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4 June 2021, 10:54 (CEST)

‘Maritime Masterpieces’: the salty sea air of harbour life across six centuries

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With ‘Maritime Masterpieces’ the Maritime Museum Rotterdam is opening the coda to the Boijmans Next Door series, bringing together more than 70 treasures from the two collections. Celebrated

works by Bosch, Monet and other masters, dating from the 16th to the 21st century, join forces to tell this tale of marine life and art.

The post-lockdown reopening of museums on 5 June means that the public can at last visit the brand-new ‘Maritime Masterpieces’ exhibition in the Maritime Museum Rotterdam. From art-historical and marine perspectives, the exhibition tells the tale of shipping and ports over the last six centuries, as well as people’s lived experiences in these settings. ‘Maritime Masterpieces’ brings together more than 70 works, masterpieces from the collections of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and the Maritime Museum. Older works by Hieronymus Bosch, Hendrik Avercamp, Jozef Israëls, Claude Monet and Paul Signac meet modern works by Dolf Henkes, Guido van de Werve and Sasja Hagens. The exhibition is the coda to the Boijmans Next Door project, which involved the Boijmans collection being shown at neighbouring locations, thanks to the generous support of the Droom en Daad Foundation.

Vigor, desire, life

In the Maritime Museum, located at Rotterdam’s historic Leuvehaven harbour, visitors can follow how maritime life has evolved over the centuries. Each painting, ship model, drawing or artefact tells a tale about maritime and port life. This reveals art-historical connections between various styles, but tells the underlying human stories too.

The emergence of landscape painting, a typically Dutch phenomenon, formed the cradle of marine painting. Marine painters such as Ludolf Bakhuizen, Willem van de Velde the Younger and Jan van de Cappelle, who were contemporaries of Rembrandt and Vermeer, excelled at using the best qualities of marine painting in works that conjoin atmosphere, poetry, maritime life and seascape.

Industrialisation also gets a look-in: from the first steamship to scientific expeditions to Nova Zembla – everything was captured on canvas. Dutch maritime painters such as Josef Israëls and Hendrik Mesdag reflect the simple lives of fisherfolk. French painters like Signac came to the Netherlands in search of the seascape they knew from paintings, but were also inspired by unfamiliar scenes in the port of Rotterdam. The exhibition then reaches the quayside of the present day, where artists including Frank Stella and Sasja Hagens drew inspiration from interpreting ports as a metaphor for vigor, desire, life.

Boijmans Next Door

Boijmans Next Door was made possible thanks to the support of the Droom en Daad Foundation. Launched in 2019, this series of exhibitions has involved an ambitious collaboration between Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and eight neighbouring museums and institutions in Rotterdam. A total of about 500 masterpieces from the museum collection have been presented in a new extramural context. This encounter between collections, as here in the Maritime Museum, provides novel insights and new interpolations among the works on display. The narratives and context of these works are thus explored in greater depth and breadth. This is the first time that the Boijmans collection has been showcased by so many Rotterdam institutions with which Boijmans has already been cooperating for years.

The opening date for Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen is 6 November 2021. Here the Boijmans collection, which comprises approximately 151,000 works of art, will be reunited in the world’s first art depot that is fully accessible to the public.

To arrange a press preview of the ‘Maritime Masterpieces’ exhibition you can make an appointment with Peter Jan de Werk, Marketing & Communications for the Maritime Museum Rotterdam, via p.dewerk@maritiemmuseum.nl or tel. +31 (0)6 51 06 72 18.

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About Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

The world-renowned art collection of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen has over the span of 170 years expanded to more than 151,000 artefacts, which includes some 63,000 paintings, photos, films, pre-industrial design and design objects, contemporary art installations and sculptures, as well as 88,000 prints and drawings.

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