

# The Virginia Informer

## Muscarelle's Dutch Italianate exhibit sheds light on Dutch art history

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Although the room featuring the Muscarelle Museum of Art's exhibit *The Dutch Italianates: Seventeenth-Century Masterpieces from Dulwich Picture Gallery* is dimly lit, the works shown there are anything but dark.

The works in *The Dutch Italianates* showcase, which opened November 16, feature landscapes in which the sky is the focal point, allowing artists to examine the different qualities of light. Dutch Italianates marveled at the landscape and light qualities of Rome, and so painted Roman backgrounds with Dutch people practicing their vocations - hunting, farming, and blacksmithing - in the foreground. This often resulted in "idealized, sun-drenched views of the Roman campagna (countryside) rendered with meticulous Dutch naturalism," according to the exhibit's introductory notes. Over time, because of a surge of patriotism, the Dutch Italianates' ideals evolved into a prevailing preference for Dutch landscapes.



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This collection of works, which includes such artists as Philips Wouwermans, Adam Pynacker, Nicolaes Berchem, and Aelbert Cuyp, is on loan from the Dulwich Picture Gallery, lauded by the Muscarelle as "the best small museum in all of Europe." The collection displays many different approaches to the Italianate style. Nicolaes Berchem's works have an indistinct, hazy quality to the landscape, but an amazing amount of detail to the figures; the cows' hides are so realistic that the rest of the painting seems to be in an unrealistic fog.

Unfortunately, the attention paid to the atmosphere and landscape is sometimes spoiled by the lack of precision in the foreground's figures. Abraham van Calraet's "White Horse in a Riding School" shows a tiny woman, assumedly for a sense of distance, who is decidedly unconvincing. Another of his paintings, *Two Horses*, includes considerable flaws in the horses' proportions which detract from his work's better aspects.

A good balance between hazy landscape and exact figures is found in the work of Adam Pynacker. His *Bridge in an Italian Landscape* shows a great deal of detail in the foreground, including the bridge, plants, and trees, while the background maintains the hazy quality, but applies it to figures in the distance as well, making the perspective and atmosphere much more realistic, and by extension, suturing the gap between the Dutch figures and Roman landscape.

Similarly, Pynacker's *Landscape with Sportsmen and Game* shows a master's skill in its extraordinarily detailed birch trees and hunting dogs while still maintaining a beautiful Roman haze in the distance. One special aspect of this painting is its cornflower-blue vegetation; while absolutely stunning today, the color is inaccurate. The paint Pynacker used in 1665 was chemically unstable, and so the green leaves have changed to a brilliant blue with time.

The exhibit's focus, though narrow, covers an often overlooked part of art history and allows the viewer an excellent opportunity to examine the aspects of a genre that, according to the exhibit's notes, "profoundly influenced the eighteenth-century French and English aesthetic, and even carried over to nineteenth-century America." The Dutch *Italianates* is on display in the Muscarelle Museum of Art until March 22 and is free to all members of the College community.