

CURATOR'S COLLECTION

On the Collections of Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish Art in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm Carina Fryklund

The Swedish Royal Museum, founded in 1792 in memory of King Gustav III (1771-92), is one of Europe's oldest public museums. Indeed, parts of the royal collections were opened to visitors as early as the 1780s. Initially housed in the Royal Palace in Stockholm, to which art works from other royal residences were transferred, the collections subsequently went on display in the new Nationalmuseum building on Blasieholmen, which opened its doors in 1866. Although the Nationalmuseum is a relatively small museum by European standards its collections of Old Master paintings and graphic arts include a significant number of masterpieces. The collection of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish pictures numbers around 880 items. Added to this is a renowned graphics collection that includes some 1,000 Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish drawings. The core of these collections – major works by Rubens, Van Dyck, Jordaens, Rembrandt and his circle, as well as a broad range of portraits, history, landscape, and genre pieces – is derived



from two principal sources: the Swedish royal collections, spanning over three centuries of collecting, and the eighteenth-century private art collection of Count Carl-Gustaf Tessin (1695-1770).

As early as the sixteenth century, Gustav Vasa (1523-60), the first king of Sweden, made a serious business of importing works of art. Inventories show that between 1529 and 1548 he acquired 92 works by German and Netherlandish masters, which were housed in the Gripsholm Castle, among them Cornelis Engebrectsz's *Crucifixion*. In his *Schilder-boeck* (1603-04), Karel van Mander states that the Swedish monarch commissioned Jan van Scorel to paint a *Madonna and Child of*

which, unfortunately, no trace has been found. During the seventeenth century the royal collections were then augmented mainly by spoils of war. The reign of King Gustav Adolf (1611-32) was dominated by the Thirty Years' War, and captures made on the continent during Sweden's period of military and political ascendancy had the effect of substantially increasing the holdings of Northern European art. Important German art collections were looted. In 1632 Swedish troops seized parts of the electoral collection in Munich, and in 1648 a vast number of art works were 'appropriated' from the outstanding collections of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. Inventories compiled in Prague in 1641 and Stockholm in 1652 give an idea of the looted treasures. The leading items from Prague included Adriaen de Vries's *Psyche Carried by Amorini* (fig. 1), Jan van Hemessen's *Madonna of Humility* (fig. 2), Jan Massys's *Venus Cythereia* (fig. 3), Frans Floris's *Banquet of the Sea Gods* (1561), and several market scenes by Joachim Beuckelaer. They were delivered to the king's daughter Christina (1632-54), a widely educated person who

was steeped in European art and culture and was thus supremely well-qualified to appreciate these masterpieces. The 1652 inventory of the art collection lists 750 pictures, of which 470 came from Prague. When Christina abdicated in 1654 and left Sweden for Rome, she took with her all the pictures by Italian Renaissance artists, while those by Northern European artists (which she found less attractive) were left behind. A number of those works are now in the Nationalmuseum, but many were destroyed in the great fire of 1697 that consumed Stockholm's Royal Palace.

From the early seventeenth century onwards, Sweden maintained close cultural and commercial ties with the Low Countries. By the second half of the seventeenth century, a large number of Swedes - leading aristocrats, statesmen, and art patrons - had attended university at Leiden and Amsterdam. Among them were heroes of the Thirty Years' War like Count Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie (1622-86) and Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel (1613-76). De la Gardie, who assembled one of the first art collections of importance in the country, was the owner of Jacob Jordaens's *King Candaules of Lydia Showing His Wife to Gyges* and *The Three Graces with a Basket of Roses* by Peter Paul Rubens (and studio). Another devoted art collector was Johan Gabriel Stenbock (1640-1705), the owner of Jordaens's early *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1618).



Stenbock had a brilliant career at the Swedish court and in the civil service, becoming a privy councillor in 1668 and amassing a considerable fortune, which he invested with bankers in Holland. His art collection also contained several works by Rembrandt and his school, including *The Kitchen Maid*, the *Portrait of an Old Man with a Stick* and that of *An Old Woman*

Among the principal architects of Sweden's growing prosperity was a group of Dutch and Flemish industrialists who settled in the country during the first half of the seventeenth century: hard-working middle-class people whose motives were religious as well as commercial. Most were members of the De Geer, De Besche, Grill and Peill families, and they would come to play a significant role in Swedish history, particularly after the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648.



These families were key promoters of the rapid development of the Swedish iron industry, which remained the country's most important export product throughout the eighteenth century. They brought with them their wealth, culture and art collections, which today form part of the Nationalmuseum's holdings. It was, for example, a member of the Peill family who brought to Sweden one of Rembrandt's greatest masterpieces, *The Conspiracy of the Batavians under Claudius Civilis* (fig. 4). The De Geers owned Hendrick ter Brugghen's pendants, *Boy Playing the Lute* and *Girl Holding a Glass*, as well as several animal pieces and hunting scenes by Frans Snyders and Paul de Vos, including the former's *Fable of the Fox and the Heron*. The Dutch industrialists also attracted painters like Allaert van Everdingen, Govert Camphuysen, and Cornelis van der Meulen to Sweden.

It was not until the Age of Enlightenment, however, that art collecting really came to the fore in Sweden. Count Carl Gustaf Tessin, son of the court architect Nicodemus II Tessin, was the most brilliant cultural personality in eighteenth-century Sweden. His art collection – a major part of which was later acquired by the royal family – has left the most conspicuous traces in the history of the Nationalmuseum's collections of foreign art. Thanks to his father's extensive collection of drawings, prints, illustrated books, treatises on art and other literature,



Carl Gustaf received an excellent aesthetic education that allowed him to become Sweden's most outstanding connoisseur of all time. Already a passionate collector as a young man, he made his first acquisitions during his continental Grand Tour in 1714-19. His most important purchases, though, were made while serving as Swedish ambassador in Paris in 1739-42, when he assembled a superb collection of contemporary French art, as well as purchasing a number of seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish pictures that included Rembrandt's exquisite portrait of a *Young Woman in Profile* (1632), Jacob van Ruisdael's *View of Egmont*, Philips Wouwerman's *Nobleman's Sleigh on the Ice*, Frans Snyders's *Still Life with Dead Game*, and Anthony van Dyck's *Two Naked Children with Grapes*.

The opportunity to establish an outstanding collection of drawings presented itself in 1741, when the fabulous collection of French financier Pierre Crozat was put up for auction. Tessin purchased over 2,000 of the more than 19,000 drawings catalogued for the sale by Pierre-Jean Mariette, and he supplemented them with almost 600 sheets acquired through exchanges with other collectors who had attended the sale and purchases from dealers who had bought from the same source.



The roughly 560 Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish drawings that Tessin came by included a significant number of sheets by Rembrandt and his school previously owned by Roger de Piles (fig. 5), and major works by Rubens (fig. 6), Van Dyck, Hendrick Goltzius (figs. 7), Abraham Bloemaert, Adriaen Brouwer and Stradanus. Tessin's annotations in a copy of Mariette's 1741 sale catalogue, and a carefully specified list of art works sent home from Paris, are a fount of information about these French purchases.

The art-loving Crown Princess Lovisa Ulrika (Queen of Sweden 1751-71), and her consort Adolf Fredrik, also engaged Tessin to purchase works of art for the royal collections. Acting on behalf of the royal couple through the picture dealer Edmé-François Gersaint, the Dutch and Flemish works that he acquired at Paris auctions of the estates the collector Antoine de la Roque in 1745 and of Vicomte Fonspertuis in 1748 included David II Teniers's early *Tavern Scene with Pipe Smokers*, Philips Wouwerman's *Jugglers at a Market*, Jacob Ochtervelt's *Company with a Dancing Dog*, and Cornelis Bega's *The Music Lesson*.



Tessin also purchased pictures for the royal family in Amsterdam: Isaack van Ostade's *Self-Portrait*; Adriaen van Ostade's *Lawyer Sharpening a Quill Pen*; and paintings ascribed to Rembrandt. The *pièce de résistance* of Adolf Fredrik's collection was Van Dyck's early *Saint Jerome with an Angel*. King Gustav III, every bit as dedicated a collector as his parents, later used public funds to purchase their collections with the aim of creating a specially designed art gallery in the Royal Palace. To this end he also purchased art works from private collections in Sweden and on the international art market. In 1779, for example, he acquired 24 paintings from the wealthy Sack family at Bergshammar, including Rembrandt's *The Kitchen Maid*, once part of the Stenbock Collection, Willem van Aelst's *Still Life with Hunting Gear* (1664), and Jan Fyt's magnificent *Still Life with Abundant Game* (1651). Through the efforts of Gustav III, Rembrandt's *Conspiracy of the Batavians under Claudius Civilis*, then the property of Henrik Wilhelm Peill (1730-1797), entered the Royal Palace in the mid-1780s. By that time, the king's art gallery, which was housed in two of the palace apartments, had opened to a limited public. Another gallery was added after the king's Italian journey in 1783-84, making it possible for 200 paintings to be shown in an arrangement that remained essentially unaltered until his death in 1792.

After the death of Gustav III, the royal collection was inventoried and a decision was made to create a public museum for its display. The Royal Museum, housed in the north wing of the Stockholm Palace, was founded by royal decree on 28 June 1792. The first printed catalogue of the collection was published in 1841, when, due to overcrowding, steps were already being taken to rehouse the collections.



In connection with the inauguration of the new Nationalmuseum in 1866, Karl XV (1859-72), King of Sweden and Norway, donated Rubens's free copies after Titian, *The Worship of Venus* and *The Andrians* (fig. 8), which had been brought to Sweden by the Bernadotte family some time after 1814. Around now it was also decided that Rembrandt's *Claudius Civilis* should be placed on permanent loan in the museum by the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, its owner since 1798. Additions to the collection of Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish pictures continued to be made during the nineteenth century through private donations and purchases. In 1864 Count Axel Bielke, a trustee of the museum, made a donation that included Jordaens's *King Candaules of Lydia Showing his Wife to Gyges* from the De la Gardie Collection. Acquisitions included Judith Leyster's *Boy Playing a Flute*, once owned by Queen Lovisa Ulrika. In 1881 Rembrandt's *St Peter* of 1632 was purchased from a private Swedish collection. The picture had been brought to Sweden as early as the seventeenth century by the daughter of its first owner, Carel van Cracauw (1579-1646), the Dutch stadholder's envoy to the Danish court.

In 1949 the Nationalmuseum received a private donation of Rembrandt's last work, *Simeon and the Christ Child*, and the artist's small *Self-Portrait* (1630) was acquired in 1956. In 1973 the graphics collection was enhanced by the donation of the De la Gardie collection of drawings, the last significant private collection of Old Master drawings in Sweden. Formed at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Count Jacob Gustaf De la Gardie (1768-1842), it contained a large number of drawings from the Brussels collection of Prince Charles de Ligne, which De la Gardie had received as part of a farewell gift from Duke Albert of Saxony-Teschen (1738-1822), founder of the Albertina, whose acquaintance he made while serving as Swedish ambassador in Vienna in 1799-1801. About half of De la Gardie's collection, some 800 sheets, found its way to the Nationalmuseum, including nearly 300 Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish drawings, among them a large group by Mannerists like Karel van Mander, Paulus van Vianen, the Wierix family and Joos van Winghe.



Several important Dutch and Flemish paintings were added to the collection in the 1980s, including Joos de Momper's *Landscape with the Fall of Phaeton*, which has the same Prague provenance as the artist's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* and *Shipwreck of the Greek Fleet on the Voyage home from Troy*. The most recent major acquisition is Jan Lievens's early *Apostle Paul at His Writing Desk* (fig. 9), which was bought in 2012. It had been shown in the museum in 1992 as part of the exhibition

Rembrandt and His Age, and has a provenance going back to the eminent collection of Count Gustaf Adolf Sparre (1746-94) in Gothenburg and Vanås. In 2013 the museum was then able to acquire another three pictures from the same source, David II Teniers's *Tavern Interior with a Peasant Lighting his Pipe*, Jacob Toorenvliet's *Man Holding a Jug*, and Gijsbrecht Leytens's *Wooded Mountain Landscape with Waterfall and Travellers*.

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