

## Rijksmuseum to host the world's largest exhibition on Dutch master painter Johannes Vermeer



The world's biggest ever Vermeer show - Copyright AP Photo

Some art lovers make it a mission to visit and view as many works as possible by 17th-century Dutch master Johannes Vermeer.

Starting Friday (10 February), the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam is making their lives a whole lot easier.

A once in a lifetime blockbuster exhibition at the Netherlands' national museum of art and history brings together 28 of Vermeer's paintings from seven countries around the world.

Not bad considering only 37 paintings are generally ascribed to the artist, who lived from 1632-1675 in the city of Delft.

Never before have so many Vermeer works been put on show together in a single exhibition. Seven of the paintings haven't been in the Netherlands in more than two centuries.

Rijksmuseum General Director Taco Dibbits believes the exhibition provides a chance for visitors to immerse themselves in the exquisite interior scenes for which Vermeer is best known, but also early religious paintings and two cityscapes, both depicting his home town, Delft.

## Who is Vermeer?



A man looks at View of Delft during a press preview of the Vermeer exhibit at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum - AP Photo

Johannes Vermeer was a 17th-century Dutch master painter, known for his exceptional ability to capture the beauty of everyday life, often painting scenes of women and children in quiet, domestic moments.

He used light and colour to create a sense of atmosphere and depth in his paintings, making them feel incredibly real and alive.

Some of his most famous works include, "Girl with a Pearl Earring" and "The Milkmaid."

He lived from 1632-1675 in the city of Delft, and because so little is known about him, he has been nicknamed "The Sphinx of Delft."

He left no letters or diaries, and there are no known portraits of him.

**Vermeer found a life's work in the corner of a room** ”

- Irwin Greenberg -



'Girl with a Pearl Earring' by Vermeer - AP Photo

Recent research has begun to unravel the mysteries of the painter. Studies being carried out around the exhibition are further broadening knowledge about his work.

"We're really coming closer to Vermeer than we've ever been," said Pieter Roelofs, the Rijksmuseum's Head of Paintings and Sculpture. Recent research means that "we really understand more about his life, about his household, about his direct contacts, the people for whom he made these paintings, and what they mean."

In preparation for the exhibition, the museum has been taking an extremely close look at its own Vermeer paintings, which include iconic "The Milkmaid."

High-tech scans that peer through the surface of the work have revealed that Vermeer tweaked the background as he painted, apparently to ensure that the focus shone solely on the woman pouring milk. A jug holder – similar to a wall-mounted coat rack – that was originally in the background was painted over.

### **What's on display at the exhibition?**



*A woman takes images of 'Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window', on loan from the Gemaelde Galerie Dresden - AP Photo*

The Rijksmuseum's exhibition brings visitors the largest collection of Vermeer paintings ever displayed.

Across 10 rooms, there are 28 masterpieces by the "Sphinx of Delft."

The most famous painting on display is without a doubt the "Girl with a Pearl Earring", which only had to make a short trip from the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague, but unfortunately isn't sticking around until the end of the exhibition. She returns home after 30 March.

Other masterpieces have had a longer journey for the exhibition that has been some eight years in the making.



"Officer and Laughing Girl," "Mistress and Maid" and "Girl Interrupted at her Music" flew from the US East Coast, leaving the Frick Collection while the New York museum undergoes restoration.

More works come from The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The **Leiden** Collection in New York.

The National Gallery of Art in Washington, which, together with the Mauritshuis, staged the last major Vermeer retrospective in 1995-96, also sent paintings.

With such a comprehensive retrospective, the paintings that aren't in Amsterdam almost become almost as noteworthy as those that are. A few of the 17th-century works are so frail that they simply can't travel.

One painting — "The Concert" — didn't make it to Amsterdam because it is among 13 artworks still missing after being stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston in 1990 in one of the world's most notorious art heists.

The incredible show in Amsterdam opens Friday and runs to June 4. It has already become the Rijksmuseum's most in-demand exhibition - Dibbitts said the museum has so far sold nearly 200,000 tickets and has extended opening hours to accommodate more people.

But don't worry - if you can't get to Amsterdam or snag a ticket, there is already a digital show available narrated by Stephen Fry.

**Check out the video above for a preview of this once in a lifetime exhibition.**