

A Royal Passion for Art.

William II of the Netherlands and Anna Pavlovna

Villa Vauban – Luxembourg City Art Museum
12 July – 12 October 2014

William II (1792-1849) was both King of the Netherlands and Grand Duke of Luxembourg, as a result of the personal union linking the two countries. He reigned from 1840 and was a true “Art King”. Together with his wife, tsarevna Anna Pavlovna (1795-1865), he amassed a significant art collection, which after his death was auctioned and scattered all around the world.

The exhibition is being shown in three successive locations, all of which have a connection to the history of the royal couple and their art collection: 1. the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, the home city of Anna Pavlovna, where a significant part of the royal collection ended up, 2. the Dordrechts Museum in the Netherlands, which launched the concept of the exhibition and 3. Villa Vauban in Luxembourg, formerly part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and home to one of the collectors who acquired works from the royal collection.

The collection of William II comprised works by Italian, French and Spanish Old Masters, Flemish Primitives and Dutch painting from the Golden Age. He also purchased works by contemporary artists as well as several drawings (among others by Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael). The collection had an international format and included masterpieces by Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Hans Memling, Rembrandt, Jan Steen, Francesco Melzi, Anthonis van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens. Among the 19th-century works, in particular the landscapes by B.C. Koekkoek, a seascape by J.C. Schotel as well as a family portrait by Paul Delaroche stand out.

Tragic end to an art collection

Shortly after the death of William II, it was revealed that the royal collection was heavily burdened by debt. Immediately prior to his death, the king had received a secret loan of more than one million guilders from his brother-in-law, Tsar Nicholas I. The art collection acted as guarantee. Upon William's death, his brother, Prince Frederick, decided to sell the collection. The auction took place in 1850 and attracted important art collectors from all over Europe, among them the Luxembourg-French banker Jean-Pierre Pescatore, as well as various museums. The largest art collection of the Netherlands was thus dispersed, with parts of it ending up in museums throughout the world.

House of Orange and the Romanovs

A further focus of the exhibition is the royal couple William and Anna. Through William's marriage in 1816 to Anna Pavlovna, the House of Orange became linked to the Russian dynasty of the Romanovs. Anna was the daughter of Tsar Paul I and the sister of his successors Alexander I and Nicholas I. Drawn from the Dutch Royal Collections in The Hague, the exhibition showcases precious wedding gifts, several ornate pieces of furniture from various royal residences and richly decorated private objects that once belonged to William and Anna. The young princess and later queen brought a magnificent dowry with her and ensured that the Calvinist kingdom acquired some of the splendour of the tsarist court, in the form of opulent interiors and a “glamorous” court life. William II had a neo-Gothic hall designed and erected to house his art collection on the grounds of his Kneuterdijk Palace in The Hague.

The exhibition *A Royal Passion for Art* offers visitors a fascinating insight into the life and passions of a 19th-century European royal couple, which left their mark well beyond the boundaries of their territories, not least due to their commitment to art.