



The Lure of Falconry

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 7th August- 15th October 2012

In acknowledgement of UNESCO's recent recognition of falconry as part of humanity's intangible cultural heritage, from 7th August to 15th October 2012 the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam will present a unique exhibition dedicated to falconry in the visual arts.

The exhibition features more than 40 etchings and engravings, all belonging to the Rijksmuseum and never before exhibited, as well as falconry equipment, loaned from private owners, that illustrates the importance of falconry in past centuries and the richness of this old tradition that played such an important role both in and outside of the Netherlands.

In the exhibit's journey falconers appear, from time to time, as courtly lovers, noble saints and valiant hunters. Falconry, the art of hunting with falcons, described so memorably by Emperor Frederick II of Swabia in his treatise "De Arte Venandi cum Avibus", was a prestigious pursuit in Medieval and Renaissance Europe, one inextricably associated with aristocratic and courtly life, being largely the province of kings and nobles. To train and care for their birds they employed professional falconers: a surprising number of those at European courts were from the Netherlands, which played a leading role in many aspects of falconry for hundreds of years, providing falcons, trainers and falconers to courts throughout Europe and beyond. The village of Valkenswaard in De Kempen, Brabant, lying on the migration route of the peregrine falcon, was for centuries a major supplier of birds of prey and falconers for all European courts.

The art of falconry has been practiced for several thousand years during which time the methods used for training and hunting with birds of prey have remained virtually unaltered, even in different times, styles and cultures. Looking closely at the pictures shown in the exhibition, it will be evident that, while the circumstances in which trained hawks are kept and flown at game have changed considerably through the ages, the essence of training and hunting with birds of prey has stayed largely intact. Many varied traditional methods have contributed in their own way to how birds of prey are used in falconry nowadays.

The accurate depiction in the drawings of clothes, falconry equipment and the hawks and falcons themselves, shown full of detail, allows us to make a journey into the past and relive the excitement of times when falconry was often a metaphor for courtship and romance and symbol of nobility.

This handsome exhibition has been realised with the precious help of Wim Pijbes, the director of the Rijksmuseum, of Jane Shoaf Turner, head of the print department, and of the curators Huygen Leeftang and Erik Hinterding, who scoured the collection for interesting and unusual works of art related to falconry subjects.

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The curators have worked closely with experts from the Dutch falconry clubs, under the umbrella of the Nationaal Overleg Valkerij Organisaties (NOVO), and the Valkerij en Sigarenmakerij Museum in Valkenswaard, who helped with their great knowledge of the history and practice of the old and noble art of falconry.

To ensure that the contents of this exhibition were accessible to all falconers and enthusiasts from around the world, thanks to the enthusiastic effort of many people, a gorgeous, high quality catalogue has been published.

This publication was in part supported by generous grants from The Falconry Heritage Trust, Amvest, Houthoff Buruma, Honeybrook Animal Foods, Gemeente Valkenswaard; with special thanks to Mr. H.W. ten Bosch and many other individual contributors. Particular gratitude is owed to Harrie Knol, who wrote the essay 'The Passion and the Beauty of the Flight' and helped the exhibition in many other ways too.

Text drawn from the catalogue "The lure of falconry" by Patrizia Cimberio, Falconry Heritage Trust, Board of Directors.



Leaving for the Hunt Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet, dry-point, c.1485-1490.

Falconry was often employed as a metaphor for a lover's conquest of his beloved



Portrait of Rembrandt with a Falcon, unknown pupil of Rembrandt, etching with touches of burin, 17th century.

The falcon on the fist gives the portrait an added cachet

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