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Clouds and Light: Impressionism in Holland
July 8 – October 22, 2023
Museum Barberini, Potsdam

Landscape painting originated in the Netherlands. The realism of the seventeenth-century Old Masters long set the standard against which all others were measured. The development of *plein air* painting in France offered new impulses to nineteenth-century Dutch artists. From July 8 to October 22, 2023, the exhibition *Clouds and Light: Impressionism in Holland* will demonstrate how these French influences inspired artists to create their own, Dutch form of Impressionism. The wide-ranging show is the first exhibition to explore this theme and brings together around a hundred works by some forty artists, including key works by Johan Barthold Jongkind, Vincent van Gogh, Jacoba van Heemskerck, and Piet Mondrian that until now have rarely been shown in Germany. Lenders include the Rijksmuseum and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Kunstmuseum Den Haag, the Dordrechts Museum, the Kröller Müller-Museum in Otterlo, and the Singer Museum in Laren.

European Landscape Painting: A Dutch Invention

Clouds, waves, and beaches had featured in the landscapes of the Netherlandish Old Masters since the seventeenth century. Not until the early nineteenth century did landscape painting gain relevance for the rest of Europe with Caspar David Friedrich, William Turner, and Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes. When the *plein air* painters of French Impressionism began celebrating the fleeting moment as the epitome of modernity, Dutch artists were inescapably challenged to react. The exhibition *Clouds and Light: Impressionism in Holland* explores this European dialogue, tracing the development of Dutch art from the 1840s to the 1910s in its conversation with Impressionism.

The French Impressionists, too, admired the landscape painting of the Dutch Old Masters, though their interest was focused less on identification with a national landscape than on the realism of its style. In 1871, Claude Monet spent four months in Holland, where in the 1840s his role model Gustave Courbet had also sought refuge from the French art world, seeking to hone the characteristic immediacy and realism of his painting through the study of clouds and waves. The Hasso Plattner Collection at the Museum Barberini holds two of Monet's paintings from this sojourn in Holland. They show an intensity of color and an energetic, compact style that is unusual for his early work.

From the Hague School to Luminism

Dutch artists encountered the works of the Barbizon painters during visits to France and, from the 1880s on, in the collection of the painter Hendrik Willem Mesdag in The Hague. Like the French Impressionists in the forest of Fontainebleau, Dutch artists painted the light filtering through the trees in the woods of Oosterbeek as early as the 1850s. The Hague School turned its attention to the polder landscape beneath broad skies, echoing the cloud paintings of the Old Masters just as Eugène Boudin was doing in France. The paintings of Willem Roelofs, Anton Mauve, and Jacob Maris are characterized by luminous grays that transform the rain-heavy clouds over the meadows into the protagonists of their images. The beach is the arena of fishermen, who go out to sea or return with their catch; here, in contrast to the marine painting or ocean views of Romanticism, subjective observation is already determinative.

In the 1880s, the painters of the Hague School were succeeded by the Amsterdam Impressionists, who discovered the city as the locus of modern life with its shopping streets, coffeehouses, and electric lights. The beach now became the setting for leisure activities like strolling or riding donkeys. Artists such as George Hendrik Breitner and Isaac Israëls, who knew the work of Claude Monet, Auguste Renoir, and Gustave Caillebotte from exhibitions in Paris, sought out motifs of technological progress and social change in their own environment. From 1890 on, the next generation of Dutch artists drew inspiration from French and Belgian Pointillism, which they saw at exhibitions in Amsterdam and Leiden. After 1905, the landscapes created under the influence of French Fauvism soon came to be known as Luminism.

Unmixed colors, expressively exaggerated in simultaneous contrasts, connect the late work of Vincent van Gogh to the early, Pointillist phase of Piet Mondrian and demonstrate that the avant-garde in Holland, too, was fueled by Impressionism. Building on its Impressionist research emphasis, the Museum Barberini presented *Impressionism in Russia: Dawn of the Avant-Garde* in 2021, the first exhibition to explore the European dialogue with French models and span an arc from the realism of Ilya Repin to the abstraction of Natalia Goncharova, Mikhail Larionov, and Kasimir Malevich.

“After the exhibitions *Van Gogh. Still Life* and *Rembrandt's Orient*, a new chapter of Dutch art takes center stage at the Museum Barberini. Thanks to fantastic lenders such as the Rijksmuseum, the Stedelijk Museum and the Kunstmuseum Den Haag, the exhibition presents a prominent panorama of Dutch cloud painters and artists of light.” explains Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini.

“Nineteenth-century Dutch art is seldom shown in Germany and is scarcely represented in German museums—with the exception of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, which purchased works by the Hague School in the 1880s. While artists like Van Gogh and Mondrian have been the subject of numerous monographic exhibitions, painters like Jacoba van Heemskerck, Jan Toorop, Jan Sluijters, and many others who

have been honored with major retrospectives in the Netherlands are nearly unknown in Germany, even though their affinity to the landscapes of Max Liebermann and the influence of Van Gogh on the artists of Die Brücke give them an air of familiarity,” says Michael Philipp, Chief Curator of the Museum Barberini.

The exhibition is accompanied by a 312-page catalogue (Prestel, 2023, English/German) with contributions by Sterre Barentsen, Renske Cohen Tervaert, Frouke van Dijke, Marijn Geist, Jacqueline Hartwig, Mayken Jonkman, Jeroen Kapelle, Quirine van der Meer Mohr, Lucien Midavaine, Michael Philipp, and Renske Suijver.

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