

Dulwich On View

Celebrating people and culture in the Dulwich area

Dulwich meets Oklahoma

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A travelling exhibition of Dutch masterpieces from [Dulwich Picture Gallery](#) is on its way back to London after being on show at the [Oklahoma City Museum of Art](#).

The Gallery's Director, **Ian Dejardin**, spoke with Oklahoma's Associate Curator, **Jennifer Klos**, about the exhibition *The Dutch Italianates: 17th-century Masterpieces from Dulwich Picture Gallery*.

JK: What is most interesting about Dulwich Picture Gallery's collection of Dutch Italianate paintings that visitors may not know?

ID: Dulwich Picture Gallery was founded in 1811 and is the first public art gallery in England, which means that these paintings have been on public view for nearly 200 years. In that time, of course, tastes change. At the time these paintings were acquired, these were very, very famous names indeed and far better known and far more collected in this country than the great classic Dutch landscapists.



Nicolaes Berchem was one of the great gods of art, and nowadays people haven't heard of him. That always fascinates me. I think it's one of the most interesting things, the history of taste, because things go in and out of fashion. They are seen as million-pound paintings one minute, and nobody wants them the next. And because we have been here so long, we actually have several areas of painting on display in our gallery of the highest possible quality that have gone completely out of fashion for a period and then

are on their way back. It's charting the course...the paintings themselves don't change but our appreciation of them does. It's like rediscovering a whole new phase of art history.

JK: What particular features characterize these paintings as Dutch Italianate?

ID: The Dutch Italianates were right there at the creation of the classical landscape in Italy. They play an important role in it. With the exception of one or two, Dutch Italianates have a very

particular feel to them that sets them apart. The Dutch are famously frank. They are not interested in the nonsense that they would have perceived in the Italian character.

The Dutch Italianates were electrified by the landscape. But you will find, even in the most classical of their paintings, there are also Dutch elements, as with **Cornelis van Poelenburch's** *Valley with Ruins and Figures* (right). As your eye moves into the center of the painting, you see that someone has put out their washing to dry. There is the old Roman ruin in the center and what the Dutch artist does is put the washing out to dry.



That's what I love about them. They like the little touches of real life. In all the landscapes, you will find this very particular view of the inhabitants, the very colorful peasant population, shepherdesses, muleteers.

JK: Did the contemporary Italian artists of the seventeenth century respect these Dutch artists?

ID: Very rarely. One of the most interesting things about this is that these painters have acquired this label, "the Dutch Italianates." Of course, they were not known as that in their own day. They were just seen as Dutch artists. The reason that "Dutch Italianates" is such an unfortunate "dog-eared" label is because it gives the impression that they lived in Italy. They didn't. They visited Italy, some of them for a comparatively short time, some of them for quite a long time. A lot of them would spend a year, 18 months, to two years. And when you consider the difficulties of the journey, that is quite a commitment.

JK: For the artists who did not have the chance to travel to Italy, who influenced them the most?

ID: The most influential artists would be **Jan Both** and **Cornelis van Poelenburch**. For instance, [**Aelbert**] **Cuyp** was electrified by Jan Both. There are two Cuyp paintings in the exhibition, *Landscape with Cattle and Figures* and *Herdsmen with Cows*, which are effectively identical in subject matter. And what has happened is that in between those two compositions, Cuyp has seen the works of Jan Both. So it's Jan Both who teaches Cuyp how to capture a different light from what the classic Dutch artists were producing. I also think Poelenburch was hugely influential in [the work of] Utrecht. He was larger than life, influencing whole generations of artists.

Of course, what fascinates me about Holland is how close everybody was to each other. You think of artists in Haarlem and artists in Amsterdam without realizing that Haarlem is precisely 12 miles away from Amsterdam. It was never very hard to be influenced by other artists in Holland. You just jumped on a horse and rode down the road a bit.

There's more from Jennifer and Ian on DOV later this week.

Images: with thanks to Dulwich Picture Gallery.