

A little Italy

Making a stop at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, a collection of paintings highlights influential 17th-century Dutch painters.

BY ALLISON MEIER

The Dutch Italianates: 17th-Century Masterpieces from Dulwich Picture Gallery

OPENING 5:30 P.M. TONIGHT,
ON DISPLAY THROUGH JAN. 3, 2010
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Once revered as equals of Rembrandt and Vermeer, the 17th-century Dutch Italianates faded out of prominence in art's historical memory. But through the ambitions of a Polish king and the founding of a London gallery, a comprehensive collection of the masters' art upholds the works' reputation.

"The Dutch Italianates: 17th-century Masterpieces from Dulwich Picture Gallery" debuts tonight at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art. The museum is the last stop for the 39 paintings' American tour and includes art by Nicolaes Berchem, Aelbert Cuyp, Karel Dujardin, Adam Pynacker and Philips Wouwermans.

"They are all Dutch painters who were looking to Italy for their inspiration, whether it be for elements of the composition or subject matter," said Jennifer Klos, associate curator and department coordinator at the museum. "Italy has always been an inspiration for most of Europe, but particularly in the 17th century. After the success of the Renaissance, everyone's looking to Italy to learn about classical art and becoming inspired by it.

"From a mere geographic perspective, the Dutch were interested in going down and seeing the bright Italian sky and the light that is different from what tends to be an overcast and kind of cloudy Holland."

The exhibit was organized by Dulwich Picture Gallery through International Arts & Artists, and the opportunity to see the Dutch Italianates works outside of England came as the gallery prepares to celebrate its 200th

anniversary. Rather than put the pieces in storage while they renovate, Dulwich sent them on a tour through Virginia, California, Pennsylvania and, now, Oklahoma.

"These are some of the very best paintings of the 17th century, so I hope that the public in Oklahoma can have a revelation because the art is very beautiful and they're easy to enjoy," said Ian DeJardin, director of the Dulwich Picture Gallery. "There's a lot of humor in them and a lot of human interest, too. I really do hope that people are surprised and bring the paintings back to the level of appreciation that they should never have lost."

He will give an opening-night lecture on the gallery and the collection 5:30-6:30 p.m. tonight.

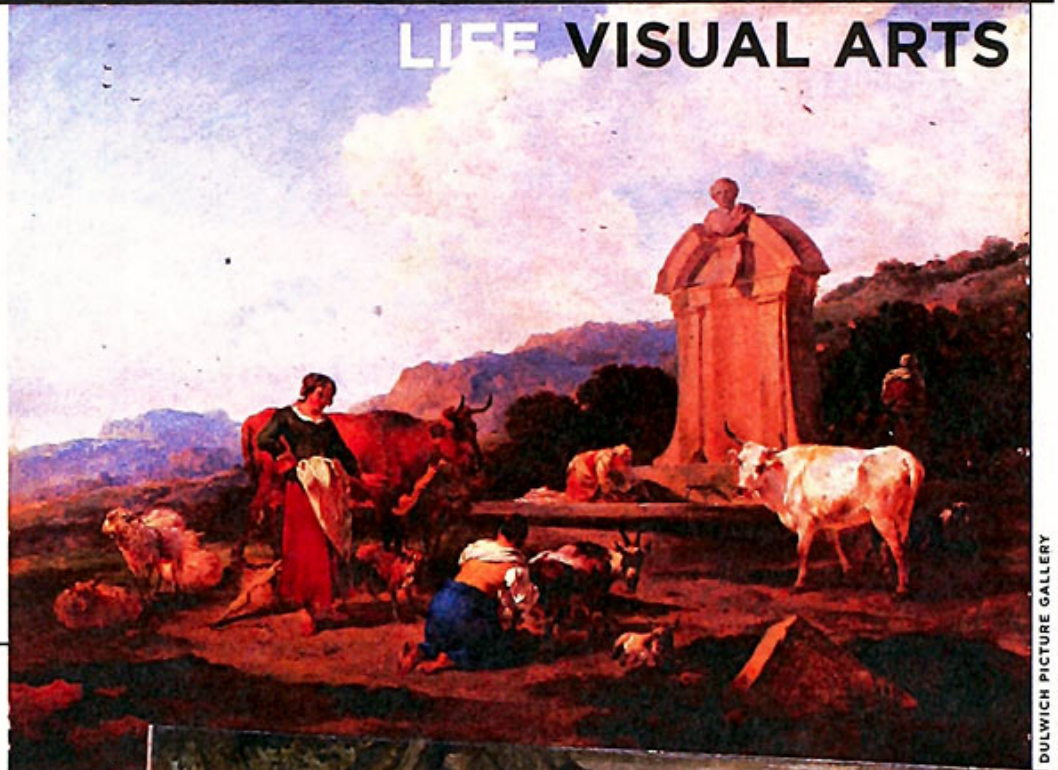
Whether working in Italy or only from secondhand sketches, the artists incorporated elements of classical Roman architecture into landscapes of mountains and rivers under luminescent skies. While landscape artists of other countries cleared their scenery of life but the trees, the Dutch artists populated them with people and animals.

"This is a very Dutch element where you have this pristine landscape and then all the sudden you may have a shepherd, peasants or milk maids in the composition referencing everyday life," Klos said. "If you pay attention to the figures, they look natural. These are elements that reference everyday life in Holland."

Although the artists were capturing the exoticism of Italy through marble columns, ancient bridges and temple ruins, they also included the familiar by re-creating Italian and Dutch people.

"They loved ordinary people and animals, and you'll find some wonderful horses in these paintings," DeJardin said. "If you went to this exhibition and only looked at the horses, you'd have a wonderful time."

The paintings were first collected as Stanislaus Augustus, the last king of Poland, planned to set up a massive



top Nicolaes P. Berchem's "Roman Fountain with Cattle and Figures"
bottom Jan Weenix's "Landscape with Shepherd Boy"

museum in Warsaw that would be comprehensive of the history of art, including all time periods from around the world. He commissioned two London collectors, but before they finished the deal, Poland was partitioned by its powerful neighbor Russia, lead by Stanislaus Augustus' ex-lover, Catherine the Great. The king was exiled and the collectors didn't get their commission.

"Our founders were left with the paintings they had already collected for him and couldn't find a buyer," DeJardin said. "They tried Russia and the British government and no dice, so they decided to carry on building the collection and gave it to Dulwich College in London in 1811, and that's how our gallery was founded."

As a condition of the donation, the art had to be made available to the public, making the Dulwich Picture Gallery the oldest purpose-built public

art gallery in England. Although the Dutch Italianates may have fallen out of art collecting fashion, they had such an enormous influence on the 18th-century aesthetic in France and England, that it crossed the Atlantic to inspire 19th-century American art.

"These paintings are among the most beautiful landscapes produced by any country in the 17th century," DeJardin said. "We have been part of the process of bringing these artists back to public appreciation, and that's really what I want to do because amongst these names, there are a few that are quite well known, but they are all absolutely brilliant artists." **OKG**

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