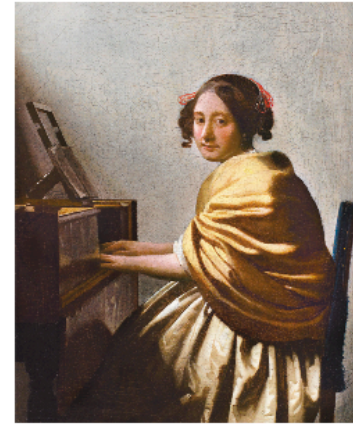


NOW SHOWING ABU DHABI



Left to right: Rembrandt's *Minerva in Her Studio*; *The Lacemaker*; *Head of a young man with clasped hands*; *Study of the figure of Christ*; and *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*

As a tribute to the great Dutch master, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), whose 350th death anniversary is being commemorated this year, the fledgling Louvre Abu Dhabi, which has completed a year, is holding the outstanding exhibition, Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre (February 14-May 18, 2019).

Outstanding, because with "95 works, including more than 20 from across Rembrandt's career and by his workshop, it is the most expansive exhibition of Dutch Masters ever held in the Gulf region," to quote Manuel Rabaté, director of Louvre Abu Dhabi. He summed up the exhibition saying: "...it surveys his (Rembrandt's) brilliant artistic journey in Leiden and Amsterdam and his relationships with rivals and peers, including Jan Lievens, Ferdinand Bol, Carel Fabritius, Gerrit Dou, Frans van Mieris, Frans Hals, and Johannes Vermeer." Leiden is where Rembrandt was born, and the private collection named after this town is one of the largest and most significant of 17th century Dutch art.

The canopy of eight interlaced layers that forms the dome above this museum was inspired by Arab traditions and palm trees, creating the illusion of being feather-light. The complex geometric structure

Dutch GOLD

designed by architect Jean Nouvel creates a firmament of 7,850 stars that animates a 'rain of light' on the structures beneath, both by day and night. Facing and jutting into the blue waters of the Persian Gulf, this architectural wonder adds to the mystique of the exhibitions it hosts.

"This exhibition confirms the interests of Louvre Abu Dhabi in cross-cultural exchanges. It was the result of collaboration between the Leiden Collection, the Musée du Louvre in Paris with contributions from Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, and the Bibliothèque nationale de France. They produced the exhibition, and it was coordi-

nated and facilitated by l'Agence France-Muséums," said Souraya Najoumi, director of the museum's scientific, curatorial and collection management department.

Long before the term 'multi-culti' came into currency, this popular expression that originated in the 1900s, could well have been applied to describe both Rembrandt, whose fame transcended geographical borders, and Amsterdam, the city where he settled for good in 1631. It aptly describes Louvre Abu Dhabi, too, as it welcomes diverse cultures within its fold.

The so-called Dutch Golden Age reached its apogee around 1667, when

**SOUMITRA DAS
CHECKS OUT THE
LOUVRE ABU DHABI'S
NEW EXHIBITION
CELEBRATING
REMBRANDT AND
OTHER DUTCH
MASTERS' WORKS
OF ART**

it witnessed efflorescence in the fields of science and arts, alongside thriving mercantile and maritime trade. In 1611, artist Claes Jansz Visscher II (1587-1652), had remarked that Amsterdam was "the sun and the soul not only of Europe, and parts of Africa...but of the entire world." The Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company) was formed in 1602, only two years after the monopolistic English company that ruled and bled India white till 1857.

One can surmise from Rembrandt's inventory of his extensive collection of curiosities—natural and handcrafted—culled from the world over that these were available in the global city of Amsterdam. Owing to extravagant living, the artist had to take recourse to this measure in 1656 to preempt bankruptcy. Two exhibits here symbolise Dutch wealth and prowess—the model of a frigate (1648) and an engraved nautilus shell showing Diana and Bacchus (1660-80).

Two of Vermeer's works—*The Lacemaker* and *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*—are juxtaposed in these red-walled galleries created for this temporary exhibition. Both masterworks, although not executed at the same time, were painted on canvas belonging to the same bolt. Louvre Abu Dhabi's latest acquisition, Rembrandt's *Head of a young man with clasped hands*:



The rare and beautifully crafted 17th-century ship model from Rijksmuseum is on display at the exhibition

Study of the figure of Christ, depicting him as a corporeal being, can be seen at the exhibition alongside the tiny (8.9x6.4cm) but keenly insightful monochromatic *Boy of a Bearded Old Man* from The Leiden Collection (1633), which is being exhibited in public for the first time.

The exhibition also demonstrates Rembrandt's radical strategy of turning Biblical, mythical and historical beings into contemporary figures which influenced other artists. For example, his grand *Minerva in Her Studio* (1635) is a painting of a woman from the 17th century without any divine attributes. Jan Steen's *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* and *Banquet of Anthony and Cleopatra*, of a later vintage, also include in this exhibition, show a similar unorthodox trend of situating the protagonists in the artist's own times.

Yet in Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* (1634), he is dressed in what would be termed retro fashion today. And when Isaac de Jouderville paints him in 1631, Rembrandt sports an Oriental dress. The exhibition traces the artist's formative years and his graduation to portraiture and more ambitious projects. Included here are some of his drawings and the famous etching of *The Shell* (1650). A New York-based arts correspondent commented: "I have seen many similar exhibitions, but never one quite as good."

In the exhibition we also see works by Dou (Rembrandt's first pupil) and Mieris (Dou's pupil), who were called the 'finischilders' or fine painters. In a separate gallery are the genre paintings which brought to life everyday scenes. Vermeer's two paintings, while belonging to this convention, transcend its bounds transformed by the magic of light. Salvador Dali was so obsessed with the Flemish master *The Lacemaker* that he wanted to paint it at a Paris zoo. True to form, after an hour, the great Surrealist artist produced a pair of rhinoceros horns.

The Louvre Abu Dhabi is closed on Mondays. The exhibition is on till May 18. Ticket for adults 63 AED; louvreabudhabi.