

Celebratory exhibition at Leiden's Museum De Lakenhal of Rembrandt's 'Four Senses'



Photography Taco van der Eb.

LEIDEN. - [Museum De Lakenhal](#), which opened its doors in Leiden on 1 May 1874, is celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2024. The festivities will kick off with the presentation of Rembrandt's *Four Senses* — His First Paintings. Rembrandt created this series of paintings, comprising his earliest known work, when he was around 18 years old and living in Leiden. In addition to the *Spectacles Seller* (*Allegory of Sight*) from Museum De Lakenhal's permanent collection, the presentation features three works from The Leiden Collection, New York: *Stone Operation* (*Allegory of Touch*), *Three Musicians* (*Allegory of Hearing*) and *Unconscious Patient* (*Allegory of Smell*). No trace has ever been found of the fifth painting in this series, the *Allegory of Taste*. The four works will be on display at the museum for 150 days.

A master in the making: The series of allegories depicting the senses clearly demonstrates that Rembrandt has always been an original and experimental artist. Particularly since the 16th century, the senses tended to be personified in art by elegant female figures, accompanied by fixed attributes. Rembrandt, however, favoured a different approach by opting for everyday scenes with which anyone could identify. Although not all aspects of these early works are equally successful, they do evince the emergence of precisely those qualities that in time would turn Rembrandt into such an innovative and celebrated painter: among others, his singular use of *chiaroscuro*, his bold brushwork, and his unique eye for interaction between everyday people through an uncanny ability to capture their typical, characteristic expressions.

Fertile artistic climate: Rembrandt's *Senses* occupy a significant position in the artistic history of Leiden. Museum De Lakenhal, which will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2024, aims to shine a spotlight on the local developments and cultural connections that have characterized the city's illustrious past. The four *Senses* will be on display at the very heart of the permanent collection, surrounded by other works produced by the young Rembrandt, alongside several paintings by his friend and rival Jan Lievens as well as his star pupil Gerrit Dou. *Musical Company*, completed in 1626, two years or so after the *Senses*, reveals the speed at which Rembrandt developed as an artist — both technically and formally. *Travellers Resting*, which was painted some five years later by an anonymous artist from Rembrandt's circle in Leiden, is a striking example of the successful application of *chiaroscuro* in its dramatic contrasts between light and dark. The fertile nature of Leiden's artistic climate in this particular period clearly transpires in the creative exchange among Rembrandt's contemporaries. For example, the subtly executed headscarf worn by Jan Lievens' *Old Woman Reading* must surely have served as a source of inspiration for Rembrandt, while the face of the young Jan Lievens can even be identified not only in Rembrandt's *Three Musicians*, but also in his *Musical Company*.

A first for Leiden and Museum De Lakenhal: Already when Museum De Lakenhal first opened its doors in 1874, the city of Leiden felt the absence of works by its most famous 'son', Rembrandt van Rijn. A crucial moment in the museum's history was therefore undoubtedly its purchase of *The Spectacles Seller* in 2012. This panel, one of Rembrandt's *Senses*, is a prime illustration of the master's work as an emerging artist during his Leiden period. In fact, his studio must have been located just a stone's throw from where Museum De Lakenhal stands today. Two of Rembrandt's *Senses* — *Stone Operation* and *Three Musicians* — joined The Leiden Collection of Franco-American collector Thomas Kaplan in 2007. The third, *Unconscious Patient*, was not discovered until it appeared at an auction in New Jersey in 2015. It was bought by Kaplan a year later. Since then, the four paintings have been displayed as a series at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 2016 and the Rembrandthuis in Amsterdam in 2016-2017. The upcoming reunion of Rembrandt's *Senses* in the very city of their creation is therefore a first, both for Leiden and for Museum De Lakenhal.

Tanja Elstgeest, Director of Museum De Lakenhal: "There could hardly be a more fitting way to celebrate our 150th anniversary than through the presentation of these works. Rembrandt is the most influential artist to have been produced by Leiden. In the first half of 2024, we look forward to introducing both Dutch and international visitors to the very first works to have emerged from his hand and the talent already exhibited by the artist at such a young age. Rembrandt had a genius for observing the people around him, on the street and in the city. He was a pioneer from the very beginning of his career, and his originality still serves as a beacon to the artists currently fulfilling this role in society."

Museum De Lakenhal

Museum De Lakenhal is a leading museum of art and history. The museum is located in the former Cloth Hall on the Oude Singel in Leiden, dating from 1640. The permanent collection presentation combines highlights of old masters such as Lucas van Leyden, Rembrandt van Rijn and Jan Steen with works by modern and contemporary artists such as Theo van Doesburg, Charley Toorop, Claudy Jongstra and Erwin Olaf. In exhibitions, lectures and various public programs, the museum connects art and knowledge from the past to social developments and challenges of today.

Anniversary year of Museum De Lakenhal

The presentation *Rembrandt's Four Senses - His First Paintings* kicks off a festive anniversary year at Museum De Lakenhal. Within that framework, the exhibition *Thread Roots* by Kimsooja, the first solo exhibition of this internationally renowned artist in the Netherlands, will be on view from March 2 through July 21. In the fall, the museum will celebrate 450 years of freedom of the city with an exhibition highlighting Leiden's long parade history.

The Leiden Collection

The Leiden Collection, established in 2003 by Franco-American collector Thomas Kaplan and his wife Daphne Recanati Kaplan, comprises over 250 paintings and drawings, representing one of the most important collections of 17th-century Dutch paintings in private hands. With 17 works by Rembrandt, it is the world's largest privately owned collection of the master.

Museum De Lakenhal
Rembrandt's 'Four Senses'
January 20th, 2024 - June 16th, 2024