

GOLDEN AGE PORTRAITURE REVEALING FRANS HALS

TUESDAY 23 – SATURDAY 27 APRIL 2024 (5 DAYS)

LECTURER: TOM DUNCAN

£2495

- See largest group of paintings by Frans Hals assembled in decades
- Introduction to the Rijksmuseum with two timed entries to the Hals exhibition
- Visit to Haarlem to see wonderful group portraits by Hals too large to travel
- Visit The Hague's Mauritshuis
- Explore Keukenhof Tulip Fields
- Excellent 4* hotel in historic city centre



Frans Hals, *Regentesses of the Old Men's Alms House* (detail), Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem

OVERVIEW

Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum has frequently organised exhibitions celebrating the most important painters of its 'Dutch Golden Age', most recently Rembrandt and Vermeer, for both of which we have organised tours. It is over 30 years since there has been a major retrospective devoted to the third of the three great 'Golden Age' painters, Frans Hals. The Rijksmuseum, in conjunction with London's National Gallery and Berlin's Gemäldegalerie has organised a major Hals exhibition, now open in London. However, neither the London nor Berlin versions will have access to most of Hals's famous group portraits as they are too large and fragile to travel. These have to be seen in Haarlem's Hals Museum, so we offer a tour based in Amsterdam next April, to include timed entry to the exhibition, *and* a day spent in Haarlem.

Frans Hals was born in 1582 in Antwerp, when religious conflict dominated the '80 Years War' between the northern, mainly Protestant provinces and their Spanish rulers, based in Brussels. The family moved to Haarlem to escape religious persecution, where he trained as a painter. His style is immediately recognisable – it displays an intimate realism executed with a freshness that at times seems strikingly modern, indeed as unlike Rembrandt as it is possible to be. As one critic has remarked 'Hals seized a moment in the life of his subjects with rare intuition, fond of daylight and silvery sheen, while Rembrandt used golden glow effects based upon artificial contrasts of low light in immeasurable gloom'. His subjects come from across the social strata: grandee banquets, meetings of militia officers, local councillors and their clerks, wealthy merchants and their wives, itinerant musicians and the 'flotsam and jetsam' of tavern life. It should come as no surprise that his subject matter and technique would fascinate painters in the nineteenth century – he is one of the few great artists who gave black and white so many tonal shades.

The exhibition will differ somewhat in each of its three homes, all sharing a common pool of masterpieces. However, our visit to the Amsterdam version will have the unique advantage of including paintings that cannot travel beyond the doors of the Hals Museum in Haarlem - which we shall include to see those extraordinary group portraits. We shall also look at the wider 'Dutch Golden Age' when we explore the main collections of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the exquisite Mauritshuis in The Hague. Finally, we shall also travel to see the spectacular annual display of tulip and other bulbs at Keukenhof.

The tour is led by Tom Duncan, assisted by our preferred local guide Sabine van Wijk. We stay at the 4* Estherea Hotel, ideally situated on the Singel Canal and close to the exclusive '9 Streets' shopping district. The hotel is within easy walking distance, or a short tram ride, of all we shall visit in the city, with excellent restaurants nearby.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Tuesday 23 April – We fly from London Heathrow to **Amsterdam** with BA, arriving early afternoon. We transfer immediately into the city centre and join our canal boat for a guided **Introduction Cruise**, charting the city's evolution and history. Our luggage will be transferred to our hotel rooms while we enjoy this cruise. Later that evening there will be a group dinner in a local restaurant close to our hotel.

Day 2: Wednesday 24 April – We travel to **Haarlem**, where Frans Hals spent most of his life and from whose population he sourced most of his clients. We spend the morning exploring the city, including a visit to the remarkable **Grote Kerk** or 'Great Church' of St Bavo. After some free time for lunch we continue to the **Frans Hals Museum**, which is housed in the *Oude Mannenhuis*, the Old Men's Alms House. The highlight of the collection is the remarkable series of group paintings of the 'great and good', men and women who supervised not only the city's charitable institutions but the men who were members of the civic militias. Most of these paintings are too large and fragile to be moved, so our visit to the museum will be the ideal preparation for our two visits to the Hals Exhibition later in the week. We return to Amsterdam and the evening will be free.

Day 3: Thursday 25 April – We take a local tram to visit the **Rijksmuseum**, the city's unparalleled collection of Dutch and European art. All the major masters of the Dutch School are represented, newly redisplayed in rooms full of decorative arts of the highest quality. There will be a guided introduction to the Dutch Golden Age with its masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and the great painters of genre scenes and landscapes. After some free time for lunch (not included) in the Museum's excellent café, we have the first of two visits to the **Frans Hals Exhibition**, located within the Rijksmuseum. We return to our hotel by tram and the evening will be free.

Day 4: Friday 26 April – This morning we drive out to **Keukenhof**, also known as the Garden of Europe, and one of the world's largest flower gardens. It covers an area of 32 hectares and 7 million flower bulbs are planted every year to flower the following spring. As this will be the best time to see the bulbs in flower, surely we *must* take in this remarkable sight? We return to Amsterdam and after some free time for lunch (not included) we return to the **Rijksmuseum** for a second visit to the **Hals Exhibition**. Should you not wish to visit it a second time, and as we will not have a formal guided tour of the Rijksmuseum's non-Dutch holdings, you might prefer to explore these excellent collections? An alternative might be to take the tram to visit the Rembrandt House Museum? Details of other museums and exhibitions will be circulated to participants in advance. We have our final dinner in an excellent local restaurant.

Day 5: Saturday 27 April – We drive to **The Hague** to spend the morning at the **Mauritshuis**, the splendid mansion which houses the Royal Picture Gallery and which contains choice masterpieces such as Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Tulp*. There are no 'duds' in this collection. After a leisurely group lunch, we continue to Amsterdam Airport and the return flight to Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £2495 **Without Flights** £2295 **Deposit** £350

Single Supplement £575 (Classic Room) £875 (Deluxe Room)

Hotels 4 nights with breakfast at the 4* Hotel Estherea, Amsterdam

Hotel Upgrade £195 **Canal View Room** (2 sharing) – only 4 Canal View Rooms available

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA434** Depart London Heathrow T5 **1145**, arrive Amsterdam **1405**

Return: **BA441** Departs Amsterdam **1925**, arrive London Heathrow (T5) **1940**

Price includes 2 dinners & 1 lunch with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, services of Tom Duncan, our local guide Sabine van Wijk, and Stephen Brook as tour manager

Not included Travel to/from Heathrow, 2 dinners & 3 lunches



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