

CURATOR IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Christian Tico Seifert, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

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About Tico Seifert

I was born and educated in Berlin, where I studied art history, medieval history and classical archaeology. In 2008 I received my Ph.D. from the Freie Universität Berlin (FU) for my dissertation on Pieter Lastman, which will be published this fall. I taught art history at the FU from 2003 onward. With support from the Royal Dutch Embassy in Berlin and the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, I founded the [Niederländisches Forum](#) in 2004 and I co-organized the [international Rembrandt Symposium in Berlin in 2006](#). After a two-year period as acting head of administration of the Department of Historical and Cultural Sciences at the FU, I was appointed senior curator of Northern European art at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh in May 2008.

Curator at the Scottish National Gallery

The National Galleries of Scotland consist of the Scottish National Gallery (roughly pre-1900 art), the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. My remit at the National Gallery includes



Early Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish as well as German and a small number of Swiss and Scandinavian works of art. One of the advantages of the job is that it is not limited to a single medium: curators at the Scottish National Gallery are responsible for paintings, works on paper and sculpture. The collection is arguably one of the finest smaller ones in the world. I appreciate its manageable size and curate roughly 200 paintings, 1000 drawings, 5000 prints and a few sculptures. In addition, I am the curatorial liaison for [Duff House in Banff \(Aberdeenshire\)](#), one of the National Galleries' partners. An advantage of working at a national institution is that it is the point of reference for many private collectors. Consequently, traveling throughout the country and visiting collections is an enjoyable part of my job. Currently my main task is working on the catalogue of the permanent collection of Northern European paintings that was begun by my predecessor [Emilie Gordenker](#).

Cataloguing can be seen as a bread-and-butter job, yet I feel that it is the best way to learn about the collection in your care. I particularly enjoy the combination of first-hand observation and in-depth research. Add to this the technical examinations by our conservation team and fruitful discussions with them and external colleagues and you have a truly stimulating environment for research. A recent one-month research leave, which I spent at the [RKD](#) (Netherlands Institute for Art History) in The Hague, was particularly useful in this respect.

Preparing exhibitions and displays is another delightful part of the job. We are currently working on [The Young Vermeer](#) together with the [Mauritshuis](#) in The Hague and the [Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister](#) in Dresden. The master's three earliest

paintings will be shown together for the first time, representing a unique opportunity to compare and explore these rather atypical and enigmatic works. Moreover, this is the first Vermeer exhibition to be held in Scotland.

For the summer of 2011, I am planning a show on [Dürer's fame](#) featuring around 30 prints, drawings and paintings from our own collection. Examining different aspects of fame, we will present a selection of our best Dürer impressions together with contemporary and later copies – drawn and printed – imitations and forgeries, as well as portraits and works that reflect his art.



In addition to famous examples by Marcantonio Raimondi and Johannes Wierix, we will include work by British artists such as John Runciman (1744-1768/69) and William Bell Scott (1811-1890), whose response to Dürer's art is less well known.

Research is integral to preparing catalogues and exhibitions. In my opinion, museums and galleries should be important centers of research. While object-based research, naturally, has priority, the boundaries of our collections should never be the limits of our thinking – nor of our research.

At the Scottish National Gallery, I am fortunate to be working in a stimulating, encouraging and supportive environment. I am also a member of the National Galleries' Research Committee. In answer to the question of what my favorite work is, I have to confess that this tends to change! Close to my heart, for example, are our two paintings by Adam Elsheimer. Yet it would be unfair to single out just one or two works at the expense of a variety of beautiful and important objects. Moreover, my experience is that the relationship with an artwork intensifies the more you look at or study it. Currently, Vermeer's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* is definitely one of my favorites sparked by the thorough preparations for the exhibition.



Another example is Hendrick Goltzius' marvelous drawing of *Bust of a Man with a Tassled Cap*, which was unpublished when it entered the collection in 2000 and deserves a great deal more attention. I first saw it while interviewing for the position and it immediately captured my interest. Soon after I began working at the National Gallery I organized an exhibition on [Dutch Mannerism](#) as part of an ongoing series of displays from our collection. Goltzius' drawing was one of the highlights of the show and research on this intriguing work continues.

Aside from the National Gallery, living in Scotland is proving to be highly enjoyable. Edinburgh is a wonderful city, close to the sea and the hills. The Scottish countryside and wildlife are simply amazing and the people here are extremely friendly and helpful. All of this made it easy for my wife and two children to settle in and continues to inspire and enrich our lives.



[Christian Tico Seifert](#) is Senior curator of Northern European art at the [Scottish National Gallery](#) in Edinburgh, United Kingdom. He has been a member of CODART since 2006.