

Dutch Golden Age shines through at the Louvre

By HANNAH MCGIVERN | 10 February 2017



Johannes Vermeer, *The Astronomer* (1668), in the Louvre's own collection
(© RMN-Grand Palais [Musée du Louvre] / Franck Raux)

The Louvre is going Dutch this spring with the reopening of its Northern European painting galleries and not one, but three exhibitions devoted to the art of Holland's 17th-century Golden Age.

A major survey, *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting*, has been in the making for almost five years, says the curator Blaise Ducos. It is a co-production with the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, where the show will travel later this year. Twelve of Vermeer's characteristically quiet domestic interiors will be presented among rowdier genre scenes by more than a dozen of his peers, including Gerrit Dou and Gerard ter Borch, Pieter de Hooch and Frans van Mieris.

This context gives the lie to the idea that Vermeer was the solitary “Sphinx of Delft”, a term coined by the French art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger in the late 19th century. While Vermeer’s formative years remain shadowy, he can be identified within a network of painters working across the Netherlands between 1650 and 1680, Ducos says. The show’s pairings and groupings will reveal how works such as Vermeer’s Milkmaid (around 1660)—a rare loan from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam that will not appear at the other two venues—borrowed from, and transformed, the compositions of others.

The exhibition runs in parallel with a focused presentation of 30 works from the Leiden Collection, the largest collection of works by Rembrandt in private hands. Highlights will include a newly discovered painting by the teenage Rembrandt, *The Unconscious Patient* (an Allegory of Smell) (around 1624-25) and *Eliezer and Rebecca at the Well* (1645-46) by Ferdinand Bol, which the New York-based collectors Thomas and Daphne Recanati Kaplan have donated to the Louvre.

Visitors planning to see the museum’s full Dutch Golden Age season are advised to “have a good breakfast and wear good shoes”, Ducos says. More than 500 Dutch and Flemish paintings in the permanent collection will go back on view on 22 February in 20 refurbished galleries, while a temporary display of genre scenes on paper is due to follow in March.

- *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting, Louvre, Paris, 22 February-22 May (travelling to the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 17 June-17 September and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 22 October-21 January 2018)*
- *Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection: the Age of Rembrandt, Louvre, Paris, 22 February-22 May (travelling to the Long Museum in Shanghai, the National Museum in Beijing and the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017 and 2018)*
- *Drawing the Everyday: Holland in the Golden Age, Louvre, Paris, 16 March-12 June*