were controversial and resulted in two reviews of his appointment, but even more contentious was his 'Partial Impact' theory which he formulated in 1878. This hypothesized a self sustaining Universe and denied the place of God.

Bickerton was eventually dismissed in November 1902. He formed a firm friendship with Van der Velden in the 1890s, and the artist held him in high regard. This is evident in this sympathetic portrait.

Around the time it was painted Bickerton was founding his 'federative home' at 'Wainoni' which placed him on the outside of conventional Victorian society in Canterbury.

29. **The Old Fisherman c. 1892**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Stephen Powell Bequest 1964

The regard that Van der Velden held for Rembrandt was high, equal to that he had for Josef Israëls, who many considered the second Rembrandt.

In a work such as this he came close to the lessons of both master's treatment of light. For Van der Velden, Jesus and Rembrandt had the same meaning. He believed light and colour were God. His creed was often recited to his students in the 1890s 'colour is light, light is life, life is love, and love is God. This portrait of an old fisherman seems to seek its inspiration from Rembrandt's *Man wearing a Gilt Helmet*.

30. **The Story Teller 1896**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson

The model for this painting was an acquaintance of Van der Veldens, Mr Henry Albert (Harry) Soanes who lived in Manchester Street. Mr Soanes posed for just the head and shoulders.

In this work Van der Velden returned to a narrative type subject that he had often painted in Holland during the 1870s which included cardplayers and women and children with a games man. Peasant communities in Europe often had individuals who would entertain at storytelling in a tavern for a tankard of ale. This storyteller is in fisherman's garb, similar to that of the Marken fishermen, surrounded by highly amused young listeners.

31. **Portrait of Mr & Mrs Bassett 1897**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Private

During March 1897 William K Bassett, who was at that time taking lessons from Van der Velden, asked the artist to do a double portrait of his parents.

The portrait was completed on 20 October of that year. The Bassetts had been neighbours of Van der Velden during the few years he resided at Avonside.

In the portrait he shows the couple playing their favourite game of backgammon against a background that includes a portion of the *Mount Rolleston and Otira River* painting (Cat 25) which at that time hung in the sitting room of Van der Velden's house in Durham Street. It is likely this room was used as a setting. While the portrait was in progress it was felt that the figure of William Bassett was not well resolved at the bottom of the composition. William Bassett's pet greyhound was therefore introduced to correct the balance.

32. **Smoking Room, Carrington Hospital 1901**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Stephen Powell Bequest 1964

In January 1901 Van der Velden suffered a ruptured blood vessel of the stomach and was hospitalized at Carrington Hospital for convalescents, Camden, on the outskirts of Sydney.

As he slowly recovered, a room was placed at his disposal in which he could paint if the weather was inclement out of doors. Van der Velden made many studies of his fellow patients talking, reading or just playing cards to pass time.

In this painting a group of patients are involved in the card game of Donkey.

33. **Wellington Landscape**  
Watercolour and pencil Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Gifted by Miss M P Stevenson 1979

Petrus Van der Velden returned to New Zealand on 20 January 1904 after nearly six years living in Australia.

He arrived in Wellington and remained living there until the end of his life. He resided mostly out of the city in Wellington's bay suburbs; in particular Worser Bay and Island Bay. During this time he made numerous sketches and drawings of the environs of Wellington. In this study work horses are shown grazing, still in harness likely, while their owner is taking a lunch break.

34. **Landscape with a Cow 1912**  
Watercolour Collection: Hocken Library, University of Otago

This work is one of many that Van der Velden made of cattle grazing on the hillsides of Wellington's bay suburbs.

35. **Horse 1910-1912**  
Oil on canvas board Collection: Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui

At the time Van der Velden painted this work he was living at 56 Derwent Street, Island Bay.

A number of canvases from around this time include animals, particularly horses and cattle grazing.

It is also evident that the colour range of Van der Velden's palette had increased considerably.

36. **Funeral, Otira Gorge c. 1892**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Private

In this oil study Van der Velden has synthesised the principal elements of both the *Dutch Funeral* and *Otira* series in one unique work.

#### PETRUS VAN DER VELDEN - DRAWINGS

Catalogue numbers 37-56 are preparatory drawings and sketchbook studies made during both the Dutch and New Zealand periods of Van der Velden's career as an artist.



Prepared by Neil Roberts



## CONTRASTS

WORKS OF  
PETRUS VAN DER VELDEN

THE ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY  
8 FEBRUARY TO 5 APRIL 1992

This exhibition, presented in recognition of the Abel Tasman 1992 commemoration, aims to acknowledge one of the most eminent Dutch artists to work in New Zealand, Petrus Van der Velden (1837-1913).

In July 1892 Van der Velden wrote about his life in New Zealand to to A. C. Loffelt, art critic for the Dutch newspaper *Het Vaderland*: "It is a beautiful country and one cannot praise Abel Tasman enough when one sees how much knowledge is necessary to reach such a land... Yet it is interesting to observe that the maps made by Abel Tasman remain still the best".

It is difficult today to agree with the last statement, but both Tasman and Van der Velden, in their own inimitable way, were discoverers of a new land, forging abiding links with The Netherlands.

#### PETRUS VAN DER VELDEN IN HOLLAND

1. **Nude Male, Standing c. 1868/69**  
Oil on paper Collection: University of Canterbury

This life study dates from early in Van der Velden's career as a painter and it is likely that it was made while he was attending classes at Rotterdam Academy in 1868 or the Berlin Academy the following year.

2. **Prow of a Sailing Ship c. 1869/70**  
Pencil, crayon, charcoal, and watercolour  
Collection: University of Canterbury

In the late 1860s like many of his Dutch artist contemporaries Van der Velden developed a strong interest in Holland's naval history. When in 1867 his lithographic business was wound-up he chose marine painting as a new direction in art. He carried out many detailed studies of sailing vessels often directly from those moored in Rotterdam Harbour, however few were developed further into paintings.

3. **The Seer c. 1872**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Lottie Mathews Bequest 1964

This romantic sentimental study of an old white haired and bearded sage reveals strongly the influence of The Hague School painters on Van der Velden at this time, particularly that of Josef Israëls. It is highly Rembrandtesque in its treatment of light. Van der Velden had a high regard for the seventeenth century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn, and admiration for his treatment of light - the basis of Van der Velden's often quoted creed 'light is life, life is love, love is God'.

4. **Polder Landscape with Windmill c. 1870/71**  
Oil on board Collection: University of Canterbury

Painted soon after Van der Velden took up painting after many years as a lithographer, it is possibly one of a series of studies made in crisp clear light out-of-doors as it is numbered sixteen.

5. **Dutch Landscape with Windmills**  
Oil on board Collection: Hocken Library, University of Otago

This early plein-air oil is similar to (Cat 4) in treatment. It was made directly from nature, and was not intended to be any more than a study that perhaps could later be used as preparation for a larger studio work.

6. **Marken Funeral Barge c. 1871-73**  
Oil on canvas Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Presented by the family of James Jamieson 1932

In 1870 Petrus Van der Velden applied for an official King's pension to enable him to continue working independently as an artist. The committee that interviewed him suggested that he go and study the peasant fishing community on the island of Marken in the Zuijder Zee.

Between 1871 and 1873 Van der Velden made regular visits to the island drawing the peasant fishermen and aspects of their simple lives. In doing so he became acutely aware of the fragile balance of life and death in a sea community. The sea claimed more than its share of fishermen.

The painting is one of a cycle related to the funeral theme that became known as the *Funeral Series*, one of Van der Velden's major group of works. The principal focus in all the funeral paintings, as in this work, is the transporting of the coffin to the place of burial by the mourners, either by barge or sledge.

**7. Dutch Polder Landscape c. 1875**  
*Oil on board* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Robert Bell Bequest 1943

Painted out-of-doors like a number of other small landscape studies made by Van der Velden in the 1870s it reveals also something of the keenness he felt for naturalism. This study was probably made on the island of Marken.

**8. Boys at a Table and a Woman Pouring Drink c. 1871-73**  
*Watercolour and charcoal* Collection: University of Canterbury

This is just one of many studies Van der Velden made of Marken fisherboys. In this work two are shown relaxing in a tavern setting as they are served drink by a tavern maid. It is likely that Van der Velden made such studies with the intention of perhaps using them as preparation for the background of a more major studio work.

**9. Dutch Canal Scene**  
*Monochrome* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Presented by the family of A F Nicoll 1960

Originally from a sketchbook of studies made during the 1870s and 1880s, this a simple wash drawing of a river rather than a canal possibly the River Maas. A substantial southern Netherlandish town is shown in the distance.

**10. The Dutch Funeral 1872**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Gifted by H C D van Asch 1932

This painting depicts a funeral party of mourners on the island of Marken. It is one of the more major works in what is popularly known as *The Funeral Series*.

The initial inspiration for these works is thought to have been an actual drowning of a Marken fisherman that occurred during one of Van der Velden's visits to the island. It has also been suggested that Van der Velden was much moved by Josef Israëls' *Drowned Fisherman* of 1860.

Van der Velden's *The Dutch Funeral* was completed and exhibited at The Hague in 1872. Josef Israëls was so impressed by the work that he gave the artist a personal medallion.

The painting was subsequently purchased by Dr Gerrit van Asch and was brought to New Zealand in 1879. Dr van Asch became a close friend of Van der Velden and assisted him on many occasions after his arrival in New Zealand in 1890.

**11. Winter Evening in Holland - Rijnsburg c. 1888**  
*Watercolour* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Presented by Mrs Richmond Fell 1960

The rural village of Rijnsburg features in several works by Van der Velden including drawings and oil paintings. It is a few kilometres southeast of Noordwijk-Binnen where Van der Velden and his family moved in August 1888 and remained until April 1890. In this study Rijnsburg is shown in winter under a heavy blanket of snow.

**12. Winter in Holland (Woman gathering faggots)**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Private

This painting was among several that Van der Velden made depicting woodgatherers and it has been suggested could date from the late 1870s as it relates to a lithograph made in 1877 by Van der Velden titled *In the Sand Hills Dongen*. Van der Velden visited Dongen in the mid 1870s.

When Van der Velden left Holland in 1890 he left many paintings behind in the care of a friend who periodically forwarded them to New Zealand at Van der Velden's request.

This work was one of a number consigned to Christchurch in June 1897 and was soon after purchased by Mr William Bassett, then a part-time pupil of the artist.

**13. House on the Heath (a.k.a. Old Dutch Homestead) c. 1888**  
*Oil on panel* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery

This work was likely painted at a time when Van der Velden lived in the rural coastal community of Noordwijk-Binnen and is thought to be a study of houses on the coastal dunes nearby. It has also been suggested that the location is Het Groot.

**14. Head of an Old Cellist**  
*Watercolour* Collection: Bishop Suter Art Gallery, Nelson

This work is a preparatory head study, possibly for a larger oil, which shows the same subject paused in his playing of the cello.

In 1887 Van der Velden exhibited an oil painting of a similar subject which was purchased the same year for the collection of the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague.

The highly romantic sentimentalized image of old age reveals a strong influence from the work of Josef Israëls who focused on similar subjects. However, the lighting originates clearly from Rembrandt van Rijn. Van der Velden had a deep interest in music, particularly that of the violin and cello.

**15. The Scutchers c. 1889**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Sarjeant Art Gallery, Wanganui

In the late 1880s Van der Velden made a number of studies and painted at least two canvases concerned with the cottage flax-milling industry. This work, which depicts young adolescent workers retting and winding flax fibre, is possibly the same work as *Hackling of Flax*, a painting exhibited in Amsterdam in 1889.

**16. Cottage Interior**  
*Oil on canvas board* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Presented by the family of James Jamieson 1932

Petrus van der Velden made many paintings of rural peasants in the 1880s as well as those painted during the years he visited the island of Marken. These were peasants of the land rather than the sea.

In this work, a study of interior light and space, Van der Velden exhibited his powers in using sunlight to play across the walls and floors, warming the small house.

The peasant cottage interior was a popular subject among the Dutch Realists of The Hague School, particularly Van der Velden's mentor Josef Israëls.

**17. Dutch Girl**  
*Watercolour* Collection: Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru

Like many of his contemporaries Van der Velden made studies of peasant children engaged in domestic tasks.

He believed in nature being the only real teacher and that dozens of studies before nature were required before developing in oil paint. The girl is shown holding up her hands perhaps awaiting the winding of wool.

**18. Study, Ferrying Sheep on Dutch Canal**  
*Oil on board* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Presented in memory of HM Bacon by his wife, 1966

Animal husbandry was very much part of peasant farmers' labour. In Holland often the most effective way to move livestock to areas of pasture braided by canals, especially sheep, was by barge or boat.

**19. Girl Knitting**  
*Watercolour* Collection: Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru

The study, like (Cat 17), is part of Van der Velden's interest in themes associated with contemporary peasant domestic life that involved the simple daily tasks of family members.

**20. Head of a Girl (Bubbles)**  
*Oil on wood panel* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Lottie Mathews Bequest 1964

Petrus van der Velden made many studies of all stages of life, from infancy to old age, and childhood was no exception. In treatment and use of Rembrandtesque light, this work bears a close resemblance to studies of children by Hague School realists Josef Israëls (1837-1899) and Jacob Maris (1824-1911), particularly the latter.

The young girl in this painting is shown seated at a table with a bowl and bubble pipe before her; about to start her play. Van der Velden's daughter Hendrika, was born in 1882 and was frequently her father's model during her childhood and youth. It is possible that Hendrika is the child in this work.

#### PETRUS VAN DER VELDEN IN NEW ZEALAND

*The following works, dated after 1890, were painted either in New Zealand or Australia.*

**21. Self Portrait c. 1891**  
*Watercolour* Collection: Hocken Library, University of Otago

This self portrait depicts Petrus Van der Velden soon after his arrival in New Zealand. It is a sympathetic self study, with penetrating eyes.

**22. The Marken Girl**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Private

In this study of a young girl Van der Velden appears to have used the same model as that in his painting *DISILLUSIONED OR SORROWFUL FUTURE* which he sold to the Gallery of New South Wales in 1898 for £400. The

principal model for this work is thought to have been his daughter Hendrika who frequently sat for him in the 1890s.

**23. The Satara Player 1894**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Robert McDougall Art Gallery  
Marjorie Bassett Bequest 1964

The subject of this portrait study is thought to have been an identity that frequented Cathedral Square in the 1890s busking. Van der Velden has dressed him up in a costume and scarf to present a more exotic image.

**24. Girl with a Candle c. 1893**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru

Van der Velden's fascination with light was supreme and he explored many day and night time subjects in his painting. For him, "colour was light, light was life, life was love and love was God". Often however, the light source is not so clearly defined but in this work it is.

In such painting Van der Velden parallels the work of such artists as Honthorst and the popular Dutch night scene painter Petrus van Schendel but more specifically Godfried Schalcken 1643-1706 an imitator of Gerard Dou who developed a reputation for his candle light scenes.

**25. Mount Rolleston, Otira River 1893**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Private

This work is one of several versions of the same subject of varying dimensions painted in 1893 following Van der Velden's visit to the area during January and February that same year.

On that occasion he hired a covered wagon and driver and was accompanied by the architect Alfred J Carmichael and two other companions, one of whom was a Mr Aldersley, a photographer. During the trip Aldersley developed pneumonia and died.

The subject of the painting, the Otira River, arises on the northern side of Mount Rolleston (2277m) and flows northwards down the Otira Gorge on the north side of Arthur's Pass across North Westland to join up with the Taramakau River in the vicinity of Aikens.

**26. Bush Creek, Taramakau**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Aigantighe Art Gallery, Timaru

It was Van der Velden's practice to make numerous outdoor studies both in drawing and painting which were later developed in the studio. This work was possibly painted following his first visit to the Otira in 1891.

**27. A Waterfall in the Otira Gorge 1891**  
*Oil on canvas* Collection: Dunedin Public Art Gallery

Petrus Van der Velden made his first visit to the Otira in January 1891, which lasted six weeks. On this occasion he also travelled through to the West Coast where he visited Greymouth and Kumara. His travelling companion was Josef Sluis a neighbour at Avonside where Van der Velden lived at that time.

The weather during his first visit was not good with much rain but this did not deter Van der Velden who would work under an umbrella.

The many studies and drawings he made became the source for several early paintings based on the Otira. This is one of the earliest, and is the principal work in what has become known as *The Otira Series*.