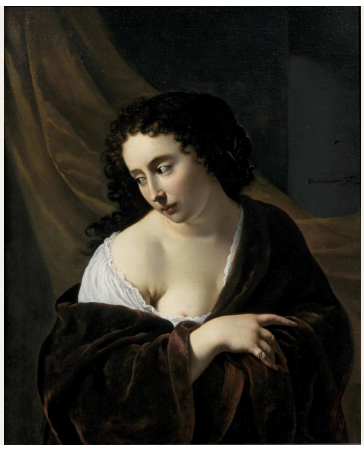
UTRECHT, NETHERLANDS

Centraal Museum: Masterpieces

Twenty works from Utrecht's Centraal Museum, from civic pictures and views of the city to a group of paintings by Isaac Israëls.



The Centraal Museum collects art connected with Utrecht alongside work from wider Dutch traditions, and it follows art and design into the modern period. The city has its own history of painting, which includes artists who responded to Caravaggio in the seventeenth century.

Much of this selection stays close to Utrecht. Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh paints its burgomasters with the city messengers, its banner and Vredenburg Castle. Hendrik van Oort and Bruno van Straaten paint its streets, a canal and its gates, and in one case the water has frozen and walkers and skaters have taken it over. Around that core are religious scenes, still lifes and portraits, among them Thérèse Schwartze's group of a mother with her children. Isaac Israëls has more paintings here than anyone else. His subjects, from women at a sewing table to a boxer at rest and a crowd at a fair after dark, take the selection a long way from the burgomasters' tiled room.

Artline made this selection from the museum's documented holdings, independently of the museum. Dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the linked records, including approximate dates and date ranges.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/centraal-museum

The selection · 20

1. A Young Woman
   Johannes Jansz Bronckhorst · 1654
2. Heraclitus
   Johannes Moreelse · 1630
3. Vredenburg Castle in Utrecht
   Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh · 1660
4. The Oudegracht in Utrecht
   Hendrik van Oort · 1838
5. The Pausdam and Achter de Dom, Utrecht
   Hendrik van Oort · 1820
6. The Tolsteeg Gate and Its Surroundings, Utrecht
   Hendrik van Oort · c. 1830
7. The Weerd Gate and Its Surroundings, Utrecht
   Bruno van Straaten · c. 1830
8. The Adoration of the Shepherds
   Johan de Veer · c. 1650
9. The Burgomasters of Utrecht with the City Messengers
   Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh · 1658
10. The Raising of Lazarus
    Aert Jansz Marienhof · 1648
11. The City Banner of Utrecht
    Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh · 1658
12. Aleida Gijsberta van Ogtrop-Hanlo with Her Five Children
    Thérèse Schwartze · 1906
13. Sewing School
    Isaac Israëls · c. 1905–c. 1906
14. The Rainbow
    William Degouve de Nuncques · c. 1910
15. Factory Girls on the Prinsengracht, Amsterdam
    Isaac Israëls · 1894
16. The Black Boxer
    Isaac Israëls · 1914
17. Steam Carousel at Night
    Isaac Israëls · 1910
18. Still Life with Fruit and Lobster
    Michiel (II) Simons · c. 1670
19. Fish Still Life and Seascape
    Willem Ormea · 1641
20. Reading Girl
    Isaac Israëls · c. 1920

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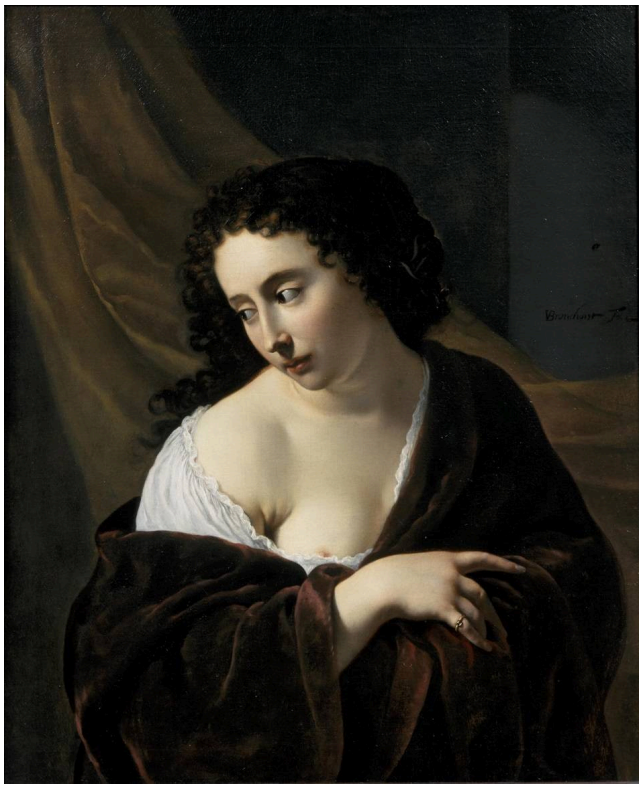
A Young Woman

Johannes Jansz Bronckhorst

1654 · Centraal Museum



Johannes Jansz Bronckhorst. A young woman. Image credit: Johannes Jansz Bronckhorst. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

She is not named, and Bronckhorst gives her no elaborate setting, so the portrait rests on pose and dress. Her head tilts above a loose wrap and one hand lies across the fabric. These are small adjustments, but they are enough to show how her body sits beneath the clothes.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 15008

02 / 20

Heraclitus

Johannes Moreelse

1630 · Centraal Museum



Johannes Moreelse. Heraclitus. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Heraclitus was an ancient philosopher, and Moreelse had no way of seeing him. This bent old man with a globe to contemplate is therefore a characterisation, not a likeness. Bronckhorst's young woman is a face without a name. Here the name comes from antiquity and there was no face to go on, so the expression had to be invented along with everything else. Moreelse gives his closest attention to the clasped hands and to the light across aged skin.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

Vredenburg Castle in Utrecht

Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh

1660 · Centraal Museum



Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh. Castle Vredenburg in Utrecht. Image credit: Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Nobody approaching Vredenburg Castle at ground level could have seen it like this. The viewpoint has been raised so that the walls, towers and surrounding water can be taken in together. Van Swanenburgh gives up the experience of arriving for a view that explains how the place is put together.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 12645 a

04 / 20

The Oudegracht in Utrecht

Hendrik van Oort

1838 · Centraal Museum



Hendrik van Oort. De Oudegracht te Utrecht. Image credit: Hendrik van Oort. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The Oudegracht view is built on a change of level. A bridge splits the scene in two: some people stand on it above the canal, others are down by the water, and through the arch a second crossing carries the route onward. The figures are small, and they are spread across these heights to show how people moved through an uneven part of the city.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2331

05 / 20

The Pausdam and Achter de Dom, Utrecht

Hendrik van Oort

1820 · Centraal Museum



Hendrik van Oort. De Pausdam and Achter de Dom in Utrecht. Image credit: Hendrik van Oort. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

On the Pausdam the buildings have the upper hand. Tall façades leave only a fairly narrow strip at their foot, and a cart and pedestrians make their way along it. That is enough to show a street in use without reducing the architecture to a backdrop. The irregular roofline stops the façades settling into an even rhythm.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2333

06 / 20

The Tolsteeg Gate and Its Surroundings, Utrecht

Hendrik van Oort

c. 1830 · Centraal Museum



Hendrik van Oort. De Tolsteegpoort en omgeving te Utrecht. Image credit: Hendrik van Oort. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Winter has changed what the place is for. The water that normally separated the Tolsteeg Gate from its surroundings has frozen, and walkers and skaters have taken it over, while walls and a windmill make a solid skyline above them. Van Oort records a use of the city's edge that lasts only as long as the ice.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2332

07 / 20

The Weerd Gate and Its Surroundings, Utrecht

Bruno van Straaten

c. 1830 · Centraal Museum



Bruno van Straaten. De Weerdpoort met omgeving te Utrecht. Image credit: Bruno van Straaten. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Van Oort's Tolsteeg Gate carries the same approximate date, but here the water is open and doing its ordinary work. Van Straaten sets the Weerd Gate on the far side of a broad expanse of it, so the city appears as it might to someone travelling towards it. Boats of different sizes mark out the distance, and a bright sail catches the eye before the shore does.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2304

08 / 20

The Adoration of the Shepherds

Johan de Veer

c. 1650 · Centraal Museum



Johan de Veer. De aanbidding van de herders. Image credit: Johan de Veer. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

The infant is small, and De Veer does not enlarge him. The heads and hands of the group turn towards him instead, and that convergence is what makes him the centre of the picture. The gathering is kept tight, with shadow closing in at its edges.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2280

09 / 20

The Burgomasters of Utrecht with the City Messengers

Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh

1658 · Centraal Museum



Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh. De burgemeesters van Utrecht met de stadsboden. Image credit: Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Dress tells the burgomasters from the city messengers before any face is read, and Van Swanenburgh records these distinctions of office as carefully as he records likenesses. The tiled room places everyone within a single order, and an opening connects that order to the city outside.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1537

10 / 20

The Raising of Lazarus

Aert Jansz Marienhof

1648 · Centraal Museum



Aert Jansz Marienhof. De opwekking van Lazarus. Image credit: Aert Jansz Marienhof. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Lazarus, raised from the dead, comes out of his tomb before witnesses, and Marienhof conveys the miracle through that audience as much as through the man brought back to life. De Veer's Adoration, from about the same time, packs its figures tightly together. Marienhof spaces his onlookers out so that each reaction stays distinct, and a rocky setting holds them in one scene around Christ and the tomb.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 7288

11 / 20

The City Banner of Utrecht

Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh

1658 · Centraal Museum



Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh. De stadsbanier van Utrecht. Image credit: Willem Cornelisz. van Swanenburgh. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Van Swanenburgh painted this in the same year as the burgomasters. The officials have gone, and the civic emblem becomes the subject in its own right. The banner's broad division into red and white reads at once, while the tangle of bodies and weapons beneath it takes longer to sort out. The armoured figures, presumably the men responsible for carrying or defending it, are there to hold it up, and the picture gives them second place.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 1536

12 / 20

Aleida Gijsberta van Ogtrop-Hanlo with Her Five Children

Thérèse Schwartze

1906 · Centraal Museum



Thérèse Schwartze. Portrait of Aleida Gijsberta Van Ogtrop Hanlo with Her Five Children. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title names the mother in full and simply counts the children. The painting is more generous to them. Six sitters are a lot to hold together without falling back on one shared pose or expression, and Schwartze manages it by grouping them closely and letting their different heights and glances keep each child distinct. The clothing is elaborate, as befits a formal family portrait, but the faces never harden into a repeated pattern.

Object source · Open artwork

13 / 20

Sewing School

Isaac Israëls

c. 1905–c. 1906 · Centraal Museum



Isaac Israëls. Sewing school. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/isaac-israels/sewing-school-1906 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The women along the table share a task rather than a pose. Bent heads recur from one working place to the next, linked by runs of pale fabric, and repetition of that kind could easily flatten the workers into a pattern. Israëls's loose handling keeps it irregular enough that none of them looks interchangeable. Schwartze, in much the same years, kept her family group distinct through height and glance. Here the unevenness of the paint does that job.

Object source · Open artwork

14 / 20

The Rainbow

William Degouve de Nuncques

c. 1910 · Centraal Museum



William Degouve de Nuncques. L'arc en ciel. Image credit: William Degouve de Nuncques; Source credit: https://www.centraalmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/22147-larc-en-ciel-william-degouve-de-nuncques. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Fields and rows of trees divide the land into settled patterns. The rainbow crosses them without belonging to any of them, a passing effect laid over an ordered landscape and set off by dark clouds.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 22147

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Factory Girls on the Prinsengracht, Amsterdam

Isaac Israëls

1894 · Centraal Museum



Isaac Israëls. Factory girls on the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/isaac-israels/factory-girls-on-the-prinsengracht-in-amsterdam-1894 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The earliest of the Israëls paintings here takes him to the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam. The title identifies the women by their work, but the picture shows them walking, not working. They move close together at the same pace, and that shared stride, more than any glance towards the painter, makes them a group. Israëls puts them at the centre and keeps the street around them busy.

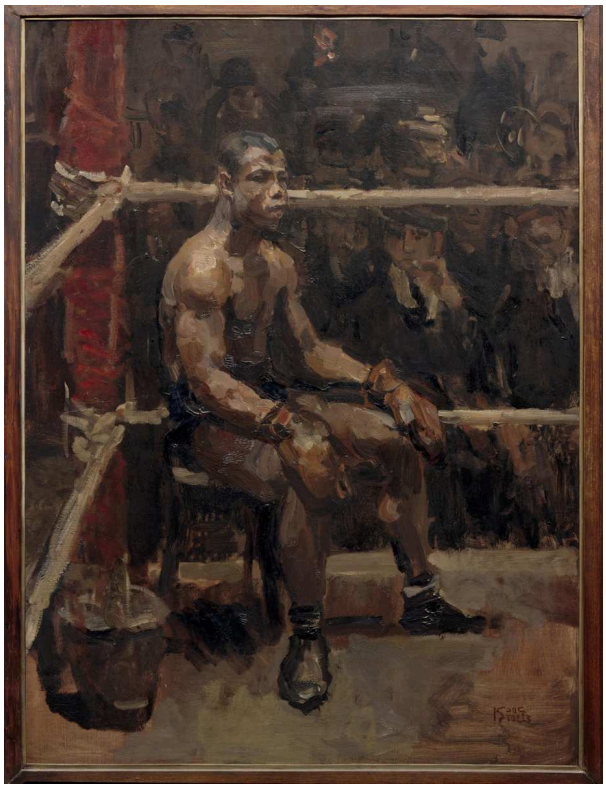
Object source · Open artwork

16 / 20

The Black Boxer

Isaac Israëls

1914 · Centraal Museum



Isaac Israëls. The Black Boxer. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/isaac-israels/the-black-boxer-1914 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The man is not named. The title identifies him only by his colour and his sport. The ropes place the scene in a boxing ring, yet he is sitting down, a trained body at rest rather than in action, and light and the turn of his body give him a solid presence in the crowded interior.

Object source · Open artwork

17 / 20

Steam Carousel at Night

Isaac Israëls

1910 · Centraal Museum



Isaac Israëls. Steam carousel at night. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/isaac-israels/steam-carousel-at-night-1910 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Bright machinery and a packed crowd compete for attention. Israëls picks out parts of people with small touches of light and leaves many faces unfinished. The broken handling suits the subject: at a crowded fair after dark, people are seen in fragments, wherever the light happens to fall.

Object source · Open artwork

18 / 20

Still Life with Fruit and Lobster

Michiel (II) Simons

c. 1670 · Centraal Museum



Michiel (II) Simons. Still life with fruits and lobster. Image credit: Michiel (II) Simons. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Fruit, lobster and vessels crowd the table, but nothing has simply been heaped; each object has been placed. Most of the interest lies in the surfaces, in how differently the fruit skins, the lobster's shell and the darker vessels take the light. The display spreads towards the edge of the table without spilling over it.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 6570

19 / 20

Fish Still Life and Seascape

Willem Ormea

1641 · Centraal Museum



Willem Ormea. Visstilleven en zeegezicht. Image credit: Willem Ormea. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Ormea fits a still life and a seascape into one picture, as his title promises. Large fish lie on a ledge close to the viewer, and beyond them tiny boats are out on a distant stretch of water. The jump in scale is abrupt, and it may simply be an awkward join, but it makes the pairing of catch and sea impossible to miss.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: 2325

20 / 20

Reading Girl

Isaac Israëls

c. 1920 · Centraal Museum



Isaac Israëls. Reading girl. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/isaac-israels/reading-girl-1920 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The latest of the Israëls paintings here leaves the fairground and the ring behind for a girl with a book. The book is small within the picture, but her whole pose is arranged around it. Israëls does not clear the room to underline her concentration. The furnishings and pictures around her stay in view, loosely painted, and she keeps her eyes on the page regardless.

Object source · Open artwork

Officials and passers-by

Taken together, the Utrecht pictures show the city in two quite different ways. Van Swanenburgh's Utrecht is, broadly, the city as an institution: officials sorted by office, an emblem held up by armed men, a castle seen from above so that its plan can be grasped. Van Oort and Van Straaten come down to the level of the street and the water. There the figures and boats are small. They show what a place was used for and give its buildings and distances a scale. Israëls's Factory Girls on the Prinsengracht, set in Amsterdam rather than Utrecht, reverses that proportion. The people no longer give the street its scale. They are what the picture is about.

Further reading

The Practice and Science of Drawing

Harold Speed · Read free · English

A practical, general guide to drawing, in which Harold Speed works through line, mass and the organisation of a figure. His terms help when comparing the carefully posed portraits in this selection with Israëls's more loosely painted figures.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12

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