

SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

A CHAT WITH LARA YEAGER – CRASSELT

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Lara Yeager-Crasselt, curator of The Leiden Collection in New York, sat down with Selections to talk about the landmark Louvre Abu Dhabi exhibit *Rembrandt, Vermeer & the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from the Leiden Collection* and the *Musée du Louvre*. She explains that the exhibit “traces two main narratives – Rembrandt’s

development as an artist, as seen through The Leiden Collection's 15 works by the artist, and the development of genre painting in 17th century Holland, as shown through The Leiden Collection's extraordinary depth of works by the *fijnschilders* (fine painters). When brought together with important selections from the Musée du Louvre's collection, these works offer a distinctive glimpse into the dynamics of artistic exchange that shaped the art of the Dutch Golden Age, while enabling visitors to follow Rembrandt from his early career in Leiden through his ultimate flourishing in Amsterdam, where he stimulated artistic innovations among his pupils and peers." A highlight of the show: for the first time in 300 years, Johannes Vermeer's *The Lacemaker* (Musée du Louvre) and *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (The Leiden Collection) will hang next to each other.



Anastasia Nysten: Tell me more about the cultural exchange part, the importance of being at the Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Lara Yeager-Crasselt: The first gallery begins with this idea of global exchange, so we have a map showing Dutch global exchange, which stretches from Brazil to Indonesia to North America to Manhattan, and it is that culture that created the wealth and created also a culture of openness and curiosity about the world. You'll see a ship model from the 17th century, which is on loan from the Rijksmuseum. At the same time, you'll also see a very rare print by Rembrandt, the first work by Rembrandt in the Louvre exhibition, which is from Louvre Paris, and it represents a shell probably coming from the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean. This already sets the stage for an artist like Rembrandt being interested in the world. As you move from there, you really begin with the core of The Leiden Collection, which is Rembrandt and his contemporary Jan Lievens in Leiden. And so you have to imagine these two young artists in the 1620s: they're friends, they're rivals, they're contemporaries and they're competing and exchanging ideas with one another. One of the things that spur them is this interest in a larger world.

These first two galleries set that stage, and it plays out throughout the exhibition. You start to really look at these beautiful Oriental carpets that are portrayed, porcelain, feathers, which came from Africa or South America, drawings by Rembrandt of lions, all these new things that came into Amsterdam, which was in so many ways the centre of the world in Europe at that time. So that's the larger context of exchange for the show. As you move from Leiden to Amsterdam in the second, third and fourth galleries, you follow Rembrandt himself. When he left Leiden, he had big aspirations to be a painter and had big success in Amsterdam. This is an incredible room of Rembrandt paintings, and this is the first time that all 15 Rembrandt paintings in The Leiden Collection are viewed together. You can follow him from the beginning of his career, his very first paintings are in The Leiden Collection, including Allegory of the Senses.



Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635-1681), *Woman at Her Toilet, Assisted by a Black Servant* 1678. Oil on panel. Paris, Musée du Louvre © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Adrien Didierjean.



Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667), *The Music Lesson*, ca. 1661. Oil on panel. Paris, Musée du Louvre © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Tony Querrec.

AN: If you were to describe an artwork from Rembrandt, what would be the key elements be?

LYC: Rembrandt had an incredible ability to capture humanity or the human soul, and whether in portraiture or in history paintings, he gave his figures an immediacy and a sense of life. That's both the sense of honesty and how he captured the people, whether from life or a portrait or from his imagination, they're present before you. But he did that also through light and shadow, he was the master of using light to convey the character of a person to create the mood or the drama. And what you should always appreciate from Rembrandt is his brushwork. He uses a very evocative, sometimes very thickly painted brushwork so that the painting becomes part of the person, part of a story itself. And that is very much in contrast to where we're standing, which is in the first gallery of the Leiden fine painters, which was a style of painting of incredible detail.

Gerrit Dou started this school of painting in Leiden in the 17th century. He was the first pupil of Rembrandt. Dou was the total opposite and begins painting on a very small scale, what we call cabinet pictures, using a paintbrush with a single hair to capture everything with incredible detail. That's the other world here, the Rembrandt world and the world of Dou and Fran van Mieris. It's attention to what we call genre paintings, scenes of everyday life, but these are also because of the preciousness of their material. A number of them are painted on copper, which is very precious, and it gives the paintings a glow.

AN: Tell us about taking the private collection to become a public collection.

LYC: Two years ago when the collection went public, it was twofold. One was the exhibition of 33 paintings at the Louvre and the other side of that was the publication of an online scholarly catalogue of the collection. Having a private collection, which is fully documented and totally catalogued, with such a defined and focused identity, is unparalleled. Now that we're becoming much better known, the works are often recognized, but many of them were in private collections before and haven't been seen in decades. So it's about seeing the paintings in a public way, about presenting scholarship in a very serious and scholarly way.



Gerrit Dou (1613-1675), *Self-Portrait with Palette in a Niche*, ca. 1660-65. Oil on panel. Paris, Musée du Louvre © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / Tony Querrec.



Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Bust of a Bearded Old Man*, 1633. Oil on paper, mounted on panel. New York, The Leiden Collection. Image courtesy of The Leiden Collection, New York.



Frans van Mieris the Elder (1635-1681), *Young Woman Feeding a Parrot*, 1663. Oil on panel New York, The Leiden Collection. Courtesy of The Leiden Collection, New York.