Dutch and Flemish Paintings from the HERMITAGE

The Art Institute of Chicago

July 9 through September 19, 1988
The Hermitage Museum in Leningrad is one of the world's greatest museums. Its collection of European painting dates from the time of Czar Peter the Great (1672-1725), who first turned the face of Russia toward western Europe, moving the capital from Moscow in the interior to Saint Petersburg on the Baltic Sea. His successors, notably Catherine the Great (1729-1796), continued to collect paintings avidly, often through agents buying on their behalf in western Europe. It was Czar Nicholas I (1796-1855) who, recognizing that the imperial collections were too large for the Hermitage Palace, commissioned the German architect Leo von Klenze to design a luxurious modern museum building; it opened in 1851. After the Revolution of 1917, the Hermitage continued to grow through the nationalization of private collections as well as through purchase.

Of all the Hermitage's vast holdings, the paintings of seventeenth-century Holland and Flanders are perhaps the best represented school in terms of quality, depth, and variety. Not only are there splendid works by Rembrandt, Rubens, and Van Dyck, covering the whole range of their careers, but the collection is also rich in exceptional paintings by lesser masters of landscape, genre, portrait, and still-life painting. This was the period when the art of the Low Countries (present-day Belgium and the Netherlands or Holland) reached its fullest flower. It also saw the establishment of the political separation between south and north—between Catholic Flanders, which was part of the empire of the kings of Spain and was ruled by their appointed regents, and Protestant Holland, which had revolted against Spanish rule in the late sixteenth century and whose independence was accepted by 1609, to be confirmed by treaty in 1648. Clear cultural distinctions resulted from the separation of Protestant, enterprising, and independent Holland from Catholic, imperial, and dependent Flanders. In terms of painting, the major patron in Flanders was still the Catholic church, with its demand for altarpieces. Painters in predominantly Calvinist Holland, finding no market for large, public religious works, often turned instead to still life, landscapes celebrating the simple beauty of their newly independent land, and scenes of everyday life, such as the exquisite Glass of Lemonade by Gerard Terborch (1617-1681). These works were acquired largely by the expanding middle class.

Above: The Hermitage, Leningrad
The center of Flemish painting was Antwerp, a city in gradual decline from its period of greatest prosperity as a port and financial center in the sixteenth century. It was dominated by the personality of the remarkably productive Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who was a diplomat and man of letters as well as a painter. Because of the cosmopolitan careers of Rubens and Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) and the far-flung connections of the Spanish ruling family, Flemish painting was part of the international baroque movement, with its drama and rhetoric. In Holland, by contrast, the smaller cities of Haarlem, Leiden, Delft, and Utrecht, among others, nurtured their own schools of painting, though ambitious painters, like the young Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), moved to the thriving commercial center of Amsterdam. Unlike Rubens in Flanders, Rembrandt was more the exception than the rule among his fellow countrymen in his commitment to religious and mythological subjects and in his ambition to connect with the greatest art of the past.

RUBENS

Rubens spent eight crucial years in Italy, absorbing the most recent developments of Italian painting. His *Adoration of the Magi* of 1608 is the preparatory study for the last altarpiece he painted in Italy. The dramatic light emanating from the Christ Child and the astonished gestures of the onlookers show his assimilation of the revolutionary Italian painter Caravaggio's example. The dashing brushwork and dynamic arrangement of swirling figures are evidence of the young Flemish painter's powerful baroque style.

On his return to Antwerp in 1609, Rubens established himself as the city's leading painter and the head of a large workshop. His ties to the regent's court brought him many large commissions, which were often worked up with the help of assistants and collaborators based on his rapid oil sketches. The *Arch of Ferdinand* and the *Arch of Hercules* are two such sketches, in this case part of an extensive series of temporary decorations celebrating the triumphal entry into Antwerp of the new regent, the Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand, brother of Philip IV of Spain. Such sketches give a glimpse of Rubens's fertile imagination and sure hand as he rapidly set down and reworked his ideas.

Below:

Among the paintings Rubens made for his own pleasure, his landscapes are outstanding. This was a type of painting that did not play as prominent a role in Flanders as in Holland. Rubens's images of the countryside grow out of his own deep identification with rural life and his awareness of a classical tradition of appreciation for the forces of nature. Such works as Landscape with Stone Carriers are based on both direct observation and idealization of nature.

**REMBRANDT AND DUTCH PAINTING**

In his history paintings and mythologies, especially those of the mid-1630s, Rembrandt was the most baroque of Dutch painters. His *Sacrifice of Isaac* was painted a few years after he established himself in Amsterdam in 1631. In this work, Abraham is the pivot in a bold zigzag composition emphasizing the moment of greatest tension in the biblical story. He is poised between the fatal act of obedience to God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac and the angel's intervention.

Rembrandt's ability to vividly imagine the details of biblical events increased in his later works, becoming more inward, rooted in the quiet reactions of daily life, as in *The Holy Family* of 1645. Here, Joseph, busy at his carpentry, sets the everyday tone of the scene, whose focus is Mary's tender and somewhat anxious absorption in the sleeping Christ Child. This little figure, carefully wrapped up like a contemporary Dutch baby, is utterly humble, helpless, and deeply poignant. Even the tumbling angels are essentially earthbound in their gymnastics. Yet, within this peaceful domestic scene, the angel who descends with outstretched arms towards Christ's

Above:
cradle is, in his pose, a prefiguration of the Crucifixion.

_Haman Recognizes His Fate_ (also called _David and Uriah_) of about 1665 represents Rembrandt’s very late religious painting, in which he concentrated on the innermost reactions of a few isolated figures. Three other paintings in the exhibition show further aspects of Rembrandt’s career. The imposing _Portrait of a Scholar_, dated 1631, was probably one of Rembrandt’s first commissioned portraits painted in Amsterdam. _Flora_, dated 1634, is a highly personal representation of the artist’s bride, Saskia, as the Roman goddess of flowers—an image of abundance and promise. The _Portrait of an Old Jew_ of 1654, like so many paintings of exotic sitters throughout Rembrandt’s career, can be seen as a portrait, a character study, and an evocation of a biblical character.

In the course of his long career, Rembrandt had many students who adopted his style and subject matter, including Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621-1647), Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627-1678), and Aert de Gelder (1645-1727), whose paintings are included in this exhibition. These students often turned from Rembrandt’s style to the classicism that dominated Dutch painting in the mid-seventeenth century. The new clarity of color and light, as well as a breadth and balance of composition, apparent in paintings from this period, seems to reflect the self-confidence of an established and prosperous independent Holland. These stylistic characteristics are evident in the harmonious landscapes of Italianate painters like Jan Both (c. 1615-1652), Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), and Adam Pynacker (1621-1673); in the elegant and highly finished genre paintings of Gabriel Metsu (1629-1667) and Gerard ter Borch; and in the grand forest and mountain landscapes of Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29-1682). The _Watchdog_ of Paulus Potter (1625-1654) aptly embodies the self-confidence of this period—the pose of the noble animal is stable, yet poised for action, the texture of his fur is directly and boldly recorded, yet subordinated to an overall design.

EXHIBITION AND MUSEUM INFORMATION

PUBLIC PROGRAMS
The following Guest Scholar and Public Lectures are free with museum admission. Ask for location at Information desk.

GUEST SCHOLAR SERIES
Tuesday evenings at 6:00

JULY 12
Rembrandt in the Hermitage. Egbert Havercamp-Begemann, John Langeloth Loeb Professor of the History of Art, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University

JULY 26
Rubens and the Triumphal Arch, John Rupert Martin, Marquand Professor of Art and Archaeology Emeritus, Princeton University

AUGUST 9
Self-Portraits by Dutch and Flemish Painters, Perry Chapman, Assistant Professor of Art History, University of Delaware

AUGUST 16
Reason and Emotion in Dutch Genre Painting—"The Doctor's Visit," Susan Donahue Kuretsky, Blandin g Professor of Art History, Vassar College

PUBLIC LECTURES at 12:15

JULY 12 and 22
General Introduction to the Exhibition

AUGUST 2
Rembrandt's "Sacrifice of Isaac"

AUGUST 3
Rembrandt's "Holy Family"

AUGUST 11, 12, and 16
General Introduction to the Exhibition

AUGUST 24
Rembrandt in the Hermitage

AUGUST 18 and 29
Northern European Landscapes in the Art Institute
Gallery 117

SEPTEMBER 9 and 15
General Introduction to the Exhibition

SEPTEMBER 16
Van Dyck and the Elegant Portrait

RECORDED TOUR
Available at exhibition entrance:
Public, $3; Member, $2.50

ADMISSION
The full admission of $5 is required. Tickets should be purchased in advance: at Art Institute ticket booths on Michigan Avenue steps or in Columbus Drive lobby; at all Ticketron locations; or by Teletron. In Illinois, call 853-3636; outside Illinois, call 1-800-843-1558. Members are admitted free but should request their tickets in advance at either ticket booth.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION
Membership sales desks in the museum are located in the Michigan Avenue Lobby and outside the second-floor Dining Room. To become a member by using a credit card, call (312) 782-4830. For more information, call (312) 443-3622.

HOURS
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 10:30-4:30
Tuesday, 10:30-8:00, Saturday, 10:00-5:00
Sundays, and Labor Day, 12:00-5:00

Exhibition Hotline: (312) 454-8484

SPECIAL EVENING EVENTS
Private viewings, lectures, and food service for 100 or more. Call (312) 443-3530 or 443-3794 for more information.

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