

VANDERVEN ORIENTAL ART



Japanese Apothecary Bottle Depicting the Leiden-Haarlem Tow Canal

Japan, Arita, late 17th century, depiction The Netherlands c. 1740

Height: 31.5 cm

Provenance:

- Vandervén & Vandervén, 1997
- Van der Poel Collection, The Netherlands 1998
- Erven van der Poel, 2026

A Japanese white porcelain globular bottle, the rounded body rising gracefully into a tapering neck with a double-lipped rim. The bottle was later strikingly decorated in the Netherlands in overglaze enamels, bearing the coats of arms of the cities of Leiden and Haarlem, supported by two winged angels sounding trumpets on the neck.

The body is painted with a panoramic view of the trekvaart (tow canal) between Leiden and Haarlem, depicting a toll house, figures along the waterway, and a horse-drawn trekschuit (tow-barge) travelling along the broad canal. The underside is marked in underglaze blue with a VOC monogram enclosed within a laurel wreath. Notably, the initials have been copied in the incorrect order, reading VCO instead of VOC.

This type of bottle is generally referred to as an "apothecary bottle", after examples without inscriptions that were commissioned in Japan for the "apothecary shop" in Batavia. Similar bottles were, however, also produced for private clients, who used them for storing wine or distilled spirits. They were typically supplied in sets of six, nine, or twelve and housed in an elegant wooden case known as a 'keldertje'.

For many years, it was mistakenly believed that the house depicted on the bottle represented the commissioners' house at Halfweg near Lisse. Research conducted in 2007 demonstrated that this identification is incorrect. The building instead bears a much closer resemblance to the toll houses at Oegstgeest and Heemstede.