



Willem van Haecht, *The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest*, 1628, oil on panel,

Antwerp © City of Antwerp Collection, Rubenshuis, photo credit: CC BY-SA KIK-IRPA, Brussels

Major temporary exhibition

DEALING IN SPLENDOUR

A History of the European Art Market

(30 January to 6 April 2026)

Gartenpalais Liechtenstein, open daily, 10:00–18:00, admission free

With its dealers, eminent institutions, and mysterious workings, the art market has long fascinated those on the outside. Now with its latest exhibition, “Dealing in Splendour: A History of the European Art Market” (30 January to 6 April 2026), the Liechtenstein Garden Palace is presenting a groundbreaking show that lifts the curtain on the various forces at play in the art trade. Major loans from international collections – including paintings by Titian, Rembrandt, Monet, and Klimt – will swell the ranks of stellar works from the Princely Collections themselves – such as sculptures by Giambologna and paintings by Brueghel, Van Dyck, and Canaletto – to make this a thought-provoking history exhibition and visual feast at one and the same time.

“When it comes to sealing the reputations of certain artists, the art market has been just as important as the writings of art critics and art historians themselves,” says Stephan Koja, Director of the Princely Collections. “Market activity rests on the commercial value of works of art, and market demand for particular artists determines their recognition –

including among critics. Understanding these dynamics is essential for discerning how artists become appreciated and maintain their careers. That's why with this exhibition we are deliberately bringing the art market – often perceived as shadowy – into the spotlight.”

The curatorial team at the Liechtenstein Princely Collections has charted the development of the European art trade from Greco-Roman antiquity to the Italian city-states of the Renaissance, the Dutch Golden Age, all the way up to the sensational exhibits and transatlantic deals of the 19th century.

As a result, the exhibition clearly reveals that many features of today's art market are, in essence, thousands of years old. Because a handful of cities and countries set the trends that subsequently became established practice elsewhere, the exhibition gives each of these centres of innovation its own gallery, allowing visitors to take a closer look at the advances that emerged there. This makes it possible to trace how the art market shaped not only the distribution of art objects but also the transmission of art forms and styles and art history itself. Both the first-documented European art collections and the earliest record of a lively art market date from Hellenistic Greece. And later, in the Roman Empire, the affluent citizens of Rome displayed a pronounced interest in acquiring Greek art.

During the Renaissance, artistic production in Florence was driven by official commissions and powerful patrons. Neri di Bicci produced large-format altarpieces and Giambologna, for example, made an equestrian statue of Ferdinando de' Medici, preserving his likeness for posterity. Parallel to such high-profile commissions, however, artists created terracotta reliefs and small devotional images for private use – works that, thanks to serial production and the efficient division of labour within the workshop, were considerably more affordable.

In 16th-century Antwerp, there emerged a free market that saw works being produced in their thousands and marketed to the general public in the so-called *Schilderspanden* (painters' stalls). Over the course of the following century, merchant families began trading artworks on a global scale for the first time. This period also saw the start of artists specializing in particular genres, a labour-saving practice that made art accessible to the aspiring middle class. Despite this opening-up of the art market, a portrait by Rembrandt van Rijn or Anthony van Dyck, or a flower still life by someone of the calibre of Rachel Ruysch remained the preserve of wealthy collectors. The panel painting, "The Gallery of Cornelis van der Geest", a key loan from the Rubenshuis, portrays the successful spice merchant surrounded by his extensive collection. In the north, the Dutch "Golden Age" brought about an unprecedented boom in artistic production.

The professionalization of art dealing and the rise of auction houses in Paris and London marked another step in the evolution of the art market. James Christie founded the auction house that still bears his name, widely known today for spectacular, headline-grabbing sales and record-breaking prices. During the French Revolution opposition mounted against the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, which had the last word on accepted artistic taste and production. Over the course of the next century, some dealers championed alternative exhibition opportunities to rival the Paris Salon and bolster the careers of marginalized artists such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Henri Rousseau, Gustave Courbet, and Charles-François Daubigny. These dealers became pivotal intermediaries who shaped new tastes and helped nurture the emerging art market in the United States.

One exhibition highlight is Claude Monet's "Grainstack, Sun in the Mist" from the Minneapolis Institute of Art, shown alongside three other masterpieces by the artist. Monet's practice of producing works in series marked a turning point in modern art, and such a blend of artistic independence and commercial strategy was crucial in redefining how modern artists saw themselves and the value of their art.

Meanwhile, in Vienna at the turn of the century, the Secession introduced innovative sales strategies and staged elegant exhibitions of its members' works that stood in striking contrast to the academic styles, crowded 'salon hang', and dissonant displays that had previously dominated at the Vienna World's Fair of 1873. The exhibition features an outstanding example of this new development, in the form of Gustav Klimt's "Nuda Veritas".

For more details, visit: www.liechtensteincollections.at

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