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# Editorial

## Ways of Seeing

**F**or many, the Rijksmuseum is all about paintings. And, what's more, Dutch paintings. This is in part because of the fame of the Old Masters of the Golden Age, and in part because painting remains the most popular art, in both senses of the word.

Paintings are not found solely in Dutch culture, of course, nor are they confined to wood or canvas. As we see from the acquisitions published in this issue – a Korean screen painted in ink, Chinese plates painted with figures in enamel colours and gold, and an Old Testament scene painted with vitreous paint and silver stain on glass – a painting may be many things in many forms. And, as the late John Berger so cogently pointed out, the way we look at a painting affects its meaning for us.

The souvenir box from Suriname has painted panels. More than just a decorative object, it embodies a number of meanings. The box is a product of Dutch colonial history, and at the same time a very personal record of the history of exploration. Christoffel Bisschop's nineteenth-century painting of the expedition to Novaya Zemlya (1596-97) presents another story of exploration and tells of seafaring and survival, and – on yet another level of interpretation – of historicist tendencies in nineteenth-century art.

Other newly acquired paintings likewise allude to different values. *A Dutch Girl at Breakfast* by Jean-Etienne Liotard, painted in 1756, provides another layered image of Dutch history by the multi-talented Swiss painter. It is a homage to Dutch painters like Terborch and Metsu, evident not only in the reference to the *Interior of the New Church in Delft* by Hendrik van Vliet hanging on the wall, but even more in the delicate portrayal of the young woman, epitomizing such supposedly Dutch virtues as sobriety, cleanliness and modesty. Anyone who visits her in the gallery amidst all Liotard's pastel portraits of eighteenth-century European aristocrats, can fully appreciate the difference in time and culture that Liotard bridges in this small painting.

The eighteenth-century pendants by Nicolaas Verkolje are all about *double entendre*. What appears to be an innocent outing of fashionable young people turns out in the second painting to be a prelude to a groping session, which would fully merit a #metoo comment nowadays, but actually projects the eighteenth-century sense of fun and play. However, as Gregor Weber pointed out at TEFAF, they are painted exquisitely!

Art appreciation is and always will be a many-layered thing, governed by the way we look at it.