



COVER: Charles Hopkinson, *Group of Children (Portrait of the Artist's Daughters: Harriet, Mary and Isabella)* [detail], 1911, oil, 48 x 35, private collection.

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# Dutch Utopia: American Artists in Holland, 1880-1914

by Holly Koons McCullough  
& Annette Stott

Howcasing more than seventy paintings from public and private collections throughout the United States and Europe, *Dutch Utopia: American Artists in Holland, 1880-1914* explores the work of forty-three American artists drawn to Holland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Escaping the rapid urbanization of their time, these artists converged in colonies in six communities in the Netherlands: Dordrecht, Egmond, Katwijk, Laren, Rijsoord, and Volendam.

Inspired by their pastoral surroundings, and heavily influenced by the great traditions of seventeenth-century Dutch art as well as the contemporary Hague School, these American artists created visions of Dutch society underpinned by a nostalgic yearning for a pre-modern way of life. Some even alluded to America's own colonial Dutch heritage, exploring shared histories and cultural connections between the two countries.

Included in the exhibition are works by artists who remain celebrated today, such as Robert Henri, William Merritt Chase, and John Singer Sargent, and by painters ad-

mired in their own time but less well-known now. These include accomplished women such as Elizabeth Nourse and Anna Stanley, as well as George Hitchcock, Gari Melchers, and Walter MacEwen, who built international reputations with Salon pictures of Dutch landscapes and costumed figures.

RIGHT: Elizabeth Nourse, *On the Dyke at Volendam*, 1892, o/c, 62 x 49, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen G. Vollmer.

FAR RIGHT: Walter MacEwen, *L'absente (The Absent One on All Souls' Day)*, 1889, o/c, 63 x 49 1/4, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Liège, Belgium.







*Dutch Utopia: American Artists in Holland, 1880-1914* is on view from October 1, 2009, through January 10, 2010, at the Telfair Museum of Art, 121 Barnard Street, Savannah, Georgia, 912-790-8800, [www.telfair.org](http://www.telfair.org). Organized by the Telfair Museum of Art, in association with the Singer Laren Museum in the Netherlands, it is accompanied by a 242-page hardcover catalogue. The exhibition will travel to the Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio, February 5 through May 2, 2010; Grand Rapids Art Museum, Michigan, May 21 through August 15, 2010; and the Singer Laren Museum, the Netherlands, September 16, 2010 through January 16, 2011.

RIGHT: Herman Herzog, *Moonlight in Holland*, oil on board, 22 x 26, private collection.

LEFT: William Merritt Chase, *Along the Canal (Haarlem, Holland)*, c. 1884, oil on wood panel, 10 x 13 1/2, Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, New York, gift of a Friend of the Gallery.



During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, wealthy American industrialists began collecting on the international art market on an unprecedented scale.

Savvy collectors, such as Pittsburgh industrialist Henry Clay Frick and Boston socialite Isabella Stewart Gardner, were particularly eager to acquire works created

by the old Dutch masters. Newspapers reported record sales, and exhibitions brought many Americans into contact with Dutch old master paintings. The desire to





ABOVE: Robert Henri, *Dutch Girl Laughing*, 1907, o/c, 32 x 26, Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, Dallas Art Association Purchase.

ABOVE LEFT: George Henry Boughton, *Weeding the Pavement*, 1882, o/c, 36 x 60, Tate, London, presented by Sir Henry Tate, 1894.

LEFT: George Hitchcock, *In Windmill Land*, o/c, 44 x 35 1/4, Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York, gift of the Baker/Pisano Collection.

RIGHT: Walter MacEwen, *Returning from Work*, c. 1885, o/c, 41 1/2 x 75, collection of George Haigh.

BELOW RIGHT: Charles Yardley Turner, *The Grand Canal, Dordrecht, Holland*, 1885, o/c, 38 x 65, collection of the Haring family.

arrived in Holland with expectations of the contemporary Dutch scene informed by old master paintings, and augmented by literature like John Lothrop Motley's best-selling histories of the Dutch republic (1856 and 1860) and other illustrated texts that romanticized Holland. As a result, these nineteenth-century American artists created visions of contemporary Holland that bore the imprint of the seventeenth century in multiple ways.

Robert Henri spent the summers of 1907 and 1910 in Holland. His memorable portrait of a laughing Dutch girl owes a clear debt to Frans Hals, while quiet domestic interiors by Walter MacEwen allude to the work of Vermeer and De Hooch. Charles Yardley Turner re-created the palette of an old master painting in *The Grand Canal, Dordrecht, Holland*, a work much admired in the nineteenth century.

see more of these paintings was a strong motivating factor for American painters traveling to the Netherlands. A customary

trip involved taking in the Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem and visiting the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. These Americans





...seventeenth-century flavor. During the second half of the nineteenth century a group of painters based in The Hague were hailed as the hope for a new Golden Age. These artists consciously set out to restore Dutch art to its former glory, painting the ordinary people and landscapes common to seventeenth-century art, and patterning their work on Rembrandt, Ruisdael, and other old masters. Yet their practice was filtered through the more contemporary lens of the French Barbizon school, and many Hague School artists—sometimes called “Dutch Barbizon”)—worked outdoors, directly from nature.

American artists in Holland readily absorbed the influence of the Hague School. MacEwen’s sizeable *Returning from Work*, a significant success at the Salon of 1886, reflects a Hague School theme in its depiction of humble villagers treading home after a long day of work in the bogs. Even the loose application of paint in this work, generally uncharacteristic of MacEwen, attests to the strong influence of contemporary Dutch art. Many American artists in Holland studied under or formed close friendships with Hague School masters. William Merritt Chase, who made three



summer forays to Holland, had a long-standing acquaintance with Hendrik Willem Mesdag. In 1903, Chase took the pupils from his summer class based in Haarlem to visit Mesdag in The Hague. Chase’s vibrant oil sketch of a canal in Haarlem records his presence in that city.

While the work of American painters in Holland during the 1880s generally reflected the influence of the older generation of Dutchmen, eventually both Dutch and

American painters left the path of the Hague School to explore a lighter and broader palette, such as the soft, luminous work of Gus Bisschop, George Mead, and the members of the *Impressionists*.

Paintings of rural landscapes with their humble but vibrant color schemes became increasingly popular throughout Europe and America during the last decades of the nineteenth century. There was a widespread desire for a rapidly passing way of life, where





sought out remote Dutch villages where townspeople wore traditional regional costumes and ancient windmills or watermills still ground grain and sawed lumber. To

some extent, American artists in Holland romanticized the Dutch countryside as a source of spiritual renewal in contrast to the crowded, industrial American cities.

The popularity of old master Dutch art among American audiences in the late nineteenth century stemmed in part from a perceived kinship between the two countries, both of which had fought off tyranny to embrace democracy and freedom. Some also believed that the peoples of the two nations shared character traits such as industriousness, inventiveness, self-reliance, and tolerance.<sup>1</sup> These points of convergence in national identities were often traced to the Dutch colony in North America that eventually became New York, and to the descendants of those colonists who spread out across the eastern seaboard during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Along with scenes of contemporary Holland, some American artists created imaginative history paintings of colonial America's New Netherland. Others created paintings that evoked the character traits they most admired in the Dutch. Charles Frederick Ulrich's *The Village Printing Shop, Haarlem, Holland* not only depicts the immaculate and efficiently organized inter-





ABOVE: Walter MacEwen, *The Ghost Story*, 1887, o/c, 47 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 75 $\frac{3}{8}$ , The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, gift of Mrs. Edward S. Harness.

RIGHT: Charles Frederick Ulrich, *The Village Printing Shop, Haarlem, Holland*, 1884, o/panel, 21 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 23, Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Illinois, Daniel J. Terra Collection.

ABOVE LEFT: Gari Melchers, *The Family*, c. 1895, o/c, 73 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 53 $\frac{3}{8}$ , Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Gallery), Berlin, Germany.

ABOVE FAR LEFT: Gari Melchers, *Skaters*, c. 1892, o/c, 43 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ , Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Joseph E. Temple Fund.

LEFT: John Singer Sargent, *Portrait of Ralph Curtis on the Beach at Scheveningen*, 1880, o/panel, 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ , High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, gift of the Walter Clay Hill and Family Foundation.

or of a small industry, but alludes to the seventeenth-century invention of moveable type and the basic ideal of freedom of the press. Gari Melchers' *The Family* captures the social unit that provided the basic







ABOVE: Gari Melchers, *In Holland*, 1887, o/c, 109 x 77 $\frac{3}{4}$ , Gari Melchers Home and Studio, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

ABOVE LEFT: Wilhelmina Douglas Hawley, *Two Women near the River Waal*, 1894, o/c, 29 x 24, William van Dongen.

LEFT: William Edward Norton, *A Moment's Rest*, 1892, o/c, 48 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 64 $\frac{3}{4}$ , Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., gift of Dr. Morris F. Wiener.

RIGHT: George Hitchcock, *Early Spring in Holland*, c. 1890-1905, o/c, 35 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 51 $\frac{1}{4}$ , Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia, Museum purchase, 1908.

BELOW RIGHT: George Hitchcock, *Maternity* (Maternity), 1889, o/c, 69 x 98, Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums, Aberdeen, Scotland.

building block of Dutch and American society: a father, mother, and two children.

Dordrecht, Egmond, Katwijk, Laren, Rijsoord, and Volendam supported significant colonies of American artists. All but Dordrecht were small, rural villages. Some artist colonies, such as Volendam, had been previously settled by Dutch and other European artists; others, like Egmond, were established by the Americans who gathered there. These Dutch colonies offered many

of the comforts of home: both Catholic and Protestant churches; an innkeeper with sufficient English to communicate; modest, clean homes; and fresh fish or farm produce. American artists flocked to these small communities in part to draw inspiration from the rapidly disappearing traditional lifestyle, and in part because these villages reflected the image of Holland they had derived from the study of seventeenth-century Dutch art.

Some artists were drawn to communities, such as the historically significant city of Dordrecht, that had long attracted Dutch artists. Hometown of the great seventeenth-century landscape artist Aelbert Cuyp, Dordrecht boasted ancient architecture and picturesque canals that attracted American artists. Katwijk, a charming fishing village on the coast, also had roots in seventeenth-century Dutch art. Numerous American artists chose Katwijk because of its plentiful marine subjects and readily available accommodations.





Hague School artist Anton Mauve, famous for his paintings of sheep on the meadows, peasant farmers with their cows, women in humble interiors, settled in Egmond, an art colony established in the nineteenth century by Dutch painters. His presence there drew American artists including Martin Borgord, Emma Lampert Cooper, William Henry Howe, Joseph Ives, and Marcia Oakes Woodbury. Established by two Americans, George Hitchcock and Gari Melchers, Egmond was another important colony. The Salon exhibitions of the two artists garnered international admiration and numerous followers. In contrast to the contemporary Hague School, Melchers and Hitchcock adopted a bright, modernist color palette that influenced the work of other Americans who studied in Egmond. American students also studied in the small colony of Rijsoord, the place of John Vanderpoel, a teacher at the Art Institute of Chicago who regularly accompanied his students there. Volendam, an idiosyncratic fishing village, became an international artists' colony



and the quintessential rural Dutch town, marketed to tourists as the picture-perfect image of the old Netherlands. Dutch scholars attribute its discovery to French travel writer Henry Havard, whose book about

the dead villages of the Zuider Zee aroused the curiosity of artists. George Boughton, Anna Richards Brewster, Robert Henri, Elizabeth Nourse, and Charles Herbert Woodbury are just a few of the diverse





artists to work in Volendam. Nourse's *On the Dyke in Volendam* depicts the stalwart women and children of the village, sending their husbands off to sea. Because of such

widely-exhibited Volendam scenes, the traditional attire of this village became the most popularly recognized Dutch costume among the American public.

ABOVE: James Jebusa Shannon, *On the Dunes* (*Lady Shannon and Kitty*), c. 1900-10, o/c, 73 3/8 x 56 3/8, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., gift of John Gellatly.

ABOVE LEFT: George Hitchcock, *The Sparrow's Nest*, c. 1890-1906, o/c, 22 1/4 x 17 1/4, private collection.

LEFT: Walter Castle Keith, *Beach Scene*, 1905, o/c 29 1/2 x 35 3/8, private collection.

ABOVE RIGHT: Gari-Melchers, *The Unpretentious Garden*, c. 1903-15, o/c, 33 1/2 x 40 1/2, Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia, Museum purchase, Button Gwinnett Autograph Fund.

RIGHT: John Henry Twachtman, *Windmill*, c. 1885, o/c, 38 x 51 1/2, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen G. Vollmer.

Holland became increasingly popular as a destination for tourists during the late nineteenth century. Technological advances in shipping and the proliferation of companies like the Holland America Line provided increased opportunities for travel to the Netherlands. The image of the art colony tourist in Holland was memorably captured by John Singer Sargent in his depiction of his cousin in *Portrait of Ralph Cameron*.





on the Beach at Scheveningen (near The Hague). James Jebusa Shannon, a prominent portraitist and friend of Melchers, portrayed his elegant wife and daughter lounging in Egmond in *On the Dunes* (*Lady Shannon and Kitty*).

Arriving in Holland with preconceived notions of the country based on seventeenth-century Dutch art and contemporary pastoral fantasies, American artists often manipulated the visual reality of Holland to enhance the beauty and appeal of a composition. Some modified architectural settings for dramatic impact, and others combined costumes from different towns and regions in ways that did not reflect contemporary reality. MacEwen's *The Ghost Story*, for instance, was painted in the  
(continued on page 127)

