

Hidden gems, fallen stars: Dutch paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Esmée Quodbach, assistant to the director, Center for the History of Collecting in America, Frick Art Reference Library, New York

This presentation focuses on the formation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection of 17th-century Dutch paintings, from the institution's founding in 1870 to the present. It examines how the museum's Dutch collection grew, from the so-called "Purchase of 1871" to the early 21st-century. Initially, the views of French critics such as Théophile Thoré and Eugène Fromentin - for whom the art of the Golden Age was merely a portrait of Holland and its people - were very influential in the United States. To what extent did they shape the Metropolitan's collection of Dutch pictures? And how did the appreciation of the Dutch School evolve in later years?

During the so-called Gilded Age, businessmen-collectors such as J.P. Morgan and Benjamin Altman, both with close ties to the Metropolitan, acquired many first-rate Dutch masterpieces. Scholars of Dutch art, such as Wilhelm Bode and Wilhelm Valentiner, entered upon the American scene, advising some of the country's most notable collectors. To what extent does the Metropolitan's Dutch collection reflect their tastes? How do we now evaluate the Dutch paintings acquired under the (direct or indirect) tutelage of Bode, Valentiner, and others after them?

Special attention will be given to Rembrandt, for decades the most coveted master on both sides of the Atlantic, and to Vermeer, who was all but unknown in the United States when his first works arrived there. Some of the Metropolitan's more recent Dutch acquisitions of works by such divergent masters as Abraham Bloemaert, Bartholomeus Breenbergh, and Emanuel de Witte, who were mostly ignored by earlier generations of American collectors, will be discussed as well.

About Esmée Quodbach

Esmée Quodbach studied art history at Utrecht University. She has held research positions at the National Gallery of Art in Washington and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. For the past four years, since its founding, she has been assistant to the director at the Center for the History of Collecting in America at The Frick Collection and Art Reference Library, also in New York. Esmée has published widely on the collecting history of Dutch painting. Most recently, she contributed an essay on Henry Clay Frick as collector of Rembrandt to the catalogue *Rembrandt and his school: masterworks from the Frick and Lugt collections*, accompanying the exhibition currently on view at The Frick Collection. In 2007, the Metropolitan Museum asked Esmée to write a book on the formation of its collection of Dutch paintings, which was published on the occasion of the exhibition *The age of Rembrandt: Dutch paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*.