

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

## No-name Dutch masters

### *If you go*

**What:** "The Dutch Italianates: Seventeenth-Century Masterpieces From Dulwich Picture Gallery" at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary

**When:** Through March 22

**Admission:** \$10

**Information:** [www.wm.edu/muscarelle](http://www.wm.edu/muscarelle);

(757) 221-2700

ROY PROCTOR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

November 30, 2008

**WILLIAMSBURG** Aelbert Cuyp, Nicolaes Berchem, Karel Dujardin, Philips Wouwerman, Adam Pynacker.

If gallerygoers respond to that roll call at all, it's probably because they've glimpsed these no-names on labels attached to the paintings they fly past to see pictures by Rembrandt and Franz Hals, the universally acknowledged masters of 17th-century Dutch art.

Now comes Ian Dejardin, the 53-year-old Scottish director of suburban London's Dulwich Picture Gallery, with a different perspective.

Perhaps Rembrandt and Hals haven't left Cuyp and company in their dust after all, Dejardin suggested.

Take another look at the 39 paintings by 17 artists in "The Dutch Italianates: Seventeenth-Century Masterpieces From Dulwich Picture Gallery," which has settled into a four-month run at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary.

Art history is now bending in their favor.

"The history of taste is a strange thing," Dejardin said an hour after he arrived in Williamsburg to attend the opening of "Dutch Italianates," which is launching a four-museum American tour here.

"When the founders of the Dulwich were buying art [in the 1790s], Berchem was considered one of the titans of Dutch art. Look how far he's fallen in public esteem. Rembrandt is remarkable in the history of art because he never went out of fashion. Other artists have not been so lucky."

Why did Berchem fall out of favor?

Because, in Dejardin's view, painter John Constable and art critic John Ruskin, those arbiters of British taste in the 19th century, didn't like him.

After Constable blasted Berchem in an 1836 lecture, Dejardin tells us in his catalog essay, a glum gentleman approached him.

"I suppose I had better sell my Berchems," the man told Constable.

"No, sir," Constable replied, "that will only continue the mischief."

"Burn them!"

To Constable and Ruskin, worthy 17th-century Dutch landscape was exemplified by the paintings of Jacob van Ruisdael and his student, Meindert Hobbema, whose moody images show such things as windmills silhouetted against a stormy sky in a flat landscape.

How different were the visions of those 17th-century Dutch painters - called collectively the Dutch Italianates - who either visited Italy or were influenced by those who made the southward trek.

"The Dutch Italianates were landscapists," Dejardin said, "but what makes them different are all the people in their landscapes and the kinds of people they painted.

"They painted low-lives. They were obsessed with milkmaids and shepherds. In Rome, where most of them were, it was the tavern, the beggar, the prostitute, the life on the street that interested them.

"The Italians were scandalized by that. It's very different from Ruisdael and Hobbema. It's also very different from Claude Lorraine and Italian landscape painting of that era. The Italians preferred Claude or Poussin because their landscapes illustrated classical and biblical stories.

"What fascinates me is that, although artists have always gone to Italy because it's the home of art, other artists were there to look at Michelangelo and Raphael and Guido Reni.

"The Dutch, instead, looked at the people themselves. They liked the climate and the picturesqueness of everything. Everything in Italy was more colorful than in Holland, and their paintings show it.

"Their different style has to do partly with the landscape itself - the mountains, forests and ruins of Italy."

Unlike the Muscarelle's "View From the Uffizi" exhibition early this year, which pulled all of its paintings from the storage rooms of Italy's Uffizi Gallery, most of the paintings in "The Dutch Italianates" are normally on permanent view at Dulwich.

This show will move on to art museums in Fresno, Calif., Pittsburgh and Oklahoma City when it closes here.