

John Martin Gallery

Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age at The Louvre Abu Dhabi until 18 May

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By [jmlondon](#)

Louvre Abu Dhabi, 12-13 February 2019

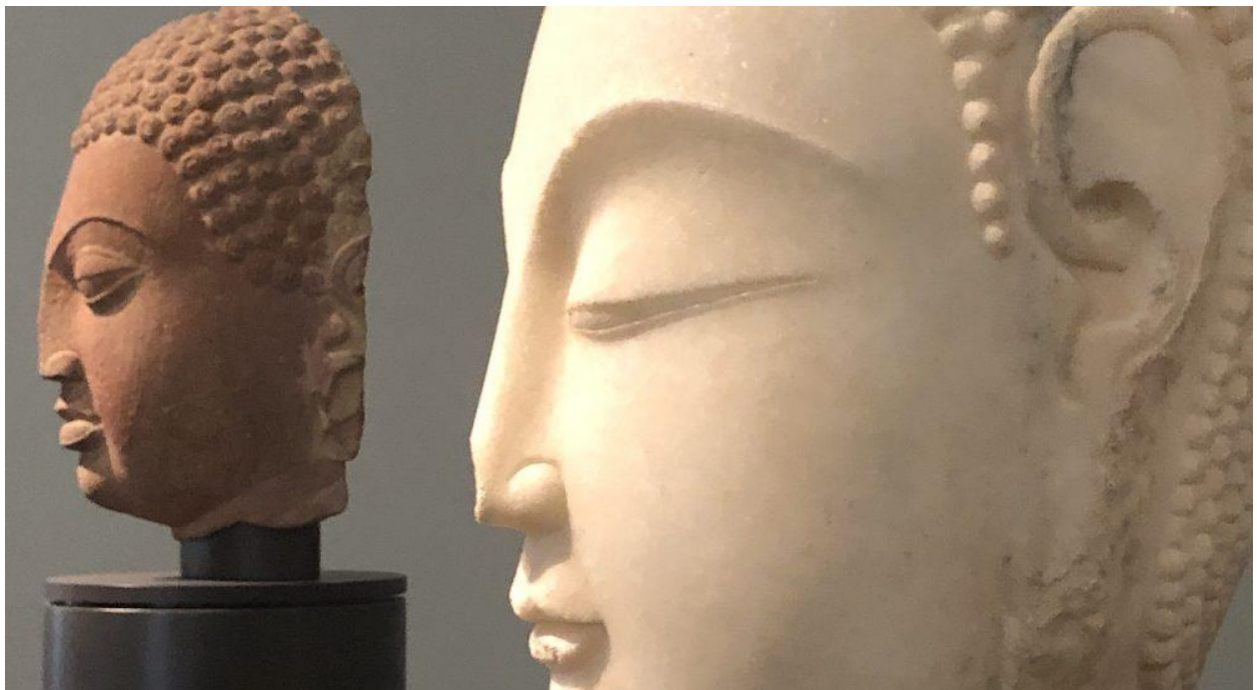
Very glad to have a chance to see the fabulous Louvre Abu Dhabi this week. It was for the opening of the incredible exhibition of Leiden School paintings, comprising work from the Kaplan collection in New York, work from the Louvre, Paris and the unveiling of the Louvre Abu Dhabi's recent purchase of the Head of Christ, an astonishingly lovely painting. The museum itself is one of the architectural marvels of the 21st century. Jean Nouvel's low-slung, domed roof is made up of a repeating filigree of geometric patterns in 8 layers and so cuts out 98% of sunlight, giving the wonderful sense of dappled lights across the walls. Unfortunately the day I was there, it was one of the 2 days each year when it rains in the Emirates, but it was not really a problem. The paintings are housed in enclosed exhibition rooms, made up of 12 'chapters' knitting together the development of shared visual ideas from around the globe.

For those of us used to the same old formula of art gathered in epochs, or geographies or the conventional art history headings, the Louvre's approach is utterly refreshing and the way each object is carefully chosen and exquisitely presented means that one isn't overwhelmed with clutter and a thousand labels. There are some serious loans from the Louvre Paris (who will provide both expertise and loans for 20 years) including David's Napoleon crossing the Alps, Whistler's Mum and La Belle Ferroniere by Leonardo (...no sign of the Salvator Mundi yet) but also some gems that the Abu Dhabi Louvre have bought in their own right, an incredible 13th century Italian font and, my favourites, two Buddha heads, one from Northern China, and the other from India. Whilst our museums could really learn a thing or two from their presentation, the entrepreneurial flair of the French Museums to make this happen may well make France's cultural assets a huge revenue-generating business. The UK's museums aren't even at the starting gate for this new race to create cultural partnerships in the Gulf.

The Dutch Golden Age show opened in the evening, with the Louvre's new Rembrandt acquisition alongside an unbelievable private collection of the School of Leiden – Jan Lievens, Metsu, Hals, Van Loo, Vermeer and Rembrandt, built up by Tom Kaplan since the 1990s, and advised by the London dealer, Johnny Van Haeften. It now comprises 13 Rembrandts, including an iconic self-portrait, and Vermeer's woman at a virginal. It is incredible that this sort of private collection can be put together today, and whilst it isn't a cheap exercise it has provided far more fun and satisfaction than the tedious super-

yachts and planes your run of the mill billionaire blows their money on. Kaplan is passionate about these paintings and has sent them round the world because he wants them seen especially by new audiences. One million people visited the collection when it went on show at the Hermitage; it has been to Paris, China and now Abu Dhabi. That must bring an incredible sense of satisfaction. The evening closed with a small after-party on the roof of the Louvre, looking out across the city, then a rush to the airport for a 2am flight back to London for the private view of Richard Cartwright's show tonight.

John Martin





Rembrandt Van Rijn, Head of a Girl, 1645.