

Honthorst Headed Home: The Crocker's *Allegory of Painting* on Loan to Utrecht's Centraal Museum for a Major Exhibition

By Sarah Farkas

IN APRIL 2026, the Crocker Art Museum said *bon voyage* to a beloved artwork, *Allegory of Painting* (1648) by Gerrit (or Gerard) van Honthorst, as it traveled to the city of Utrecht, the Netherlands—the artist's birthplace—for the exhibition *Gerard van Honthorst - Different to Rembrandt* (April 25 – September 13, 2026). Organized by the Centraal Museum and curated by its Senior Curator of Old Master Paintings and Drawings, Dr. Liesbeth M. Helmus, this exhibition is the first major retrospective of Honthorst's work. It will feature both paintings and drawings from distinguished collections across Europe and the United States, including loans from the Musée du Louvre and the British Royal Collection, as well as the Crocker Art Museum.^[1]

Gerrit van Honthorst was a leading figure of the 17th century's Dutch Golden Age. A contemporary of artists such as Rembrandt, Frans Hals, and Johannes Vermeer, he is widely recognized by scholars as one of the foremost Dutch followers of the Italian artist Caravaggio, famous for his dramatic compositions activated by strong contrasts between light and shadow. The Crocker's Honthorst depicts a well-known motif in early modern European art: the personification of painting, traditionally represented as a woman working at her easel.

The specificity of the woman's features, along with those in the portrait she paints, has led to many theories about the subjects' identities. An early 19th-century auction record, for instance, lists the subject as “the wife of Honthorst, busy painting the portrait of her husband . . . held by Cupid.”^[2] This theory, however, appears implausible given the date of the piece. As Helmus notes, “it is

clear that the painter is not a portrait of Sophia Coopmans [Honthorst's wife], who was approaching fifty in 1648.” At the same time, she emphasizes that “Honthorst's portrait of a young woman behind her easel from 1648 is such a personal document that it is inconceivable that there was no warm, confidential bond between the painter and the sitter.”

Now, the Centraal Museum's curator has proposed a new, highly compelling interpretation of the sitters: Dr. Helmus describes the painting as “a love ode to Eva,” the artist's only daughter, who married the solicitor Jacob van Rosendael (1625–1665) in 1648, the same year Honthorst created *Allegory of Painting*. Helmus concludes, “She is lovingly portrayed by her father as she paints the portrait of her new husband, Jacob van Rosendael, which is held by Cupid, the god of love. In short, the painting is a father's ode to his daughter,” and was possibly given to her as a wedding present.

More information about the painting loaned by the Crocker and the many other remarkable works by Gerrit van Honthorst on view in the Centraal Museum's upcoming exhibition will appear in Dr. Helmus's forthcoming publication *The World of Gerard van Honthorst*. ♦

¹ “Gerard van Honthorst,” CODART, n.d., accessed January 12, 2026, <https://www.codart.nl/guide/agenda/gerard-van-honthorst/>.

² “De vrouw van Honthorst, bezig zijnde het Portrait van haren man se sehilderen, welke schilderij door Cupido word vast gehouden,” from: Teylers. *Catalogus van het Uitmuntend Kabinet....* Hendrik Hoogers. Te Nymegen, J.C. Vieweg, 1816, n. 38.

→ Gerrit van Honthorst (Dutch, 1592–1656), *Allegory of Painting*, 1648. Oil on canvas, 54 5/16 x 44 1/2 in. Crocker Art Museum, gift of Suzanne Nady in memory of her parents, Jeanne and Joseph Falk, 1998.10.

