



Acceptance Speech

The Ambassador K. Terry Dornbush Award
Netherland-America Foundation Ambassador's Awards Dinner
Washington, DC
21 April 2016

Introduction

During the airplane journey from the Netherlands to Washington, I took a moment to peruse the previous recipients of *The Ambassador K. Terry Dornbush Award*. That was a daunting experience: two of them are now major donors to the Mauritshuis, one is an old acquaintance of my father's, and I know the others from reading newspapers. And they are all men.

I reminded myself that this award is given to someone who has "made a marked contribution in the field of philanthropy, education or culture...that has served to strengthen relations between the two countries." This made me feel a bit better. After all, I can comfortably call myself the poster child for Dutch American relations, at least in the field of culture. I often relate an anecdote in a heavy Dutch accent, which makes it obvious that I was raised in both countries—those of my Dutch mother and my American father.

Mauritshuis

Obviously, that in and of itself, wouldn't qualify me to stand before you this evening. I am here thanks to the Mauritshuis: the museum, the collection, my fantastic colleagues and our many friends around the world and here in the United States.

In 2008, I was a curator of Dutch art at the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh. I was approached confidentially to apply for the job as Director of the Mauritshuis. Frankly, I thought "why not?" It was a free trip to Holland. I ended up getting and accepting the job.

I confess it was a steep learning curve. Although, as you just heard, I speak Dutch without an accent, in fact, I only had one year of elementary school in the Netherlands. It was quite a shock when I had to read the first letter from the Ministry of Culture...I had no idea!

In 2008, we embarked on an ambitious plan to renovate and expand the Mauritshuis. To make a very long story short, we managed and financed this €30 million project with a small team independently of the government, and managed to get it done on time and well within budget. For me, that journey lasted six years. Luckily, the museum was only closed for two years to our visitors, and we reopened almost two years ago, in 2014.

The building project offered an opportunity to organize a tour of a selection of our paintings—intended partly to finance our building project; partly to raise awareness of our museum. After all, one of the

most frequently asked questions in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam used to be: "Where is the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*?" Obviously we had some homework to do. Our exhibition in Tokyo in 2012 was the most visited in the entire world that year, with more than 10,000 visitors a day. And the showing at The Frick Collection broke all records. There were literally lines around the block! As a result more people in the United States know how to pronounce the Mauritshuis than ever before.

Since the reopening, the Mauritshuis has gone from strength to strength: attendance in the first 12 months after reopening was more than 600,000 (compared to 260,000 in a very healthy year in 2011); we won many prizes—for the building project, the website, marketing campaign and much more; we still receive rave reviews from the press and from visitors alike.

Thank you

Should I be standing up here all on my own to accept a prize named after the generous and illustrious Terry Dornbush? I should think not. I couldn't have done it without the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*! And *The Goldfinch* helped out, too.

On a more serious note, a project such as this is a group effort, so with your permission, I should like to accept the prize on behalf of everyone at the Mauritshuis and all of the generous people who helped us. That includes Fay Hartog Levin, and the rest of the board of the American Friends of the Mauritshuis, who nominated me for this prize. And, as ever, my other friends and family, some of whom are here this evening.

To all of you, a great, big *dank u wel!*