



# PORTRAIT GALLERY OF THE GOLDEN AGE

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RJKS MUSEUM

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## On display at Hermitage Amsterdam from 29 November 2014: *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age*

The exhibition *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* will open in Hermitage Amsterdam from 29 November 2014 until the end of 2016. The presentation features over thirty group portraits dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. These enormous paintings originate from the Amsterdam Museum and Rijksmuseum and are accompanied by other paintings and objects, including Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman*. Together they illustrate the story of collective citizenship that typifies the Netherlands. These "brothers and sisters" of the Night Watch are unique in the world and rarely seen due to their size. Thanks to a special partnership between the Amsterdam Museum, Rijksmuseum and Hermitage Amsterdam, these masterpieces will be visible to a large international audience.

The question of who these civic guards, regents and regentesses were and their achievements within 17th century urban culture forms the thread of the story. While the power in the rest of Europe lay in the hands of rulers and church officials, the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands was ruled by the bourgeoisie. By governing city and country, trading, taking on the city's defence, stimulating scientific developments and setting up and managing the social safety net, the citizens ensured that the Republic became one of the most powerful and prosperous nations in Europe. The exhibition literally and figuratively gives a face to these influential men and women, particularly those from the city of Amsterdam, and makes it clear how the 17th century mentality led to manners and standards that can still be recognized in contemporary society.

Immediately upon entering the large ground floor hall in the Herenvleugel exhibition wing, visitors stand face to face with these influential citizens. The canvases - the largest of which measures approximately 3 x 6 metres - are hung in two rows and guarantee a spectacular presentation.

### Civic guard group portraits

As 'guardians' of the city the civic guards commissioned group portraits that adorned the walls of the target practice building, where members of the civic guards met. The two largest civic guard group portraits, both painted in 1642 from the Rijksmuseum collection (on loan from the city of Amsterdam) originally hung in the Musket Bearers target practice grounds on the same wall as the Night Watch and have not been on public display for decades.



Nicolaes Eliasz Pickenoy, *Civic Guards from the Company of Captain Jan Claesz Vlooswijck*, 1642, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 340 x 527 cm



Jacob Backer, *Civic Guards from the Company of Captain Cornelis de Graeff*, 1642, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 367 x 511 cm

### Regent group portraits

In addition to their efforts in the area of public order and safety, the wealthy upper-class city dwellers also took care of the administration of care and disciplinary institutions. In order to record their charitable activities and good governance, these regents and regentesses often had themselves portrayed at conference tables while engaged in their administrative tasks. Two fairly early regent portraits by Werner van den Valckert are currently being restored by the Rijksmuseum and will be on display for the first time in *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age*. The paintings show that in 17th century Holland the board of a charity was by no means composed exclusively of men. The women who were also portrayed were even responsible for the daily running of the hostels.



Werner van den Valckert, *Four Regents and the Patriarch of Amsterdam Lepers' Asylum*, 1624, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 134 x 209 cm



Werner van den Valckert, *Three Regentesses and the Matriarch of the Amsterdam Lepers' Asylum*, 1624, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 132 x 189.5 cm

### Guild portraits

Even wealthy craft guilds could afford to commission group portraits. The guild with the most group portraits to its name is the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons. The guild portraits of the Surgeons are highlighted in the side cabinets on the ground floor. Unique Anatomy Lessons are on display, including Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman* painted in 1656.



Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Deijman*, 1656, Amsterdam Museum, 100 x 134 cm

#### **Link to the present**

On the top floor, the exhibition delves more deeply into urban society and the background of Dutch group portraits in the Golden Age. Historical images are interspersed with audiovisual presentations, which include links to the present day. Typical Dutch cultural achievements such as egalitarianism, tolerance and liberty are explored in detail and *Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age* draws a parallel between the 17th century Republic and the Netherlands of today. A mirror is held up to Dutch visitors; for foreign visitors the exhibition offers an introduction to the Dutch mentality of the past and present.

*The exhibition Portrait Gallery of the Golden Age is made possible thanks to the participation of BankGiro Lottery and Mondriaan Fonds.*

For further information: [www.amsterdammuseum.com](http://www.amsterdammuseum.com)

#### Editorial note:

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