



THE ART CRUISE INSPIRES, AGAIN

Fine Art Connoisseur's sixth annual adventure abroad, the Rhine Art Cruise, delivered what it promised, and then some. Conceived by FAC publisher Eric Rhoads, the voyage this past autumn proved an ideal way to mix world-class art and architecture with five-star comforts and a delightfully cohesive group of 48 passengers who shared with each other their passion for beauty and quality. The complex history of the Rhine River Valley is not so familiar to North Americans, so our itinerary helped the travelers visualize its fascinating heritage.

In fact, the cruise was preceded by two optional tours. First, a merry band of seven artists traveled with Eric Rhoads to paint picturesque scenes in the perfectly preserved medieval city of Bruges in Belgium, and then the windmill-filled village of Zaandijk northwest of Amsterdam. En route, they stopped to explore the manufacturer of top-quality artists' paints, Old Holland — a particularly thrilling experience for working artists.

Having checked into the luxurious five-star Hotel De L'Europe in central Amsterdam, this group then expanded to 28 people, who spent four action-packed days admiring some of the Netherlands' famous artistic treasures, past and present. Their immersion began with a deliciously candid talk about the Dutch art scene by the private adviser Marina Aarts. From the window of our meeting room, we watched a spiffy canal boat alight at the hotel's pier so that we could board it for our own tour of the city's renowned waterways. Later we headed to the studio of the conservator Lara van Wasseanaer, to whom many Dutch museums and private collectors turn when their Old Master paintings need restoring. This was followed by drinks and conversation in the atmospheric studio of the



(LEFT) Conservator Lara van Wasseanaer demonstrates a point in her Amsterdam studio. ■ (RIGHT) Artist Urban Larsson describes the history of his spacious studio in Amsterdam.



Rijksmuseum curator Jenny Reynaerts with Peter Trippi and Eric Rhoads



(ABOVE) At the Van Gogh Museum, Peter Trippi introduces senior researcher Teio Meedendorp (left) and chief curator of exhibitions Edwin Becker. ■ (BELOW) At the Mauritshuis, photos in front of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* are forbidden, but....



Anne and Dick Keigher admire Van Gogh's paintings at the Kröller-Müller Museum.



(ABOVE) Lecturer Cora Hollema presented Peter Trippi with her newly translated biography of Thérèse Schwartze. ■ (BELOW) *AmaCerto* was our home away from home.



painter Urban Larsson, who happens to be Lara van Wassenaer's husband and who was busy working on a large portrait of a highly recognizable sitter.

The next day brought us to the Rijksmuseum, one of the world's greatest — and most newly renovated — art museums. Here we enjoyed an orientation by curator Jenny Reynaerts, who then guided us through the magnificent galleries of 19th-century art that she and her colleagues reinstalled recently. (In February 2016, Reynaerts will open a groundbreaking exhibition about the late-19th-century painter George Breitner, a former occupant of Urban Larsson's studio.) Our visitors then independently explored the museum's paintings from Holland's 17th-century "Golden Age," including Rembrandt, Vermeer, and Hals. After lunch at

the Rijksmuseum's chic restaurant, we headed to the Van Gogh Museum, home to the world's greatest collection of you-know-who. Over coffee and cookies, we enjoyed an orientation by chief curator of exhibitions Edwin Becker and senior researcher Teio Meedendorp, a rare opportunity to learn about this institution's exciting future plans. (The April 2016 issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur* will contain an article on the Charles-François Daubigny [1817-1878] exhibition to open there after presentations in Cincinnati and Edinburgh.) We then relished free time to discover the permanent collection, and also the temporary exhibition comparing Van Gogh with Edvard Munch.

The following day, a private motor coach whisked us to The Hague, where we first scanned the broad beach facing the North Sea



at Scheveningen. There was a reason for this: our next stop was the Panorama Mesdag, a rare survival from the 19th century of what was once a common attraction in the era before cinema; a life-size, 360-degree re-creation of the same Scheveningen beach we had just seen, painted by the marine master Hendrik Mesdag (1831-1915) and his team. All of us were astonished to emerge from a dark tunnel and spiral staircase to discover the brilliant, life-like vista upstairs. To enhance our experience further, we headed to the nearby Mesdag Museum, the mansion where Mesdag and his artist wife, Sintje van Houten, lived and worked. It contains a superb collection of 19th-century masterworks by the couple's artist friends, including Antonio Mancini, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and John Singer Sargent. Having enjoyed free time shop-



(LEFT TOP) Kasteel de Haar was expanded with Rothschild funds from the 1890s onward. ■ (MIDDLE) Cruising the Rhine Gorge ■ (BOTTOM) On the terrace at Heidelberg Castle



Autumn's colors were on full display in both Amsterdam (ABOVE) and the Rhine Gorge.



ping (and eating herrings the Dutch way), we headed to the Mauritshuis, the 17th-century jewel box-mansion filled with Old Master treasures including Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. At day's end, we unwound over a tangy rijsttafel supper, a reminder of The Hague's connection with Indonesia, formerly a Dutch colony.

The next day brought us to eastern Holland to explore the Kröller-Müller Museum, which holds the second greatest collection of paintings by Van Gogh, as well as other Impressionist and modern masterpieces. The museum is set in a superb sculpture garden within a national

park, and we lucked out with another day of sunny, mild weather. The strolling continued at the Jachthuis St. Hubertus, where the Kröller-Müller family lived. This is the finest residence built by Holland's great Arts & Crafts architect, Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856–1934). Back in Amsterdam, our day concluded at the historic artists' club Arti & Amicitiae. Here we enjoyed an illustrated lecture about the Dutch artist Thérèse Schwartze (1851–1918), presented by her biographer Cora Hollema, who also signed copies of the newly published English-language version of her book. (See Hollema's fascinating article on page 48.)

Given our shared passion for Rembrandt, it made sense for us to start the next day at the Rembrandthuis, which brings to life his home and studio; we were especially fascinated by the informative demonstration of how his assistants prepared his paints. Then it was on to the elegant Willet-Holthuysen mansion facing one of Amsterdam's most prestigious canals, and finally to *AmaCerto*. Built recently in the Netherlands and operated by AmaWaterways of Los Angeles, this is the sleek, 164-passenger vessel that became our home for the next week.

We were not finished with the Netherlands, however. Rather than sitting through a dull



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1. At Strasbourg's Palais Rohan, Peter Trippi gave an impromptu talk on a painting by William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905). ■ 2. Mitch Neto and Mark Jung snapped photos of each other as Andy Warhol. ■ 3. Michelle Jung, Dawn Black, and Kathy Jackson dressed as Mary Cassatt, Frida Kahlo, and Georgia O'Keeffe. ■ 4. Complete with bandaged ears, Dan Whipple and Rick Dickinson (center) became Vincent van Gogh while "painting" the tour's beloved coordinator Gabriel Haigazian (left) and his patient colleague Howard Wise.

series of canal locks, we boarded a motor coach that brought us to admire a windmill Rembrandt once painted. Then it was on to Kasteel de Haar, Holland's largest and most luxurious country house — the ancestral home of the Van Zuylens, but totally renovated with the Rothschilds' fortune from the 1890s onward. From there we rejoined our ship, and we were off to Germany.

GERMANY AND EVEN FRANCE

One feature of *Fine Art Connoisseur's* cruises is that I deliver a total of three illustrated lectures exclusively to our group during sailing hours. These are intended to set our experience

in historical and geographical context, giving travelers an idea of what they will see in the days ahead, and why those places look the way they do. Once on land, we let native experts and guides do the talking, though I often chime in with questions and comments.

Our first stop in Germany was the bustling city of Köln, centered on its enormous Gothic cathedral, which we explored with local guides. We then strolled through the important yet under-recognized Wallraf-Richartz Museum, focusing there on its collection of medieval art from the Rhineland, especially colorful altarpieces. The next day was spent cruising the most scenic part of the Rhine (officially the "Rhine Gorge," now a UNESCO World Heritage site). This is the winding portion of the river, where vineyard-covered hills plunge to the shore, separated from the river only by single-road villages and railway lines. The best way to absorb the spectacular beauty of this region is to sit atop a riverboat like *AmaCerto* — swaddled in blankets and sipping coffee spiked with local brandy. That is exactly what we did for six hours, later arriving in quaint Rudesheim, from where we headed to the beautiful spa town of Wiesbaden. There we drove to a hilltop crowned with an unexpectedly beautiful

Orthodox church (built in memory of a 19th-century Russian princess), then walked through the town center. Back in Rudesheim, most of us toured Siegfried's Mechanical Music Cabinet, a kooky museum of delightful gadgets like player pianos and orchestrions.

The next day was spent exploring the picturesque city of Heidelberg, chiefly its romantically ruinous castle overlooking the Neckar River. We also sampled the diverse collections of the Kurpfälzisches Museum, located on one of Germany's longest pedestrian shopping streets. The shops were even more enticing the next day among the quaint, half-timbered lanes of Strasbourg, which is actually on the French side of the Rhine, yet very German in personality. After a walking tour of the historic center, including its cathedral, we explored the fine and decorative arts collections inside the Palais Rohan that once housed the archbishop.

Back aboard the *AmaCerto*, October 31 ended with a blow-out Halloween celebration; many of our guests took to heart the suggestion that they dress like their favorite artist. Astonishing the ship's other passengers were an array of starry names: three different Andy Warhols, three Frida Kahlos, two Vincent van Goghs, plus Salvador Dalí, Georgia O'Keeffe, Mary Cassatt,



1. Pandora Dickinson channeled our recent encounter with Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. ■ 2. Libby Whipple morphed into John Singer Sargent's *Madame X*. ■ 3. Elvis (Greg Meador) returned for one evening only. ■ 4. David Orcutt and Peter Trippi arrived as Luciano Pavarotti and a witchy version of Henri Matisse with paper-cutting scissors. ■ 5. Mrs. Katz discussed the history of Freiburg's Jewish community. ■ 6. Peter Trippi (left) and Eric Rhoads (right) in Freiburg with Manfred, Susanne, Eugen, and Margret Baldas

Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, the Girl with a Pearl Earring, John Singer Sargent's Madame X, James Rorimer of the Monuments Men, Rose Valland (who secretly recorded what the Nazis stole from the Louvre), and even Marilyn Monroe, Elvis, and Luciano Pavarotti. *AmaCerto* staffers assured us they had never seen anything quite like us.

Alas, all good things must end, so our final day together was in Freiburg, capital of Germany's Black Forest region. Here, in heavy fog, we explored the marvelous cathedral, and also the synagogue rebuilt by members of the city's Jewish community who survived the Holocaust. We were particularly grateful to Mrs. Katz, the head of that community, for sharing her insights inside the sanctuary. The day closed on a lighter note, when we met up with four locals related to Peter Strub, who has sailed on four previous Fine Art Cruises and was actually born in the center of Freiburg. On hand to welcome us were his cousins Eugen and Manfred Baldas, along with their wives, Margret and Susanne (respectively). Together we ascended the Schlossberg hill (by foot or funicular) to Dattler, a charming café that serves outstanding cakes baked with the region's famous fruits and liqueurs.

Our goodbyes upon docking at Basel (Switzerland) were bittersweet. After sharing so much fun, it was sad to bid farewell to friends old and new. We all agreed to try to gather again in the autumn of 2016, when the Fine Art Cruise will try something new. From October 14 through 21, we will sail with AmaWaterways in southwestern France, specifically on the Garonne and Dordogne rivers, which merge to form the Gironde estuary. Internationally renowned for such wines as Sauterne, Medoc, St. Émilion, and Cognac, this is a region increasingly admired for its historic art and architecture, found in such scenic spots as Bordeaux, Bergerac, Bourg, Cadillac, Libourne, Paulliac, and the chateaux of Roquetaillade, Blaye, and D'Montaigne. Having relaxed and savored French cuisine, we will then fly (nonstop) from Bordeaux to London, taking up residence in a central hotel to explore the metropolis's renowned art treasures from October 21 through 26. We sincerely hope that you will consider joining us then.

Information: To learn more about next year's adventure, contact Gabriel Haigazian, Creative Travel Planners, 5855 Topanga Canyon Boulevard, Suite 220, Woodland Hills, CA 91367, 818.444.2700, gabriel@thectpgroup.com.

Peter Trippi is editor-in-chief of *Fine Art Connoisseur*. All photos courtesy Eric Rhoads.

(TOP) Six-time cruiser Charles Raskob Robinson (left) is renowned for his cravats, so Dan Whipple, Bob Wrathall, and Roger Rossi wore their own cravats in his honor. ■ (MIDDLE) Charla and Bob Nelson proudly sport the commemorative T-shirts they received in celebration of their five consecutive years cruising with *Fine Art Connoisseur*. ■ (BOTTOM) Dick Keigher, Lamar Matthews, Eric Rhoads, and Roger Rossi all sported berets.

