

AMSTERDAM, 8 July 2026

**Amsterdam – A Work of Art
How Was The City Depicted in the 17th Century?**

**An exhibition at the Amsterdam City Archives in collaboration with the
Amsterdam Museum
6 November 2026 – 7 March 2027**

In the 17th century, Amsterdam transformed from a mid-sized port city into a powerful world city. Artists captured this spectacular growth in cityscapes that show not only what Amsterdam looked like, but also how the city wanted to be seen: as a wealthy, powerful and innovative city with a respectable past. For the first time, the most beautiful and iconic cityscapes from this period are brought together in the exhibition *Meesterwerk Amsterdam*. This unique collaboration between the Amsterdam City Archives and the Amsterdam Museum celebrates not only the city's visual legacy but also the Amsterdam Museum's centenary.



Jan van Kessel (1641–1680)
View of the Dam looking west, 1668
Amsterdam, De Nederlandsche Bank, inv. no. 2407

The exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the growing city. From the construction of the canal ring to the imposing new town hall on Dam Square, from lively markets to the bustle of ships on the IJ: the cityscapes show a city on the move. At the same time, they offer a glimpse of daily life in the 17th century, and of the diversity of society at the time. It was the people who gave Amsterdam its rhythm and meaning, and their stories are still relevant today.



Michiel van Musscher (1645–1705)
A vegetable woman on the Haarlemmerdijk, 1668
Amsterdam Museum, inv. no. SA 38126

A historic collaboration

The exhibition is a unique collaboration between the Amsterdam City Archives and the Amsterdam Museum. The temporary closure of the Amsterdam Museum's main location offers the chance to bring together highlights from both collections, complemented by special loans from the Netherlands and abroad. This collaboration marks the centenary of the Amsterdam Museum, which has been collecting and sharing the city's stories since 1926. *Meesterwerk Amsterdam* is a tribute to the city's rich history as well as to the role of both institutions in preserving and presenting this heritage.

The birth of a visual tradition: pride, power and city marketing

Erik Schmitz, researcher at the Amsterdam City Archives: "In the 17th century, Amsterdam was the most depicted city in Europe after Rome. Artists such as Rembrandt, Pieter Saenredam, Jan van der Heyden and Jacob van Ruisdael created works that not only documented the city but also idealised it. It was in this period that the foundations were laid for how Amsterdam would come to be etched in the collective memory. Anyone who visits and captures the city today soon follows in the footsteps of the seventeenth-century creators of the cityscape and – perhaps unconsciously – continues a 400-year visual tradition".



Rembrandt (1606–1669)
The Ruins of the Old Town Hall, 1652
Amsterdam, Rembrandt House Museum, inv. no. 245

The exhibition shows how cityscapes were used as propaganda and city marketing, and how this new genre developed. Visitors discover how artists bent reality to their will when this served the 'truthfulness' of the cityscape: the *experience* of the image and the place mattered more than an exact rendering of the actual situation. The exhibition allows visitors to look over the artists' shoulders, as it were.

Topical themes: imagery and identity

Norbert Middelkoop, curator at the Amsterdam Museum: "The exhibition invites visitors to reflect on how images shape our view of the city. What was emphasised in the 17th century, and what was left out of the picture? What parallels are there with the way Amsterdam is captured and presented today? At a time when social media and AI shape our image of cities, *Meesterwerk Amsterdam* offers a reflection on the power of imagery, then and now".



Jan Abrahamsz Beerstraten (1622–1666)
The Paalhuis on the Nieuwe Brug, c. 1663–'66
Amsterdam Museum (on loan from the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam), inv. no. SB 6393

Audio tour

What did Amsterdam sound and look like when Rembrandt walked through the city? What went on behind the façades, on the harbour quays and in the busy markets where people from all corners of the world met? With an audio tour in Dutch and English, the cityscapes come to life. Stories, sounds and surprising details make the exhibition accessible to a broad audience.



Hendrick Cornelisz Vroom (1566–1640)
View of Amsterdam from the East, c. 1605
Amsterdam Museum, inv. no. SA 3034

Publication and public programme

A richly illustrated companion book accompanies the exhibition, in both a Dutch and an English edition. In addition, an extensive public programme offers lectures, workshops and city walks that connect the historical cityscapes with topical themes such as urban growth, migration and identity. There is also a suitable programme for children and families.

About the Amsterdam City Archives

The Amsterdam City Archives preserves the city's rich history and makes it accessible to a broad audience. Through exhibitions, educational programmes and public activities, the Archives connects the past with the present.

The exhibition is made possible in part by the Friends of the Amsterdam City Archives Foundation, the Turing Foundation, Het Zadelhoff Cultuur Fonds and Nut Amsterdam.

About the Amsterdam Museum

As the official city museum, the Amsterdam Museum invites Amsterdam's residents and visitors to become co-owners of our city – a metropolis in miniature. The museum does this by collecting, presenting and programming. By celebrating the city, but also by opening up its less positive sides for discussion and exploring what could be better. The Amsterdam Museum's main location is currently closed for renovation. The museum presents its programme at various locations across the city.

The Amsterdam Museum receives structural funding from the City of Amsterdam and the VriendenLoterij.

Note to editors

For interview requests, press enquiries or to arrange a guided tour of the exhibition, please contact Patricia Broersma-Pols at p.pols@amsterdam.nl (Amsterdam City Archives) or Kim Koopman (Amsterdam Museum) at k.koopman@amsterdammuseum.nl

Press images can be downloaded [here](#).

Save the date:

On 5 November 2026, the official opening for invited guests will take place. The exhibition will be open to the public from 6 November 2026. A press invitation will follow after the summer.