

RETRACING GHENT

CITY VIEWS AS VISUAL DISCOURSES ON THE LOCAL PAST, C. 1500-1900

01 WHAT IS RETRACING GHENT?

The project studies cityscapes of Ghent between c. 1500 and the World Exhibition of 1913, examining how these images reflect the urban past. Ghent serves as an ideal case study due to its rich history, characterized by a balance between nostalgia for the medieval past and continuous urban changes. The city boasts a large corpus of visual sources (prints, paintings, drawings, aquarelles, etc.) that depict the urban built environment. Many feature in public-oriented books on the changing physical landscape of the city. Yet, these views have not yet been the subject of in-depth academic study in the *longue durée*.



02 WHY DO CITYSCAPES MATTER?

Historical Role: Reflect on past and create collective memory.
Response to Change: Socio-economic, cultural, political shifts.
Pictorial Traditions: Insights into changing identity and value of urban spaces.

03 WHAT IS THE PROJECT'S GOAL?

Analysis: Cityscapes as narratives of Ghent's past.
Documentation: Creating a digital database in Nodegoat. Enhance documentation and appreciation through collaboration with the Ghent City Museum (STAM) and the Ghent University Library.

04 HOW ARE THE CITYSCAPES ANALYZED?

ARTISTIC ANALYSIS

Examines the **color**, **perspective**, and **composition** of cityscapes within a long-term framework, identifying the origins and clusters of various cityscapes.

ICONOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Investigates Ghent's self-conception as represented in these views, focusing on elements such as the **skyline** and **city walls**, and **figurative details** that may diverge from physical reality.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Explores how the socio-economic and cultural background of the **artists** or **patrons** influence the cityscapes, focusing on whether specific visual choices are intentional.



05 WHAT WILL THIS PROJECT DELIVER?

Output: Digital corpus, online exhibition, academic publications.
Impact: Enhanced academic and public engagement.
Support: Technical support by Ghent Centre for Digital Humanities.

06 HOW DOES THIS CHANGE OUR VIEW OF GHENT?

This study uncovers how cityscapes serve as **historical narratives**, capturing and reinterpreting the past. It analyzes their response to cultural and political changes, highlighting their role in shaping the **collective memory**. The research aligns with the **"spatial"** and **"visual turns"** in historiography, emphasizing the significance of visual representation in understanding urban environments. Ultimately, it demonstrates that cityscapes not only reflect the urban past but also contribute to enduring **pictorial traditions** through their legacy.



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