

Caesar van Everdingen: a Dutch and Finnish Collaboration on 17th-Century Painting

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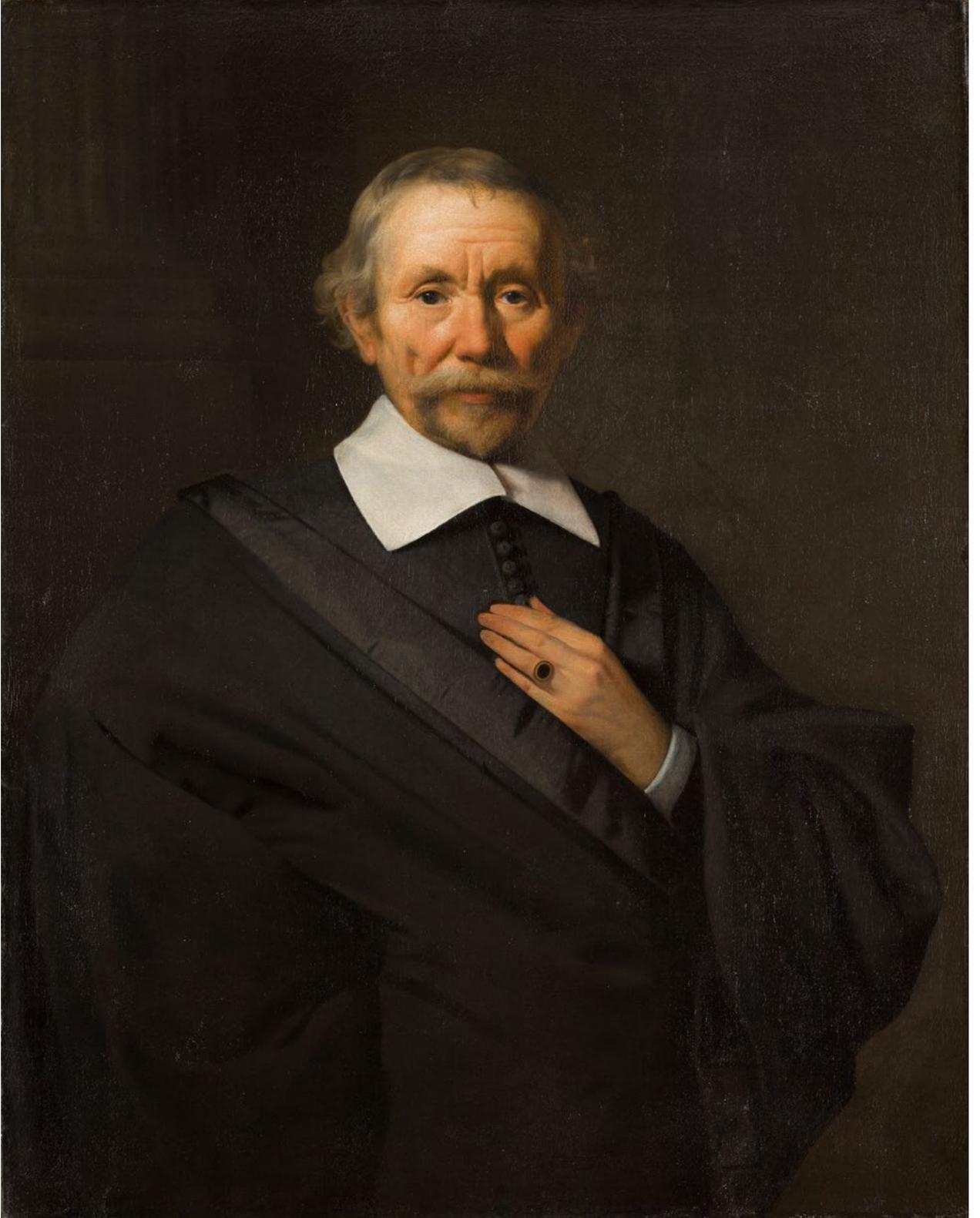
As an important new exhibition on an unsung hero of the Dutch Golden Age travels to Helsinki's Sinebrychoff Art Museum, Gill Crabbe meets the Dutch curator Christi Klinkert who has been pioneering the artist's rediscovery

The Sinebrychoff Art Museum in Helsinki is fortunate to hold a small cluster of Dutch Old Master paintings in its collection, including *Monk Reading* (1661) by Rembrandt, *Young Woman with a Glass of Wine, Holding a Letter in her Hand* (c. 1665) by Gerard ter Borch, *Joseph's Bloody Coat* (1655) by Govaert Flinck, and *Still Life* (1637) by Willem Claesz Heda to mention a few examples. Part of the Dutch masters collection is shown on a regular basis.

While art historians specialising in the Dutch Golden Age have traditionally focused on exhibitions by the great masters like Rembrandt, Hals and Vermeer, research trends in the past 15 years in the Netherlands have opened up broader perspectives on this extraordinary period in its nation's art history, bringing to light new names and artists whose contributions are worthy of attention. This kind of development is where the collaboration between research professionals and art-museum professionals can bear abundant fruit.

One such artist who has recently been under the spotlight is the Dutch Classicist painter Caesar van Everdingen, who last year was the subject of an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar, which was the artist's home town in the Netherlands. The show travels to the Sinebrychoff Art Museum in February 2017, which is something of a coup for the Sinebrychoff, as the exhibition is in fact the first monographic show of the artist to be mounted in 400 years, and thus introduces to the public a master painter who has hitherto been largely marginalised. So how did this collaboration come about?

In 2014, Dr Kirsi Eskelinen, Director of the Sinebrychoff Art Museum, attended a conference of CODART, the worldwide network of curators of Dutch and Flemish art, where Dr Christi Klinkert, the Alkmaar museum's Curator and the then Director Lidewij de Koekkoek, announced plans to mount an Everdingen show and suggested it could travel to a second venue. Eskelinen was one of several museum directors to show an interest. The Dutch and Finnish colleagues met the following year and found they were kindred spirits, having a strong commitment to research-based exhibitions with an emphasis on conservation. 'Our museum was looking for an equal partner, not necessarily the biggest museum, but one with ambition,'



Caesar van Everdingen (1616/1617–1678)
Self-Portrait, c. 1670
Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar
Photo: Niels den Haan Fotografie

says Klinkert. 'I think it will be good to see van Everdingen reaching beyond the mainland European countries like France or Germany and instead travelling to a country where perhaps you would least expect to find it. Yet I think that the quiet coolness of the paintings will strike a chord with the Finnish public.'

While van Everdingen may be an unfamiliar face on the scene in both countries, Klinkert points out that the time is ripe for the public to be introduced to a broader perspective on Dutch Golden Age painting: 'After many decades of exhibitions on the canonised Dutch masters such as Rembrandt, the Dutch Classicist style has become an increasing area of interest to researchers. The first large-scale exhibition focusing on that style was the Dutch Classicism show in 1999 at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, which travelled in 2000 to the Städelische Kunstinstitut Frankfurt. At that show van Everdingen was represented by 14 paintings, with the catalogue text suggesting the artist deserved a solo exhibition at some time in the future.'

It has taken 15 years for that vision to be realised but for Klinkert those were galvanising words, and on her appointment in 2009 as curator of the museum alongside the then Director Lidewij de Koekkoek, she set about working towards mounting a solo show for van Everdingen. So what exactly was van Everdingen's contribution to the bigger picture of the Dutch Golden Age?

'He was one of the Dutch classical painters who made history paintings of mythological subjects painted in a very different style from, say Rembrandt,' Klinkert explains. 'Van Everdingen's unique contribution lies partly in the way that he could convey textural quality,' she continues. 'He is a master of distinguishing velvet from satin or cotton but in a very different way from Rembrandt. While Rembrandt's technique was to sculpt with paint, in van Everdingen's works the paint is flat and smooth on the canvas. His secret lies in the way he gives colour to shadows, often employing six or seven hues, which gives enormous depth and subtlety to the reflections and the folds in fabrics.'

Given that Klinkert had set her sights on resurrecting van Everdingen's reputation, how was a small-scale provincial museum like the Stedelijk Alkmaar able to take on such an ambitious project? 'It took a few years for our museum to become professionalised enough to deal with a project of that scope,' Klinkert admits. 'First we had to find a registrar to work with all the logistics of setting up this kind of exhibition, so that I could concentrate on doing the research. We didn't have a collections manager, for example, to make sure the works are safe and the climate is right. Now we have a collections manager and more data loggers than before to monitor the climate.'

Then in 2011 the museum bought two paintings by van Everdingen at Christie's, bringing the number of works in their holdings to 11. 'At that moment we thought, this a starting point for claiming the artist. So next I gave a short lecture at a CODART conference in the Rijksmuseum in 2014, which was attended by curators from all over the world, where we put the message out about this project. It was good to step up and say, we are going to do this.'

The next move was to secure significant loans. In Amsterdam the Rijksmuseum agreed to lend its five van Everdingen paintings, including *Young Woman in a Broad-Brimmed Hat* (c. 1650–60), and the Mauritshuis in The Hague promised two. 'So then I was sure I had a critical mass of paintings to mount a show. Van Everdingen's oeuvre is rather small; we know of about 60 paintings that have survived and his complete output was only around 100 works.'

Having secured their core loans, Klinkert turned her attention to funding, and it was here that the museum received considerable affirmation in winning the prestigious Turing Foundation Award of 150,000 euros. 'That award attracted a lot of press interest, and with the Rijksmuseum and Mauritshuis loans in the bag, it was not difficult to secure the remaining loans and other funds needed quite quickly.'

The museum already had municipal government funding for some key restorations. 'Two works – the Civic Guard paintings, one of which is in the Helsinki show – are very large scale, so we asked for a one-off grant in addition to our regular budget to restore those and were promptly granted it. So that in turn also helped with our application to the Turing Foundation.'

Klinkert has been struck by the generosity of her professional colleagues around the world in getting the show on the road. 'When we asked for loans, we often got so much more



Caesar van Everdingen (1616/17–1678)
Young Woman in a Broad-Brimmed Hat, c. 1650–1660
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

than just the loan – either restoration or reframing, or additional research,’ she says. One example is a loan from the Michaelis Collection in Cape Town. *Still Life with a Bust of Adonis* (1666) is the pendant to one of the paintings loaned from the Mauritshuis, *Still Life with a Bust of Venus* (1665). ‘They have been shown together once before in the 1990s and the curator in Cape Town recalled that on that occasion the varnish on the Adonis appeared rather yellowed, so for this show he had it cleaned and also reframed to match the frame of the Mauritshuis’s Venus. So now we have this handsome couple.’

Another example of generous collaboration is the loan from the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp of *Portrait of a Girl as Diana* (c. 1655). ‘We thought the work was a real eye-catcher but it too was quite yellowed and it had many discoloured retouches, so it needed restoration. The curator suggested we split the cost 50:50 so that we could keep the painting after the exhibition until 2019, while the Antwerp museum is closed for renovation. So it was a win-win situation, especially as the painting proved to be largely overpainted, and there were details in the composition that were revealed when it was restored; oak branches were revealed in the upper left corner, and in the lower right corner there was a capitol with griffin-like figures on it. So the restoration gave the work more depth and classical atmosphere.’

This brings us to the further research interests that have been prompted by the process of bringing together this exhibition. A conference of arts professionals accompanying the show in Alkmaar threw up several questions. ‘We found out many new things in the preparation of the show which in turn raises further questions. So for example, with the *Portrait of a Girl as Diana*, the revelation of the oak leaves and the griffins raised questions such as: Who is the girl? Do these new details reveal something about her identity – maybe she has a griffin or an oak leaf in her name or her family crest.’

It remains to be seen whether the exhibition in Helsinki raises more research questions on van Everdingen and his oeuvre, as Klinkert will deliver a lecture to accompany the show. She is looking forward to seeing this unsung hero of Dutch Classicism presented in a very different context; the Alkmaar Stedelijk is situated in a modern museum built in 2000, with large airy gallery spaces, whereas the Sinebrychoff Art Museum, being a house museum, has a more historic atmosphere but more limited facilities, so 28 of the 39 paintings will travel from Alkmaar, including one of the two specially restored monumental group portraits of the town’s Civic Guard. ‘Moreover,’ she adds, ‘we are now learning from our first-time experience of showing an exhibition outside of the Netherlands.’

‘We know that van Everdingen’s brother Allart, a landscape painter, travelled to Scandinavia in 1644, and I like the idea that Caesar’s work is finally travelling too, following in his brother’s footsteps.’

‘Painting Beauty – Caesar van Everdingen’, a lecture by Dr Christi M. Klinkert, Curator, Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar, Netherlands, takes place on February 16, 2017, at 6 pm, at Sinebrychoff Art Museum, Helsinki