

Keynote lecture

Peter Hecht, chair of art history, Utrecht University

Politicians want museums to show their highlights, which is what the majority of visitors also want. And they want events. The Rijksmuseum Amsterdam will find it very difficult, if not impossible, to attract more visitors when it reopens by simply exhibiting more of its collection; it is quite clear that most visitors are perfectly content with their 45 minute tour of Rembrandt and Vermeer. Yet we all know, or should know, that the so-called canon they want to see is subject to change, and that nowadays many will not be attracted to Paulus Potter's *Bull*, whereas it is standard to find Adriaen Coorte's still lifes rather appealing. In this keynote lecture, I will briefly address this shifting image of Dutch art, especially how and why it has changed in the past 50 years. I will touch on the way art historical exhibitions and the art trade have influenced what (we think) we do or do not like, and how even the greatest hits can lose their appeal – sometimes through reattribution only.

In the second part of my talk I look more closely at the problem of huge and mostly invisible museum collections. I draw on my experience as guest curator at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, where only ten percent of the paintings are on permanent view and the display is rearranged every two years. In this way the museum hopes to tempt visitors to look afresh at what they thought they knew and make new discoveries. This is not easy to achieve.

About Peter Hecht

Peter Hecht teaches art history at Utrecht University, is an editor of *Simiolus*, and has been a guest curator at several Dutch museums. He publishes mostly on Dutch 17th-century art, with an accent on its iconography and reputation. His other field of interest is the history of Dutch public art collections and their politics. Hecht has organized the following exhibitions: *De Hollandse Fijnschilders* (Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 1989-90) and *125 Grote Liefdes* (Van Gogh Museum 2008-09). As a member of the Vereniging Rembrandt (Rembrandt Society) he was asked to mount the new display of Old Master paintings ranging from Van Eyck to Dalí in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, which will open in April 2011.