

Dutch treats in Los Angeles

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The opening of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) as an independent art museum in March 1965 was a powerful symbol of the coming of age of a city transformed in just one hundred years from a dusty agricultural center of little more than two thousand residents to a vibrant, international city. Today Los Angeles is home to more than 7 million people and five major art museums, three of which have significant collections of Dutch paintings.

As in New York at the beginning of the 20th century, in Los Angeles following World War II, men who had made personal fortunes sought to establish themselves as scions of culture by building collections of Old Master paintings. Among the key figures was Norton Simon, who had transformed a small orange juice bottling operation into the giant Hunts Food conglomerate and become one of the richest men in the country. Another, Edward W. Carter, had built the largest chain of department stores in the western United States. Other cultural leaders were Howard Ahmanson, chairman of Home Savings, and the industrialists Armand Hammer and J. Paul Getty.

The collecting interests of Norton Simon, who had purchased the remaining stock of Duveen Brothers in 1964, extended from Siennese altarpieces to French Impressionists. His Dutch paintings included all genres. Among his first acquisitions were Rembrandt's *Self-portrait* and Jan Steen's *Marriage at Cana* in 1969, Jacob van Ruisdael's *Three great trees* in 1971, and Gabriel Metsu's *Woman at her toilet* in 1972. After years of having his collection on loan at LACMA, in the mid seventies Norton Simon assumed control of the bankrupt Pasadena Museum of Art and installed his collection in what is now the Norton Simon Museum. Even before the departure of the Simon collection, LACMA had begun to acquire significant works of Dutch painting, including three works by Rembrandt. In 1953 J. Paul Getty had given the museum Rembrandt's *Portrait of Marten Looten*; in 1969 Armand Hammer followed with Rembrandt's portrait of *Dirck Jansz. Pesser*, and in 1972 the Ahmanson Company gave Rembrandt's *The raising of Lazarus*. Four years later Armand Hammer bought Rembrandt's *Juno* as a promised gift for LACMA, but in the late eighties he rescinded the gift, and the painting entered the newly established Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.

In contrast to Norton Simon, Armand Hammer, and J. Paul Getty, who abandoned LACMA to establish their own museums, Howard Ahmanson and Edward Carter remained loyal to the Museum. Through the Ahmanson Foundation, LACMA has been able to purchase some of the most important Dutch paintings in the collection, including Hendrick Goltzius's fabulous *Danae*, Frans Hals's *Portrait of Pieter Tjarck*, Jan Steen's *Samson and Delilah*, Salomon de Bray's *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*, Carel Fabritius's *Mercury and Argus*, and Hendrick Honthorst's *Mocking of Christ*. From Edward and Hannah Carter, the museum received an extraordinary collection of 36 Dutch still lifes, landscapes, seascapes and architectural paintings of exceptional quality and condition. This collection includes Hendrick Avercamp's incredible *Winter scene on a*

frozen canal, Ambrosius Bosschaert's, *Still life of flowers*, Jan van der Heyden's *View of the Herengracht*, Frans Post's *Brazilian landscape*, as well as major paintings by Jacob and van Ruisdael, Cuyp, Saenredam, Pynacker and others.

While one could lament LACMA's loss of the collections of Norton Simon, Hammer and Getty, the reality is that it was precisely because the collections grew independently that they became what they are today. Together the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Norton Simon Museum and the Getty represent one of the strongest offerings of beautifully conserved Dutch paintings in the United States or anywhere.