



## Genre Painting and Poetry

### Netherlandish Painting

Dutch art has long been a favourite in Basel; from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the “Golden Age” was strongly represented in several private collections. The Kunstmuseum’s range of early Netherlandish, Dutch and Flemish pictures – numbering approximately 400 paintings, several of which came from private collections belonging to old Basel families – is rich in cabinet paintings of an intimate and bourgeois nature. The exceptions – a small number of representative, large-format gallery pictures – confirm the rule. By far the majority of these works came to the museum as individual contributions, legacies and donations, and five were originally in the Amerbach Kabinett.

Following the arrival of Netherlandish paintings from the Samuel Birmann collection in 1859, the real basis for the collection of Netherlandish art was laid by the Professor Johann Jakob Bachofen-Burckhardt Foundation in 1921. Other important acquisitions include the bequest of Hans Vonder Mühl in 1914 and that of Johann Rudolf and Maria Noetzlin-Werthemann in 1928.

The most important addition to the Dutch collection came in 1958, with the bequest of the Basel businessman Max Geldner (1875–1958), whose collection bears witness to his great connoisseurship: its treasures range from one of Rembrandt’s most beautiful and precious early works to an exquisite diptych by Gerard David, as well as genre paintings by Vermeer’s contemporaries Frans van Mieris and Pieter de Hooch.

In 1971, an anonymous art lover established the Foundation for the Promotion of Netherlandish Art in Basel, which acquires works by Dutch artists at the request of the Kunstmuseum, making them available to the museum by depositing them with the Public Art Collection. To date, the Kunstmuseum has thus been able to make carefully selected, meaningful acquisitions to complement the collection – including an oil sketch by Rubens and seven paintings by artists such as Nicolaes Berchem, Pieter Coecke van Aelst and Abraham Hondius.

25 Hendrick ter Brugghen (1588–1629)  
*Ballad-singer*. 1628  
Oil on canvas. 78.5 × 65.5 cm  
Deposited by the Freiwilliger  
Museumsverein (Voluntary Museum  
Association), 1902

25 Hendrick ter Brugghen is one of the most important followers of Caravaggio in the Utrecht School. In this picture of 1628, an example of the artist’s mastery of the *chiaroscuro* technique, the ballad-singer, a woman of the people, is shown as a half-figure, turning to the viewer to perform an impudent song or a burlesque rhyme. There is nothing to “close” the front of the picture, so to speak; the aesthetic boundary has been removed. The background of the picture is comparable with that of a relief; this, together with the modelling quality of the lighting, helps to lend the work a sculptural quality. The painting thus ultimately loses its pictorial character, becoming part of the room in which the viewer is situated. Moreover, the picture’s frame also lends the subject the air of a girl of easy virtue looking out of a window.

The girl’s richly draped robe and turban-like head-covering emphasize her exotic charm. The greater the intensity of the light, the more dynamic, musical and developed is the melody of the colours. Everything seems to be aimed at stimulating the viewer’s senses. The most prominent element of the picture – the first thing that comes into our hands, as it were – is the sheet of paper, bent forward along a crease. Revelation and concealment are combined here in rare equilibrium; painting and music are placed in subtle relation to each other, and to love. It is conceivable that this picture was once one of a pair; the other painting, of the same dimensions, would perhaps have depicted a lutenist or flautist.