

The Arab Weekly

Louvre Abu Dhabi sheds light on Dutch Golden Age

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A taste of Dutch art. Visitors look at works on display as part of "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre." (Mohamed Somji).

ABU DHABI - After its successful inaugural shows last year, the Louvre Abu Dhabi has set the pace for a second season by unveiling 95 artworks by Dutch masters under the exhibition appropriately titled "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre."

The exhibition, the largest of Dutch masters from the 17th century in the Gulf region, surveys Rembrandt's artistic journey in his native Leiden and Amsterdam as well as his relationships with rivals and peers, including Johannes Vermeer, Jan Lievens, Ferdinand Bol, Carel Fabritius, Gerrit Dou, Frans van Mieris and Frans Hals.

Exhibition patrons are especially privileged because it coincides with the first display of the museum's most recent acquisition, Rembrandt's oil sketch "Head of a Young Man, with Clasped Hands: Study of the Figure of Christ" (circa 1656).

Other highlights are works by Vermeer — "The Lacemaker" (Musée du Louvre) and "Young Woman Seated at a Virginal" (Leiden Collection) — that were painted on canvas cut from the same bolt. These are displayed side by side for what is thought to be the first time in 300 years.

The exhibition is drawn primarily from the Leiden Collection, one of the largest and most significant private collections of art from the Dutch Golden Age, interspersed with masterpieces from the Musée du Louvre's Dutch collection. Loans from the Rijksmuseum and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France complete the presentation.

History has cast the Dutch Golden Age as a brief period of the 17th century when the Dutch Republic, newly independent from Spain, established itself as a world leader in trade, science and the arts and became the most prosperous country in Europe.

Wealth derived from dominance in worldwide trade also resulted in one of the most productive periods in the making of art. Paintings and art objects were widely collected and traded, resulting in the proliferation of Dutch works in museums and collections across the world.

Rembrandt and Vermeer established themselves at the forefront of the artistic movement characterised by a deep interest in humanity and daily life.

"In 2019, the UAE is celebrating the Year of Tolerance, which is testament to our long-standing tradition of nurturing a culture of openness and exchange. The exhibition... illustrates not only the importance of cross-border cultural collaborations but also how artistic creativity has always been at the heart of great historic moments," said Mohamed al-Mubarak, chairman of the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi.

Louvre Abu Dhabi Director Manuel Rabaté affirmed the “commitment to bringing key moments in art and history to a new global audience and further cement the museum’s mission to become a centre for cultural exchange.”

The exhibition unfolds through six sections exploring the heart of the Dutch Golden Age; Rembrandt’s beginnings in Leiden; Rembrandt in Amsterdam; Fine Painting in Leiden; Picturing Everyday life in the Dutch Republic; and Historical Lessons and Tales of Morality.

Rembrandt’s early famed series of allegorical paintings of the senses drawn at the start of his career in Leiden and paintings created later in Amsterdam are on display. They include “Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes” and “Minerva in Her Study,” his monumental history painting of the goddess (both from the Leiden Collection).

The works are displayed alongside paintings by other masters from Rembrandt’s artistic circle, illustrating the influence that these remarkable artists had on each other’s work.

Viewers also get an insight into the artistic traditions that flourished in Leiden and the wider Netherlands during this period, including the development of a new school of artists, called the *fijnschilders* (fine painters), who focused on painting portraits, character studies, history paintings and exquisitely rendered scenes of daily life.

The Leiden Collection, founded in 2003 by American collectors Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, consists of approximately 250 paintings and drawings and represents one of the largest and most important assemblages of 17th-century Dutch paintings in private hands.

Highlights from the Leiden Collection include Vermeer’s “Young Woman Seated at a Virginal,” Dou’s “Scholar Interrupted at His Writing,” Lievens’s “Boy in a Cape and Turban” and Rembrandt’s “Young Lion Resting.”

Among the highlights from the Musée du Louvre’s collections are: Dou’s “Self-Portrait with Palette in a Niche,” Bol’s “Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well” and an engraved nautilus shell (circa 1660-80).

Alongside the exhibition, which is to close May 18, Louvre Abu Dhabi has announced a cultural programme featuring film screenings curated by Emirati artist Hind Mezaina, a pop-up costumed performance in the museum galleries as well as talks and workshops.