

A close-up detail of a Dutch Master's portrait painting, showing a person's face with visible brushstrokes and a cracked paint texture. The face is partially visible on the left side of the image, with a focus on the eye and cheek. The background is dark and textured, with some red and white elements visible on the right side.

Dutch Masters

from the
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Dutch Masters

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Hermitage



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Michail Piotrovsky

Dutch Inhabitants of The Hermitage

They have lived in the Hermitage for many years. It has been their home for several centuries. They remember everything that has passed within these walls. They saw Russian tsars and European monarchs, great poets and brilliant generals, famous artists and architects, scholarly art historians from across the world, members of the Provisional Government, wounded soldiers, detachments of revolutionaries and crowds of servants, learned museum curators, crowds of people on guided tours, of tourists, air-raid wardens, leaders of nearly all the countries of the world – not least among them the King and Queen of the Netherlands – and many prime ministers, including the Dutch prime minister.

Along with the Hermitage they endured several world wars, the Russian Revolution, the Siege of Leningrad, the disbanding of the Soviet Union and much much more. All the paintings by Dutch artists in the Hermitage have both a Dutch past and a long Russian existence, their own place in the Hermitage and in Russian culture. To us, they are not just any Rembrandts and Hals, they are our, Hermitage, Rembrandts and Hals. Many have assumed their own special symbolic meanings in the Hermitage context and these combine with purely artistic qualities to create the new meaning of the Hermitage's Dutch collection now being shown in Amsterdam.

Being shown not for the first time, but for the first time on such a scale. When we set up the Hermitage Amsterdam I promised we would never set out to compete with Dutch museums, that we would not send large numbers of Dutch pictures. Many years have passed. The Hermitage Amsterdam has become a full member of the family of Amsterdam museums. We were asked by those in the Dutch cultural world to reconsider our promise. We agreed and the Hermitage's Dutch paintings are travelling to Amsterdam. I hope they will serve as benevolent intermediaries, helping us overcome complications that have emerged despite the long history of friendly relations between our two countries.

Some outstanding people collected Dutch paintings in Russia. Even before the creation of the Hermitage, Tsar Peter, who was enamoured of the Netherlands, ordered the acquisition of Dutch pictures. Depictions of ships and the sea not only pleased his eyes but were an aid in construction of the Russian fleet. The Dutch way of life was recalled in jolly feasting scenes in the spirit of Jan Steen. Interestingly, several pictures included figures who seem to recall Peter himself, although it is hard to say if this was mere chance or a jest on the part of the picture dealer.

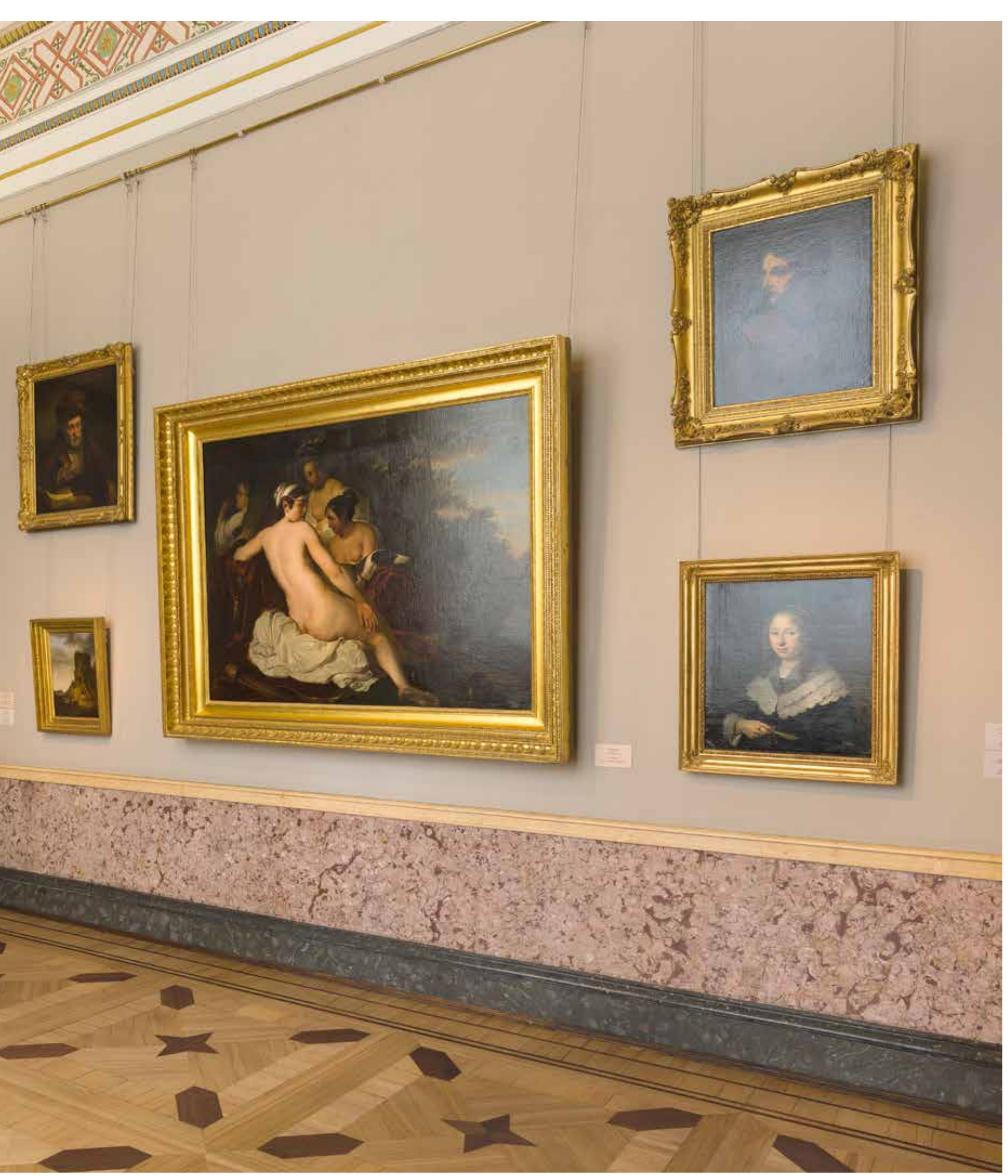
Peter probably never saw the symbolic meaning of Russia's first Rembrandt, *David's Parting from Jonathan*. In essence, the biblical subject of this masterpiece is a son's betrayal of his father: Jonathan reveals Saul's hostile intentions to David. And it was around this time that Peter suffered one of the greatest tragedies of his life: suspecting his son Alexey of treachery, he had him tried and executed. That meaning resonates today within the Hermitage walls.

Another truly great collector of Dutch art was Pyotr Semenov-Tyan-Shansky. The Tian Shan is an extensive system of mountain ranges. Titles with geographical connections were usually the preserve of military leaders in Russia, echoing the site of their greatest victories. In this case, however, the title was awarded to a man who had studied the eastern expanses of Russia and truly put them on the geographical and economic map. Semenov, a celebrated explorer, was also an important political figure and member of the State Council. And he collected Dutch paintings, becoming one of Europe's greatest connoisseurs. It was his purpose to acquire works by artists who were not represented in the Hermitage. Created specially for our museum, this collection was sold to the Hermitage for the largely symbolic sum of 250,000 roubles, but on condition that it remain with the collector until his death. Catherine II had done the same in her day with the library of Denis Diderot.

The Hermitage was created when Catherine the Great purchased the Gotzkowsky collection. Two paintings, almost the first to arrive in the Hermitage, frame the entrance to the Tent Room, a magnificent grand space dedicated to Dutch painting that is always filled on Mondays (when the museum is closed to visitors) with students copying the great masters. These two works by Goltzius are of symbolic significance for Russia: *Adam and Eve* and *The Baptism of Christ*. Two stages in mankind's development that are important to Russian viewers' outlook, to their understanding of world history. As we leave the Tent Room

Hermitage, St Petersburg
Room 253











58 **Domenicus van Tol**

c. 1635, Bodegraven – 1676, Leiden
Lacemaker. 1660s

Oil on wood; 44.5 × 34 cm
Signed bottom centre: *D. v Tol*
Inv. no. GE 1906
Provenance: between 1770 and 1774; formerly
– auction of the widow of Johan Hendrik van
Heemskerck, Amsterdam, 29–30 March 1770, lot
116, where purchased by the dealer Pieter
Fouquet for 950 florins
Hermitage catalogues: Cat. 1774, no. 711; Cats
1863–1916, no. 924; Cat. 1958, II, p. 281; Cat.
1981, p. 173

This little picture was one of the earliest acquisitions made in the Netherlands for the Hermitage in the eighteenth century. The artist, the Leiden *fijnschilder* (fine painter) Domenicus van Tol, was the nephew and pupil of Gerard Dou and throughout his short career – he died at just forty years old – he was inspired by his famous master's repertoire. Not surprisingly, in an early guide to the Imperial Hermitage van Tol was described as 'imitateur de Gerard Dow'.¹ In the Russian literature the painting came to be known as 'The Scholar's Family', since in the room beyond that occupied by the young woman and the child in a cradle we see a man at a lectern with books and a globe. But eighteenth-century European sources had called the painting 'La Dentellière', since the heroine holds a lace-pillow with bobbins. The earliest known description of the work comes in the auction catalogue of the widow of Johan Hendrik van Heemskerck in 1770. Clearly it was not then possible to read the signature, since it featured under the name of Gerard ter

Borch.² Still the work entered the Hermitage under the name of van Tol. It has already been noted³ that the overall concept derives from Dou's *Young Mother* of 1658.⁴ This is clear from the nature of the interior and the characters, the young woman seated by the window, the serving girl leaning over the cradle. We should also note that van Tol's work was probably influenced by Dou's *The Nursery*.⁵ The attire and accessories of the heroines in both works coincide: both wear a red housecoat, yellow skirt, white apron and white coif. The scene presumably has a moralising subtext: the making of lace (like spinning and embroidery) was a symbol of the feminine virtue of domesticity.⁶ Van Tol's picture was reproduced on a vase made in 1837 at the Imperial Porcelain Manufactory.⁷

Selected literature: Heemskerk Cat. 1770, no. 116; Waagen 1864, p. 204; von Wurzbach 1906–11, II, p. 715; Fekhnner 1979, no. 141; Buvelot 2016, p. 102

Notes:

1. Livret 1838, p. 327.
2. For the full quotation: see p. 34.
3. Buvelot 2016.
4. Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 32.
5. c. 1660; although Dou's triptych is lost it is known from a copy by Willem Joseph Laquy (1739–96), Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-2320-A-B-C.
6. de Jongh 1976, no. 3.
7. State Russian Museum, St Petersburg, inv. no. F4403.

In the Russian literature the painting came to be known as 'The Scholar's Family', since in the room beyond that occupied by the young woman and the child in a cradle we see a man at a lectern with books and a globe.







The Hermitage has been their home for a very long time. They have witnessed generations of Russian tsars and European monarchs come and go. At the Hermitage they survived world wars, the Russian Revolution and many other dramatic events. They drew millions of visitors to the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg. And now these masterpieces from the collection of Dutch masters at the Hermitage have temporarily returned to their native land.

The Russian love for the Dutch masters began in the seventeenth century. Peter the Great visited Holland and purchased a number of works. His successors and the people at the court were even more passionate collectors than he, making the Hermitage the proud owner of an unprecedented, extensive collection of works by Dutch masters.

But why did the Russian aristocracy love Dutch art so much? How did the collections come together? And how did these Dutch paintings influence Russian art? In this book, Russian and Dutch authors give answers to these questions and take you on a journey all the way to Saint Petersburg and back. Back to the Netherlands of the Golden Age.

'...and I wondered if those paintings by Rembrandt, Dou, Heda, Hals and Van Goyen and everything else I would see had ever felt homesick for the place they came from. Years ago, when I had stood for a long time in the Frick Collection in New York, looking at the Dutch paintings, I had realised that if I, or the people in the pictures, were to say something, we would be the only ones there who could understand one another. That is, of course, a thought from the realm of the absurd, as painted people cannot say anything or understand anything, but so that I would not have to laugh at myself, I decided it had come to me because the individuals in Dutch paintings from the Golden Age are still so recognisable as Dutch people or, conversely, that I still see people in Amsterdam, on the street or at the market, who could easily have been painted by Hals or Metsu.'

Cees Nooteboom, in an essay written specially for this book (pages 20–27)

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