

# MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

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**Rare, private collection of Old Master paintings makes exclusive appearance at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg**

*“A Feast for the Eyes: European Masterpieces from the Grasset Collection” offers a glimpse of life in the 1600s and 1700s, along with many hidden meanings, in an exhibition of 40 paintings*

**St. Petersburg, Fla. (March 5, 2019)** – Dreamy landscapes and luscious still life paintings from one of the world’s greatest private collections join together in *A Feast for the Eyes: European Masterpieces from the Grasset Collection*, a stunning exhibition opening March 23 at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

The exhibition features 40 of the finest Old Master paintings by artists from the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and Germany — including Jan Brueghel the Elder and Canaletto, one of the greatest view painters of all time represented here with an iconic view of Venice. The works span from 1600 to 1750. The collection is on loan from the Grasset family of Spain, whose patriarch assembled this group of masterpieces.

The St. Petersburg exhibition is the last time the works are expected to be shown together. This group of paintings has only been exhibited publicly once at the San Diego Museum of Art in 2016.

This once-in-a-lifetime collection features some of the most beautiful still life, landscape, and banquet scenes of the “Golden Age.” The works reflect the growing power of the middle class in this time period, the impact of maritime trade, the desire to capture images of luxury and abundance in art, and the emergence of the art market, along with a number of subtle “hidden” symbolic meanings to be discovered.

The exhibition begins with exotic floral pieces that reflect with precision and detail the expanding trade and scientific curiosity that defined the era. This opulence is also displayed in the exhibition’s splendid banquet pieces, such as the magnificent *Still Life of Fruit and Olives* by Floris Claesz. van Dyck (1575-1651), featuring cheeses, wine, and exotic fruits in a precious Chinese porcelain bowl that had been brought over long, treacherous sea routes.

*A Feast for the Eyes* also includes seascapes celebrating maritime life and trade, most notably *The Grand Canal*, an exquisite vista of Venice, Italy at its most glorious by Canaletto (1697-1768). (Many of the scenes like the one in *The Grand Canal* were painted as mementos for wealthy tourists.) The exhibition also features a number of fascinating genre scenes, such as

the piece that beautifully evokes day-to-day life centuries ago titled *Winter Landscape with Elegant Skaters* (1616) by Esaias van den Velde (1587-1630).

As for “hidden” symbolic meanings, discerning visitors will spot such touches as a mouse and dead songbirds in *Still Life of grapes, and peaches on a porcelain bowl* by Peter Binoit (1590-1632), symbolizing how wealth and success can be fleeting. And in a work by Jan Breughel the Elder (1568-1625), *A wooded river landscape, with a fish market and fishing Boats* (1610), a windmill in the distance has several meanings, symbolizing power and prosperity but also as a reference to religion and the crucifixion.

“We are enormously grateful to the Grasset family for their generosity in sharing their private collection,” said Kristen A. Shepherd, Executive Director of the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg. “This exhibition is truly a gift – in particular, a gift to young people in our community whose first impression of so-called ‘Old Masters’ will be these delightfully fresh and lively masterpieces. The Grasset Collection also gives our visitors the opportunity to study and appreciate masterworks rarely seen.”

*A Feast for the Eyes* will be on view from March 23 through July 28, 2019 and will not travel to other venues. On Sunday, March 24, from 3-4 p.m., MFA Curator of Collections Stanton Thomas, PhD will host a gallery talk, leading a tour through the Dutch Golden Age while uncovering many of the “vanitas” themes throughout the paintings, which symbolize the transitory nature of life. The discussion is one of many public programs related to the exhibition (see below).

As part of the exhibition, MFA will also have an interactive gallery guide for guests of all ages as a fun way to explore the Golden Age and the artworks.



Image Credit: Floris Claesz. van Dyck, Dutch, 1575-1651, *Banquet Still Life*, Oil on oak panel, Grasset Collection

*Feast for the Eyes: European Masterpieces from the Grasset Collection*  
Scheduled Public Programs

[Gallery Talk on “A Feast for the Eyes”](#)

Speaker: MFA Curator of Collections and Exhibitions, Stanton Thomas, PhD  
Sunday, March 24, 3-4PM (Free with Museum Admission)

[The Glorious Table: Food and Drink in European Baroque Paintings](#)

Speaker: Senior Curator and Head of Product Design and Decorative Arts at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Dr. Yao-Fen You  
Thursday, April 4, 7-8PM (Free with Museum Admission)

[Chinese Porcelain in Dutch Paintings](#)

Speaker: Cofrin Curator of Asian Art at the Harn Museum of Art, Jason Steuber  
Tuesday, April 9, 2-3PM (\$5 plus Museum Admission)

[Coffee Talk with Nan Colton – “A Feast for the Eyes”](#)

Wednesday, April 10, 10-11AM (Free with Museum Admission)

[Feasting & Frivolity Gala](#)

Friday, April 12, 6:30-11PM (Tickets Available Online)

[Cocktails & Collections](#) - Includes a docent-led tour of “A Feast for the Eyes”

Thursday, April 18, 5-7PM (Free for Members, \$20 for Non-MFA Members)

[The Bounty of the Natural World in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Painting](#)

Speaker: Alexandra Libby is Assistant Curator of Northern Baroque Paintings at the National Gallery of Art  
Thursday May 2, 7-8PM (Free with Museum Admission)

**Suggested Social Media Posts**

OPENING MARCH 23 at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg @mfastpete: “A Feast for the Eyes: European Masterpieces from the Grasset Collection” brings together a once-in-a-lifetime collection of paintings featuring some of the most beautiful still life, landscape and banquet scenes of the “Golden Age.”

Starting March 23, St. Petersburg is the only place you can view one of the world’s greatest private collection of Old Master paintings. “A Feast for the Eyes: European Masterpieces from the Grasset Collection” will be on view at @mfastpete through July 28 #MFASStPete.

“A Feast for the Eyes: European Masterpieces from the Grasset Collection” beautifully presents florals, food and the fabulous life of the “Golden Age” with 40 of the finest Old Master paintings by artists from the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Germany. The exhibition opens March 23 at @MFASStPete!

## **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA**

The MFA at 255 Beach Drive NE has a world-class collection, with works by Monet, Morisot, Rodin, O’Keeffe, Willem de Kooning, and many other great artists. Also displayed are ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, and Native American art. Selections from the photography collection, one of the largest and finest in the Southeast, are on view in a gallery dedicated solely to the medium. Kristen A. Shepherd is the Executive Director.

Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, until 8 p.m. on Thursday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Regular admission is \$20 for adults; \$15 for those 65 and older, Florida educators, college students, and active duty military; and \$10 for students 7 and older. Children under 7 and Museum members are admitted free. Groups of 10 or more adults pay only \$14 per person and children \$4 each with prior reservations. Also, admission is only \$10 after 5 p.m. on Thursday. The MFA Café is open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. For more information, please call 727-896-2667 or visit [mfastpete.org](http://mfastpete.org).

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