

AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE MAURITSHUIS



The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

‘The Goldfinch’ Alights in a Repolished Jewel Box Mauritshuis Is Set to Reopen on Friday in The Hague

By CAROL VOGEL JUNE 20, 2014



Jasper Juinen for The New York Times

[View article on nytimes.com](#)

THE HAGUE — Since it opened to the public in 1822, the Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis has been one of those quiet gems, set in a 17th-century classical townhouse in the center of this patrician city and frequented by lovers of Dutch Golden Age painting. But when it closed for a renovation and expansion two years ago, and a selection from its collection went on tour, Mauritshuis gained an instant celebrity it had never had before.

Wherever the paintings went, millions of people followed, enduring long lines to see two works in particular: Vermeer’s doe-eyed “Girl With a Pearl Earring” (circa 1665), which has become one of the most famous paintings in Western art, and Carel Fabritius’s “The Goldfinch” (1654), a mere slip of a work — about 13 inches by 9 inches — but a giant hit because of Donna Tartt’s best seller of the same title. Also in that show was a sampling of works by Rembrandt and Rubens, Hals and Steen, but they were just the icing on top.

Now, with the reopening of Mauritshuis set for Friday, and “Girl” and “Goldfinch” safely back home, the museum is bracing for an onslaught of fans wanting to see the paintings on their home turf. At first glance, visitors may not think much has changed. The only visible exterior addition are a glass staircase and elevator discreetly tucked to one side of the grand forecourt.

That’s because much of the action is underground, in a new foyer that links the original house to an existing

Art Deco building across the street. The renovation, designed by the Dutch architect Hans van Heeswijk to be as inconspicuous as possible, actually doubles the size of the museum without spoiling its allure. The new exhibition galleries are at the heart of this \$40.6 million project and will offer three shows a year relating to the museum's permanent collection. The first, on view through Jan. 4, will be devoted to the history of the building and its expansion.

A lot is different at Mauritshuis, too, in its own understated way. The entrance has been moved to the front of the building, and there is new educational space. The project also includes an auditorium, a cafe and a museum shop.

"The old building is still the main event," Emilie Gordenker, the museum's director, said on a recent cloudless afternoon, standing in front of the 17th-century house as officials were racing to the finish, unpacking cafe tables. The facade has been painstakingly cleaned, its windows new but looking very much as they always had. "We didn't want to be too big; we wanted to safeguard against that," she said. "You can still see Mauritshuis in a single visit. That's what's so great."

Before the museum closed, it had averaged around 200,000 visitors a year. But celebrity is a double-edged sword. About 2.2 million people saw highlights from the museum's collection when it toured Japan, the United States and Italy. To make sure that its galleries won't be too crowded, Ms. Gordenker is limiting visitors to 1,000 at any one time, and in the gallery where "Girl" hangs, only 30 people may see her at once. (Tickets will be available at the museum's redesigned website, mauritshuis.nl/en.)

Continue reading the main story
Continue reading the main story
"We're gearing up for crowds," Ms. Gordenker said. "But it's important that people don't feel cramped. It's not about more, but quality rather than quantity."

The entrance, which leads to a new underground space with a large carved wooden ticket desk and LED screens displaying what's on view, has been designed to prevent bottlenecks and lines. And should there be a wait to get into the museum, there will be Wi-Fi in the forecourt (as well as in all the galleries), so visitors can download a new free app (available in seven languages) to browse through the collection.

"If it's hot, we'll come outside with water," she said. "If it's raining, we've been known to give visitors umbrellas."

The project's top priority has been to preserve the original intimate feeling of the house, which, like the Frick Collection in New York, where the Mauritshuis tour made a stop that attracted a record 235,000 visitors, is much loved for its manageable size and grandeur. (This month the Frick also announced plans to expand.)

Picturesque, formal and set on Hofvijver Lake, Mauritshuis (pronounced MAU-ritz-house) was designed by the Dutch architect Jacob van Campen for Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen, a professional soldier who was the governor of the Dutch colony in Brazil. Completed in 1644, the building is often considered among the finest examples of Dutch classical architecture. But it hadn't been touched since the 1980s, and its grandly proportioned rooms had grown dingy. More important, the house needed to upgrade its climate controls and security system. The windows required changing, too, Ms. Gordenker said, because condensation was a problem.

"Some of the linen on the walls had begun to look like my old sweaters — they were pilling," she added.

Now the museum has LED lighting that is as soft as candlelight, and where there were modern chandeliers, there are now Venetian glass versions in the 18th-century style and new silk wall coverings in rich reds and moss greens that make the paintings pop. The building's exterior received a gentle face-lift, too, with colors that are as close to the original buttery yellow as possible.

Many of the collection's 800 paintings have been cleaned, and some recent acquisitions, including the vivid

“Still Life With Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels,” from around 1615, by the Flemish painter Clara Peeters, and “The Mountainous Landscape With Saint Jerome,” a 1592 canvas by Paul Brill, have been hung for the first time. But for the most part, the old rooms will be arranged as they always have been, and about two-thirds of the museum’s collection will be on view.

The biggest crowd pleasers — “Girl,” along with another Vermeer, the radiant “View of Delft,” and Rembrandt’s “The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp” — are back in their original rooms. But, because of its recent popularity, “The Goldfinch” has been moved from a side wall on the staircase to the more spacious Jan Steen Room, where it hangs by itself between two windows, awaiting admirers.

Wall labels — in Dutch and English — have been kept short. “If you put a lot of text on the walls, you will lose the atmosphere,” Ms. Gordenker said. “In the end, it’s really all about looking.”

Correction: June 20, 2014

An earlier version of this article misidentified the material on which Carel Fabritius’s painting “The Goldfinch” is painted. The work is an oil on panel, not canvas.

A version of this article appears in print on June 21, 2014, on page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: ‘The Goldfinch’ Alights in a Repolished Jewel Box.

[View article on nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

SUPPORT THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE MAURITSHUIS

The Board of the American Friends wishes to express its gratitude to our supporters who make it all possible. By joining the American Friends, you become a member of a group of patrons who care deeply about the Mauritshuis and are committed to support Dutch paintings of the Golden Age. In addition to receiving the American Friends newsletter, supporters receive invitations to museum visits, events, private gallery viewings, and much more. The American Friends is a recognized tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization and all contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. [Please become a supporter today!](#)



[click here if you wish to unsubscribe from our mailing list](#)