

## **MASTERS OF DUTCH PAINTING AT THE PEABODY ESSEX MUSEUM**

*The Golden Age of Dutch Seascapes* on view from June 13 through September 7, 2009



The Peabody Essex Museum presents *The Golden Age of Dutch Seascapes*, 70 works by Dutch masters of maritime art working in the time of Rembrandt and Vermeer. Painted during the peak years of Dutch artistic achievement between 1600 and 1700, these superlative, emotional works are the first in which European artists realistically depicted natural settings, rendering coastal atmospheres with great focus and virtuosic technique. Artists such as Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan Porcellis, Simon De Vlieger and Ludolf Backhuysen were masters of air, light and water, and used their prodigious talent to convey a world of political allegory and mystical allusion on canvas.

“These paintings offered a completely new experience in Western art — a you-are-there quality that places the viewer within the setting, amidst thunderstorms, driving wind, and white-capped seas,” said Daniel Finamore, the Museum’s Russell W. Knight Curator of Maritime Art and History, “The ocean was no longer a mere backdrop, but a vital natural force to be contemplated, confronted and rendered with passion.”

Nothing matches the sea as a subject for its versatility, its many moods, and the endlessly intriguing optical effects of water and light. Dutch masters of paint and color attracted to the seascape developed novel approaches to composition and technique. The methods pioneered by the artists in this exhibition traveled well, spreading from the Netherlands to England, the rest of Europe, and ultimately to the Americas, serving as the foundation for the many examples of maritime paintings in the collection of the Peabody Essex Museum. Fittingly, the Museum is the only U.S. venue for this exhibition, originating from the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK.

### **The Sea – A New Subject**

With works celebrating Dutch trade and commemorating military victories, the seascape became a popular genre serving the tastes of a prosperous Dutch Republic. Aristocratic patrons and wealthy burghers commissioned works intended for intimate viewing and public display.

### **A Sea of Symbols**

The sea and the vessels traversing it bore rich meaning for Flemish and Dutch artists, who voraciously mined the visual vocabulary offered by maritime subjects. A ship could represent the progress of an individual soul or the unified destiny of a nation with equal impact. Storms and shipwrecks supplied ample drama in the form of obvious danger from greater powers, as in *Seascape with Sailors Sheltering from a Rainstorm* by Bonaventura Peeters the Elder, while half-hidden rocks and submerged sea creatures suggested mystery, uncertainty or the realm of the supernatural. Military assertions and ecclesiastical refuge took geological forms that clearly communicated the artist's position — or that of his patron — on Dutch political or spiritual life.

### **Vistas of the Netherlands**

As the Dutch emerged as a world military and economic presence, they projected an increasingly consistent image of their country and lifestyle through their art. Luminous streams of sunlight amid atmospheric clouds characterize a typical lowland sky. Coastal cities as depicted by Abraham Storck were recognizable to 17<sup>th</sup>-century inhabitants and represented the general nature of Dutch life at the time, rather than resorting to biblical allusions or historical conventions.

### **Far Horizons**

National exploration and expansion enlivened Dutch painting, fueling a particular desire for Scandinavian and Mediterranean scenes. Commercial relationships ultimately altered Dutch taste and imagination with fir trees and glaciers from the North, and idealized monuments and ruins from the South. Art aficionados would be familiar with such Italian settings, and the very sight of them evoked pleasure, elegance and

exoticism. The sun-suffused *A Spanish Three-Decker at Anchor off Naples* by Abraham Willaerts breezily captures Mediterranean light and atmosphere and would have deftly transported Dutch viewers abroad.

### **Patronage, Battles and the Exotic**

The inspiration of military might in Golden Age painting cannot be overstated. Netherlandish forces were unabashed in their celebration of naval victories and heroes. Pictures such as *A Dutch Settlement in India, Probably Surat* by Ludolf Backhuysen were commissioned by Dutch provincial potentates, cities or by the admirals themselves. Artists often accompanied the fleet to commemorate battles, at times compressing various episodes of a naval event into a single scene, bringing all of the pictorial power of war and seascape to bear. The interplay of gun smoke, fire and water tested the limits of artistic technique and infused every painting with potency and true bravado.

### **THE CONSERVATION OF DUTCH PAINTINGS**

The preservation of fine art is as fascinating as the works themselves. The Peabody Essex Museum will host a conservator on-site in *The Golden Age of Dutch Seascapes* galleries to offer our visitors the opportunity to see a painting restored to its original condition, in real time. The conservator-in-residence will be available to answer questions about conservation materials, methods and the project in progress.

### **EXHIBITION EVENTS**

#### **PRESS PREVIEW | TUESDAY | JUNE 9, 2009 | 9:30 — 11:30 AM**

Breakfast, Preview and Exhibition Tour with Daniel Finamore, The Russell W. Knight Curator of Maritime Art and History. Please respond to Whitney Riepe, [whitney\\_riepe@pem.org](mailto:whitney_riepe@pem.org) or 978-745-9500 x3228 to attend. *The Peabody Essex Museum is a world away and just five stops from North Station (Boston) on the commuter rail.*

#### **ATRIUM ALIVE WEEKEND FESTIVAL: THE GOLDEN AGE OF DUTCH SEASCAPES**

##### **SATURDAY AND SUNDAY | JUNE 13-14 | ALL DAY**

Embark on a seafaring adventure for all ages at the Peabody Essex Museum. Enjoy docent-led tours through *The Golden Age of Dutch Seascapes*, learn nautical knots and rigging, construct your own telescope, sketch and watercolor with artist Jim Chisholm, immerse yourself at sea with live music and interactive storytelling, and watch a film about the adventures of 17th-century sea travel. *All events are free with museum admission.*

#### **MASTERPIECE LECTURES | CONSERVATION SLEUTHING: REVEALING THE DUTCH MASTERS**

##### **SATURDAY | JUNE 13 | 3:00 — 4:30 PM**

Consider how conservation efforts over the last 20 years have influenced our understanding of Dutch paintings. Topics include the physical aspects of conservation, philosophical and ethical issues involved in restoration work, and connections between the maritime paintings on view in *The Golden Age of Dutch Seascapes* and those in the PEM collection. Presenters are renowned curator and art historian Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., Ph.D., from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; Ian McClure, chief conservator at the Yale University Art Gallery; and Daniel Finamore, The Russell W. Knight Curator of Maritime Art and History at PEM and organizing curator for the exhibition. *Included with museum admission.*

## DUTCH BEER-TASTING EVENT

THURSDAY | AUGUST 20 | 6:30 — 9:30 PM

MEMBERS: \$50 | NONMEMBERS: \$60

Indulge in an evening of Dutch culture and camaraderie! Begin with a special curatorial tour of *The Golden Age of Dutch Seascapes*, take in a talk with Dutch beer history and culture expert Peter G. Rose, author of *Matters of Taste: Food and Drink and Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art and Life*, and sample six of the finest Dutch and Flemish beers paired with an abundance of delicious Dutch foods. *Designated drivers will be admitted free and treated to soft drinks, food, and all of the evening's activities.*

**IMAGE CREDIT (ABOVE):** *The Darsena delle Galere and Castello Nuovo at Naples, 1703*, Caspar van Wittel, 755 x 1410mm, Oil on panel, © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK.

**EXHIBITION CREDITS:** *This exhibition was organized by the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, UK, where it appeared under the title Turmoil and Tranquillity. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support provided by ECHO (Education through Cultural and Historical Organizations). The in-gallery conservation project and related video were made possible through a generous grant from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.*

### About the Peabody Essex Museum

The Peabody Essex Museum presents art and culture from New England and around the world. The museum's collections are among the finest of their kind, showcasing an unrivaled spectrum of American art and architecture (including four National Historic Landmark buildings) and outstanding Asian, Asian Export, Native American, African, Oceanic, Maritime and Photography collections. In addition to its vast collections, the museum offers a vibrant schedule of changing exhibitions and a hands-on education center. The museum campus features numerous parks, period gardens and historic properties, including Yin Yu Tang, a 200-year-old house that is the only example of Chinese domestic architecture on display in the United States.

**HOURS:** Open Tuesday-Sunday and holiday Mondays, 10 am-5 pm. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day. **ADMISSION:** Adults \$15; seniors \$13; students \$11. Additional admission to Yin Yu Tang: \$5. Members, youth 16 and under and residents of Salem enjoy free general admission and free admission to Yin Yu Tang. **INFO:** Call 866-745-1876 or visit our Web site at [www.pem.org](http://www.pem.org).

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