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Rare Rembrandt drawings on display, many for first time, at Ackland Art Museum in NC

BY COLLEEN HAMMOND

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Rembrandt's "Landscape with Canal and Boats" will be on display at the Ackland Art Museum in Chapel Hill, N.C. as part of "Drawn to Life: Master Drawings from the Age of Rembrandt in the Peck Collection," which includes dozens of 17th and 18th century drawings by Dutch and Flemish artists. REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, DUTCH, 1606-1669, C. 1655 *The Peck Collection at the Ackland Art Museum*



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CHAPEL HILL

After years of anticipation, a collection of rarely exhibited drawings by Dutch master Rembrandt van Rijn is now on display at the Ackland Art Museum.

The Ackland's newest exhibit, "[Drawn to Life: Master Drawings from the Age of Rembrandt in the Peck Collection](#)" includes dozens of 17th and 18th century drawings by Dutch and Flemish artists, including five sketches by Rembrandt, who died in 1669.

They're all from the Peck Collection, [which the Ackland received in 2017](#). It was the largest ever gift for the UNC-Chapel Hill art museum, courtesy of the late UNC alumnus Sheldon Peck, and his wife, Leena Peck. This vast collection, valued at \$17 million, included 134 Dutch and Finnish drawings.

"Drawn to Life," with 70 pieces of work, is the first time many of these drawings will be on view to the public since the donation. The museum notes that many can only be on display for short periods of time because they're sensitive to light.



Blue paper sketches like “Figures Dancing Around a Fire” by Peter van Laer are on display at the Ackland Art Museum in Chapel Hill, N.C. They’re part of “Drawn to Life: Master Drawings from the Age of Rembrandt in the Peck Collection,” which includes dozens of 17th and 18th century drawings by Dutch and Flemish artists. Pieter van Laer, attributed to, Dutch, 1599-after 1642, (c. 1625-30) *The Peck Collection at the Ackland Art Museum*

While Rembrandt’s paintings and portraits from the Dutch Golden Age famously strike viewers with awe and a radiant glow, these drawings tell a vastly different story. This collection features more understated works that are meant to be looked at for longer periods of time.

Filled with humor and humanity, these sketches speak to a change in artistic ethos during this era. Instead of crafting idyllic landscapes, Rembrandt and his contemporaries began creating more true to life images marked with slight imperfections and honest depictions of their subjects, said Dana Cowen, Sheldon Peck Curator for European and American Art before 1950.

“Drawings are so intimate,” Cowen said. “The more you look at them, the more time you spend with them, the more you see.”

Cowen invites visitors to meditate in these drawings and allow themselves to slip into the world of the artist to meet the peculiar cast of characters depicted across the exhibit.

One of Cowen’s personal favorites is [Frans van Mieris’ “Head of A Woman Looking Downward.”](#) This simple profile drawing, as the title suggests, depicts a woman posing for an artist deep in thought.



Frans van Mieris's "Head of a Woman Looking Downward" is on display at the Ackland Art Museum in Chapel Hill, N.C. It's part of "Drawn to Life: Master Drawings from the Age of Rembrandt in the Peck Collection," which includes dozens of 17th and 18th century drawings by Dutch and Flemish artists. Frans van Mieris, Dutch, 1635-1681, c. 1660-65 *The Peck Collection at the Ackland Art Museum*

The collection includes drawings by artists Jacob van Ruisdael, Jan van Goyen and Adriaen van Ostade.

The exhibit is open Sept. 23 through Dec. 31, before it is moved to the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam in March.

The museum says the Peck Collection helped establish it as one of a "handful of university art museums in the United States where scholars and students can study northern European drawings in-depth."

Sheldon Peck, one of the [museum's major benefactors](#), was a [Durham native who died in April 2021](#). He was 79 and an orthodontic specialist, educator and art collector. [Leena Peck, who grew up in Finland, died in 2019](#) at the age of 73, The Boston Globe reported.

“Their collecting was fueled by a scholarly pursuit and natural curiosity to explore how masterful artists captured a slice of humanity and truth in their works,” according to [Sheldon Peck’s obituary](#).

Several events will be held during the run of the exhibit.

The Ackland Art Museum is at 101 S. Columbia St. in downtown Chapel Hill. Admission is free. It is open Wednesday to Sunday and the second Friday of each month from 10 a.m. - 9 p.m. For information, go to ackland.org.



“Drawn to Life: Master Drawings from the Age of Rembrandt in the Peck Collection” is at the Ackland Art Museum in Chapel Hill, N.C., through Dec. 31, 2022. It includes dozens of 17th and 18th century drawings by Dutch and Flemish artists, including rare works by Rembrandt and this piece, “Studies of Hands from an Album” by Abraham Bloemaert. Colleen Hammond chammond@newsobserver.com

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