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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

AMBASSADE DE FRANCE AUX PAYS-BAS

Inauguration de l'exposition Rembrandt à Paris

(20 septembre 2018, Rembrandthuis Amsterdam)

Discours prononcé par Philippe Lalliot, Ambassadeur de France aux Pays-Bas

Madame la Directrice, Madame la Présidente,
Mesdames et Messieurs, Cher amis,

I must first of all say that I am very happy to be with you tonight in this museum which I was lucky to be invited to very shortly after my arrival in the Netherlands and which I consider as one of the most interesting in this country which has so many and among the most beautiful in the world.

I am all the more delighted that we are here together for a very special occasion: the opening of the *Rembrandt in Paris* exhibition, a title that could be surprising to those who know that Rembrandt never actually left the Netherlands!

This exhibition, which retraces the posterity of Rembrandt, in 19th-century Paris, two centuries after his death, triggered my curiosity both as a diplomat and as an art lover. First because it questions the circulation of art work, and second, because it sheds light on the mechanisms of artistic influence.

Both considerations are central to cultural diplomacy. The French Institute in the Netherlands and the Alliance française of Amsterdam are therefore very enthusiastic about this new collaboration initiated by the Rembrandt House.

I don't want to lecture you or sound too pompous but I think it is important indeed to remember the context in which this "Rembrandt revival" occurred. In post-revolutionary Paris, at the beginning of the Romantic period, Rembrandt's free and independent spirit, the originality of his work by contrast with that of his contemporaries and his informed knowledge of other European artistic movements, strongly appealed to French artists yearning for more freedom.

We may all wonder how these 19th century French artists came to discover the work of this 17th century Dutch master. While the education provided by the Académie des Beaux-arts de Paris, established during Rembrandt's lifetime, was based on the imitation of Antiquity and noble subjects, Rembrandt's work, with

its genre scenes and the depiction of expressive ordinary characters, was in fact not likely being taught at the Paris Académie.

And yet, we owe the extraordinary dissemination of Rembrandt's work to other public institutions and to the medium of etching itself. Degas discovered Rembrandt's etchings at the "cabinet des estampes" of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which purchased a lot of significant works by European artists. Manet discovered Rembrandt on a scholarly visit at the Louvre, but first and foremost in the Netherlands, at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in 1852, as well as in The Hague, where he made an etching of the famous and one of my favorite *Anatomy Lesson*.

This little known fact of art history is a reminder of the importance of the free circulation of artists, of their ideas and of their art, that give way to the most fruitful collaborations.

In this era of globalization and art dissemination via digital technologies, we should look back on that chapter of our common history to overcome any potential fear of foreign influences and recognize instead that they have always highly contributed to the originality, quality and diversity of the European art scene and to the shaping of a common European cultural heritage and identity.

That is why, based on this rich common heritage, the core mission of the French cultural services in the Netherlands is to support and promote, in collaboration with our Dutch partners, all forms of dialogue and exchanges between artists and cultural institutions. Tonight's event is the perfect illustration of what we can do together to contribute to the revival of Europe through culture which is a priority for both our Governments.

I am sure this exhibition will be of huge interest to the general public. I would like to thank very warmly those who organized it so well. I wish them the greatest success./.