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Dutch art new to Western

Tabitha Chan February 11, 2014 No Comments »

Current Issue



Courtesy of McIntosh Gallery

Western University's McIntosh Gallery is partnering with the National Gallery of Canada for the first time in 35 years to present an exciting exhibition titled "Storms and Bright Skies: Three Centuries of Dutch Landscapes." The show explores how landscapes shaped Dutch culture and lifestyle between the 17th and 19th centuries. It features many Dutch artists, including the renowned Rembrandt van Rijn.

James Patten, the director and chief curator of the gallery, says that landscapes are an integral piece to the development of Dutch art because for the Dutch, land symbolized a pride for their country and for the advent of new technology. Windmills, canals and boats are common motifs found in the artwork of this exhibition.

"From our way of looking, [windmills, canals and boats] sometimes look really quaint and old-fashioned, but at the time, that was cutting edge technology. The canals were the super highways of the day and the windmills were the power force where energy came from," Patten says.

The show gives viewers an insight to what European society was like 400 years ago. According to Patten, the Dutch had a very interactive relationship with the land and used it to advance society.

"The Dutch were a very democratic society with a strong middle class. A lot of people owned their own land, worked on it and used technology to develop it," Patten says. All those things make the landscape more important in Holland than in other countries at the time."

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Although Rembrandt is well known for his paintings, this exhibition specifically features drawings and prints from a variety of Dutch artists. Printmaking was a crucial means of communication for society.

"Printmaking itself was a new technology, akin to the Internet of its day that allowed people to communicate over distance. Prints were the only way of communicating multiple images," Patten says.

One of the featured prints in this show is Rembrandt's "The Windmill" created in 1641. This original etching is characteristic of the artist's incredible attention to detail and light. "The Windmill" is one of four etchings created by Rembrandt displayed in this exhibition.

"The one of the windmill is fascinating because he has pushed it all the way to one side so that you get to see the land behind it. This windmill is equivalent to a power station to us today," Patten says. "It's all in detail and looks very beautiful, but he's really showing something industrial and powerful."

This particular exhibition is definitely not one to be missed. There will be more opportunities in March for students to learn about the exhibit including three artist-led tours and a lecture from Sonia Del Re, the assistant curator of the show from the National Gallery of Canada.

"We're really lucky to have this show here because the quality of each individual work is very high. They're all from the National Gallery's permanent collection. It's certainly one of the most prestigious exhibitions we've had in many years," Patten says.

Storms and Bright Skies: Three Centuries of Dutch Landscapes will be at the McIntosh Gallery from February 13 to April 5. The opening reception of the show is open to the public on February 13 at 7:30 p.m.

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