

PRESS RELEASE

REMBRANDT'S AMSTERDAM GOLDEN TIMES?

27 NOVEMBER 2024 – 23 MARCH 2025

Exhibition annex

Press preview: Tuesday, 26 November 2024, 11 am

Frankfurt am Main, 23 October 2024. Amsterdam – one city with many faces. In the 17th century, Amsterdam was *the* metropolis in Europe. The economy and trade were booming, the population rapidly increased, and the arts and sciences flourished. An influential civic society shaped the city's fortunes and glorified itself in splendid group portraits made by the greatest Dutch painters of the age, foremost among them Rembrandt, alongside Jacob Backer, Ferdinand Bol, Govert Flinck, Bartholomeus van der Helst, Nicolaes Eliasz. Pickenoy, and Jan Victors. From 27 November 2024 to 23 March 2025, the Städel Museum, in collaboration with the Amsterdam Museum, showcases portraits from the Rembrandt period in a major exhibition, with the magnificent group portraits of the Amsterdam Museum taking centre stage. These works are rarely lent out, and this is the first large-scale presentation of them in Germany. Around 100 paintings, sculptures and prints and cultural and historical artefacts from other prominent Dutch and international museums will be on view in Frankfurt, including masterpieces from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Koninklijk Museum van Schone Kunsten in Antwerp and the Muzeum Narodowe in Warsaw. The exhibition will also feature remarkable works by Rembrandt and his contemporaries from the Städel Museum's own collection.

"Rembrandt's Amsterdam. Golden Times?" is sponsored by ING Germany, the Städtischer Museums-Verein e. V., the Dagmar-Westberg-Stiftung and the Fontana Stiftung, with additional support from the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung.

The exhibition challenges the traditional view of the 17th century as the Netherlands' 'Golden Age'. The economic and cultural prosperity of the Rembrandt era was bolstered by the aggressive trade policies of the United Netherlands, which relied on the establishment of colonies in Asia and South America as well as the enslavement and exploitation of people. As wars, poverty and religious and political persecution swept across Europe, migration to the Dutch Republic – particularly Amsterdam –

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steadily increased. A robust labour market and an unparalleled degree of religious tolerance attracted many in search for a better and freer life, a goal that some, but by no means all, achieved. It was primarily Amsterdam's urban elite that commissioned lavish portraits of themselves: members of the civic guards and the craft and trade guilds, as well as the governors of the social institutions supported by civic society. While showcasing these prestigious paintings, the exhibition at the Städel Museum also illuminates the experiences of other social groups. Visitors will encounter images and narratives reflecting a pluralistic Amsterdam society, which tell of wealth and poverty, joy and hardship, power and powerlessness.

In the words of **Städel Director Philipp Demandt**: "With this exhibition, we are bringing Rembrandt's Amsterdam to the Städel Museum. By taking a critical look at the realities of 17th-century Amsterdam, we engage with the ongoing discourse surrounding the re-evaluation of the Netherlands' 'Golden Age'. The masterpieces of Rembrandt and his renowned contemporaries depict a city in flux, undergoing profound economic and social transformations. No other museum in the world houses as many group portraits from this period as the Amsterdam Museum. At the Städel Museum, we are excited to unite these works with other international loans and our own exceptional collection of paintings and prints by Rembrandt, which our museum's founder already collected with passion. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the lenders and sponsors who have generously supported our exhibition. This ambitious project would not have been possible without their commitment."

"Amsterdam – Europe's vibrant metropolis, a timeless favourite among travellers and a haven of art and culture. This holds true today just as it did during Rembrandt's era. During the life of the renowned painter, the city's economy and culture flourished on an unprecedented scale. This exhibition explores both the 'Golden Age' and its darker aspects. Following the 2021 Rembrandt exhibition at the Städel Museum that focused on the peerless artist himself, we now invite visitors to immerse themselves in the city where he lived and worked with many other pioneering artists. As ING Germany, we are delighted to support this exhibition, making Dutch art once again accessible to the Städel's visitors", says **Nick Jue**, Chairman of the Board, ING Germany.

As **Sylvia von Metzler, Chairwoman of the Board of the Städtelscher Museums-Verein e. V.**, comments about the exhibition: "The exhibition 'Rembrandt's Amsterdam' is the highlight of our anniversary year. For 125 years, we have been supporting the Städel Museum in all its endeavours, and the Städel's own works by Rembrandt featured in this exhibition reflect our extraordinary commitment. We are thrilled that this great Dutch artist is once again at the centre of a major exhibition,

alongside many of his contemporaries. We will experience Rembrandt's Amsterdam in a new and surprising light."

Daniel Hoster, Chairman of the Board of the Dagmar-Westberg-Stiftung, points out that "Our founder, Dagmar Westberg, was a devoted patron and friend of the Städel Museum. She had a lifelong passion for the art of the Old Masters, which also informed the donations she made to the museum's collection. Our support of the exhibition 'Rembrandt's Amsterdam' reflects her desire to share her fascination with Old Master painting with a broad audience and reveal the stories behind the works of art. The Dagmar Westberg Foundation wishes the Städel Museum great success and many interested visitors."

"The Dutch group portrait emerged primarily in Amsterdam. It is probably the most striking example of Dutch art from Rembrandt's time. It can be attributed to the unique conditions of Amsterdam, a mercantile city with a distinctly bourgeois and Protestant character. During this time, the city transformed into a booming global trade hub, where the ruling elite celebrated their status and civic commitment through prestigious paintings created by leading artists. While the notion of the 17th century as a 'Golden Age' has long been uncritically accepted in the Netherlands—partly due to these artworks—this perspective has begun to erode in recent years. Our exhibition addresses this shift by also highlighting those individuals who were deemed 'unworthy of portrayal' at the time and thus left little mark on the tradition of portraiture. The quest to uncover their stories is both overdue and valuable, as it will enhance our understanding of Rembrandt's Amsterdam," explains **Jochen Sander, curator of the exhibition, Deputy Director and Head of the collections of Dutch, Flemish and German painting before 1800**

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition begins with striking depictions of 17th-century **Amsterdam** that reflect the city's burgeoning confidence: Nicolaes Pietersz. Berchem's *Allegory on the Expansion of Amsterdam* (c. 1663), Johannes Lingelbach's *View of Dam Square with New Town Hall under Construction* (1656) and Job Adriaensz Berckheyde's *The Inner Courtyard of the Amsterdam Stock Exchange* (c. 1670). These pieces capture the remarkable economic boom that transformed the tranquil settlement on the Amstel into a thriving megacity and the epicentre of European world trade. The stock exchange was where people made trades, including in shares of the Dutch East India and Dutch West India companies founded in 1602 and 1621, respectively. In a remarkably short time these trading companies forcibly established a colonial empire across Asia, Africa and America, investing heavily in the trade of enslaved people. Immense fortunes were amassed in this way, but also lost again through speculation

in the stock market. Amidst this economic activity, the city's government upheld a commitment to freedom of thought and religion, fostering an environment in which the arts and sciences could flourish.

People from all over Europe flocked to Amsterdam in search for fortune. During Rembrandt's lifetime, Amsterdam's population tripled, leading to a rise in social problems. In response, the city invested in various institutions such as orphanages, homeless shelters and homes for the elderly. The 'regents,' and sometimes 'regentesses,' who oversaw these establishments were volunteers drawn from the city's bourgeois elite. Included in the exhibition is a series of group paintings commissioned by the superintendents of the '**Aalmozeniershuis**' (**alms house**); they show the almoners engaged in their daily duties. The compositions are inspired by the Catholic pictorial tradition of the Seven Works of Mercy.

The '**Burgerweeshuis**' (**City Orphanage**) offered shelter, food, and education to orphaned children from burgher families in Amsterdam. Everyday life at the orphanage was strictly regimented, with the aim of raising obedient and industrious members of society. In Jacob Adriaensz. Backer's *The Regentesses of the Burgerweeshuis* (1633/34), the sitters proudly present themselves as protectors of the orphans. However, the children depicted remain anonymous and stereotyped. This makes the *Portrait of 'Malle Baandje' (Barend Jansz Bode)* (c. 1700), by an unknown Amsterdam artist, particularly striking: the sitter was committed for life to the city orphanage due to mental disability.

The exhibition showcases a series of remarkable group portraits of **Amsterdam's Civic Guards**, the city's citizen militias. Since the late Middle Ages, these groups convened in their *doelens*, or headquarters: the 'Kloveniersdoelen' (lodge of the arquebusiers), the 'Voetboogdoelen' (lodge of the longbowmen) and the 'Handboogdoelen' (lodge of the crossbowmen). Members commissioned group portraits, each paying for their own likeness, to adorn the walls of their meeting rooms. An early example of this distinctive type of painting, which primarily emerged in Amsterdam, is *Squad F of the Arquebusiers (Kloveniers)* (1557), which can possibly be attributed to Jacob War II. The Amsterdam group portrait took on a more monumental and dynamic character in the work of Rembrandt and his contemporaries, such as Govaert Flinck (1648–50), Thomas de Keyser (1632) and Nicolaes Elias. Pickenoy (1632). Their paintings show the militia companies preparing to march or enjoying festive banquets. The most famous militia piece of all, of course, is Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, but it never leaves the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. However, a drawing by Jacob Colijns after Rembrandt's masterpiece brings this group portrait indirectly to Frankfurt.

The paintings of Bartholomeus van der Helst, one of Amsterdam's finest portraitists, epitomise the genre, while at the same time signalling its demise. As the city's population expanded, so too did the number of civic guard companies in Amsterdam. With no more space available for additional group portraits in their assembly rooms, the tradition of commissioned militia pieces came to an end after more than 150 years. Among the works featured in the exhibition is Van der Helst's impressive group portrait of the *Wardens of the Kloverniersdoelen* (1655).

Rembrandt and his fellow Amsterdam artists painted group portraits of the **members of the surgeons' guild**, creating a lasting tribute to the city's esteemed physicians. At the same time, these works document the history of involuntary body donors. A notable example is *The Osteology Lesson of Dr Sebastiaen Egbertsz.* (1619), a painting attributed to either Werner van den Valckert or Nicolaes Elias. Pickenoy. This work features the skeleton of an English sailor who was executed for piracy in the Netherlands. Like Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Jan Deijman* (1656), of which only an impressive fragment survives, these paintings reflect the complex relationship between contemporary jurisprudence, scientific advancement and public curiosity.

A profoundly moving work is Rembrandt's drawing of the body of **Elsje Christiaens**, who was sentenced to death in 1664 for manslaughter committed in the heat of passion and subsequently executed publicly. Her corpse was left to decompose on the gallows field outside the city, illustrating a case of double punishment consistent with the criminal justice practices of the time: after enduring public vilification and execution, she was also denied a Christian burial and proper resting place. In this way, locals and visitors to the city were starkly reminded of Amsterdam's social hierarchy and the harshness of its justice system.

Throughout his career, Rembrandt made **social outsiders** a focus of his art, capturing beggars, the sick, street vendors and street musicians on paper with a keen eye for the realities of Amsterdam. Always playful, Rembrandt even incorporated his own features into *Beggar Seated on a Bank of Earth* (1630). The exhibition presents a selection of his etchings from the Städel's collection. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Rembrandt eschewed stereotypes and caricatures, aiming instead to depict reality without judgement. Ultimately, these works also served as a visual repertoire for the realisation of narrative biblical scenes, such as the renowned *Hundred Guilder Print* (c. 1648).

While not socially, the 17th century was an artistic 'Golden Age', as an unprecedented number of high-quality paintings was produced during this heyday of Dutch painting. The exhibition also includes a series of **portraits** from Rembrandt's Amsterdam collection, created either by the master himself or by his pupils and contemporaries, such as Rembrandt's *Portrait of Maertgen van Bilderbeecq* (1633) or Caspar Netscher's *Portrait of Pieter Six* (1677). The undisputed masterpiece among these works in the Städel's collection is the history painting *The Blinding of Samson* (1636), which showcases Rembrandt's exceptional talent for incisively capturing the dramatic climax of a story.

At the final stop of the exhibition tour, visitors gain insight into life in **Amsterdam's correctional facilities**, which were established for the first time in Rembrandt's era. Addressing the question of crime's causes and based the innovative concept of re-socialisation through meaningful work benefiting the community, the city created workhouses for women and men Amsterdam, overseen by regents. Male beggars and petty criminals were sent to the so-called 'Rasphuis', where they had to chop (or 'rasp') Brazilian redwood to produce a red dye for the textile industry. Delinquent women, particularly prostitutes, were taken to the 'Spinhuis', where they engaged in handicrafts such as spinning, lacemaking and sewing. The aim of these monotonous activities, traditionally associated with virtue, was to reintegrate inmates into society. This once again highlights how the Dutch burgher class prioritised efficiency alongside the common good. While this focus contributed significantly to the success of Rembrandt's Amsterdam, it also served to reinforce social divisions.

REMBRANDT'S AMSTERDAM. GOLDEN TIMES?

An exhibition of the Städel Museum in collaboration with the Amsterdam Museum

Curator Städel Museum: Prof Dr Jochen Sander (Deputy Director and Head of the Collection of Dutch, Flemish and German painting before 1800, Städel Museum)

Project management: Corinna Gannon (Assistant curator, Dutch, Flemish and German painting before 1800, Städel Museum)

Exhibition dates: 27 November 2024 – 23 March 2025

Press Preview: Tuesday, 26 November 2024, 11 a.m.

Information: staedelmuseum.de

Visitor services and guided tours: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Venue: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Tickets: Tue–Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays €18, reduced €16; Tuesday Special: every Tuesday 3–6 pm €9, admission free for children under 12. Groups of at least 10 persons who would normally be charged the full admission fee: €16 per person. Groups are required to book in advance by contacting +49(0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de. Special opening hours on Christmas and New Eve are mentioned on the website staedelmuseum.de. Get your Early Bird Ticket now at a special price, available until 11 November 24.

Digitorial®: Wealth and poverty. Good luck and misfortune. Power and powerlessness: Discover Rembrandt's Amsterdam from a fresh perspective. Our free Digitorial® offers fascinating background information about the art and culture of this thriving metropolis and its society. Through interactive modules and informative short texts, the Digitorial introduces the exhibition's key themes. Ideal for preparing your visit to the exhibition, you can access the Digitorial from home or on the go – available in German and English at

amsterdam.staedelmuseum.de from 8 November. The Digitalia is a brand of the SCHIRN, the Städel Museum and the Liebieghaus, conceived – and often realised – by the three Frankfurt museums as a digital museum education offer. The Digitalia is sponsored by the Deutsche Börse Group.

Audio guide app: Discover more about Rembrandt's Amsterdam and the rapid development of the Dutch metropolis in the 17th century with our audio guide. The paintings in the exhibition also reveal the darker side of the economic boom and immense prosperity, highlighting the hard labour and exploitation faced by many Amsterdammers. In approximately 60 minutes, you can explore the city's many facets through audio tracks accompanying around 30 artworks. The tour, available in both German and English, can be downloaded as a free app for iOS and Android devices from the App Store and Google Play Store at the start of the exhibition. You can easily download it to your smartphone from the comfort of your home or while connected to the Städel Museum's WiFi.

Digital application: Based on Daniel Stalpaert's detailed city map (1662/64), you can explore Rembrandt's Amsterdam from the artist's perspective on a digital walk. You are introduced to the key places and institutions of the metropolis at the time of Rembrandt, which are significant to our exhibition. It also highlights aspects often overlooked in the so-called 'Golden Age.' The digital app is available for use during the exhibition and can also be accessed on the Städel website at the start of the exhibition.

Catalogue: The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue published by Hirmer Verlag and edited by Jochen Sander. With contributions by Stephanie S. Dickey, Corinna Gannon, Norbert E. Middelkoop, Tom van der Molen, Astrid Reuter, Jochen Sander, Friederike Schütt, Kambis Zahedi. In German and English edition, 360 pages, €39.90 (museum edition).

Visitor's guide: A booklet in German is published in conjunction with the exhibition, €9.50.

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