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## **Paintings, Photos and a lot of Money**

**Netherlands, 09 Sep - 06 Oct 2015**

**Rembrandt portraits cast shadow on relationship with France ++ Volkert van der G. – a murderer tries to sell his story ++ Dutch rail network ProRail in severe financial distress. by Jessica van Zinnicq Bergmann**

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### **Rembrandt portraits cast shadow on relationship with France**

It started out as a simple idea by the director of the Rijksmuseum (Dutch national museum in Amsterdam), Wim Pijbes: the museum wanted to acquire two Rembrandt portraits and proposed to the Dutch parliament to ensure half of the financing, if the other half came from the state (160 million euro in total). The works of 1634 jointly form the wedding portraits Maerten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit and are the largest of Rembrandts portraits.

Pijbes counted his chicken before they were hatched. First of all, the idea of spending the tremendous sum of 80 million euro in public funds for a painting was greeted with little enthusiasm by the Dutch. The real issue arose, however, when French Minister of Culture, Fleur Pellerin, revealed her plans to acquire the paintings for the Louvre.

Franco-Dutch relationships were put to a serious test when the Dutch, on the one hand, kept insisting on buying both paintings and Pellerin, on the other hand, threatened to withdraw the export licence, she had earlier issued for the paintings. Both countries found an amicable solution when deciding to acquire the paintings jointly and display them in turns in the Louvre and the Rijksmuseum. The deal, in turn, led to discontent in Dutch politics as some opposition parties criticised the resulting lack of a financial contribution from the Rijksmuseum. Mariëtte Bussemaker, Dutch Minister of Culture, defends the deal and points to the fact that the museum will bear part of the restoration costs.

### **Volkert van der G. – a murderer tries to sell his story**

The murderer of the Dutch politician [Pim Fortuyn](#) made headlines once again due to a documentary that featured hidden camera footage. Volkert van der G. has been released from jail last year May. With his release came certain conditions. One of these conditions was that he was not allowed to contact the media or sell his story or pictures.

In the television programme, Brandpunt Reporter, they took undercover footage of him speaking to a friend about his deal with a photographer. This concerned a front page layout of a tabloid newspaper. The pictures were, as van der G., described in his conversation with his friend staged to make it look like he was unaware of it. Initially a probation spokesperson stated that they were unaware of this and did not grant an exception for the pictures to be taken or to be published. With this statement the question arose if [Volkert van der G.](#) would have to then finish his sentence and spend another six years in jail.

Later it occurred that the public prosecution service, the police and the probation organisation all knew about that the tabloid was planning on staging a photo shoot. They thought it would be best to have a photo shoot staged to stop the hunt on the first picture. The Minister of Justice, Ard van der Steur, had to admit that he was not aware of this which now leads to questions concerning the communication between the government and the judicial institutions. The public also raises the question whether it is believable that he was not informed about this topic.

The murder of Pim Fortuyn, party leader of the far right Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in 2002 heavily affected the self-image of Dutch society as being multicultural and open as well as the traditional party landscape with many populist and far right parties gaining success over the past decade. Therefore, many public figures – including Prime Minister Mark Rutte – were strongly opposed to an early release of van der G.

### **Dutch rail network ProRail in severe financial distress**

ProRail, the state owned company managing the Dutch rail network, is projected to have a spending gap of 475 million euro for projects in the period between 2018 and 2028. This news comes after a long list of complaints with regard to the management of ProRail, reaching from intransparent pricing for railway companies to immense increases in the costs for large projects such

as the construction of the central station in Utrecht.

Due to the financial mismanagement of ProRail, the responsible state secretary, Wilma Mansveld (PvdA) is under severe attack from opposition parties. Pressure mounted, when the press leaked an internal report revealing the disastrous lack of financial management and oversight within ProRail.

However, Wilma Mansveld argued that the organisational set-up of ProRail does not allow for her direct interference and at this stage a vote of no-confidence against her was only supported by the far-right PVV. Mansveld can thank the liberal D66 for the prevention of further personal damage, as they demanded an independent inquiry into ProRail's financial situation and a postponement of the debate until end of October.



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**Portraits of Maerten Soolmans & Oopjen Coppit by Rembrandt**

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