

Dutch museum partially re-opens

The Netherlands best-known art museum, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, re-opened one of its wings on Saturday following an asbestos scare, but most of the gallery, including sections containing much loved works by Rembrandt, would remain closed.

Officials said the Philips Wing of the museum, which currently houses an exhibition of works by the Dutch 17th-century master Hedrick Goltzius, plus the museum's permanent collections of Asian art and Italian paintings, would stay open until May 25.

However the Rijksmuseum's main crowd-pullers, including *The Nightwatch* by Rembrandt, will remain off-limits due to the scare over potentially toxic asbestos which was discovered on Tuesday during a routine inspection.

Asbestos can cause lung cancer in those who work closely with it.

The Rijksmuseum management told *AFP* that it was checking into whether more wings of the museum could be re-opened, but was awaiting further test results due next Tuesday.

The closure of the museum disappointed many of the visitors flocking to Amsterdam during the spring tourist season.

Agence France-Presse Amsterdam

The Rijksmuseum receives more than a million visitors every year, making it the country's second most popular museum after the Van Gogh Museum.

Tourists wanting to see the Rijksmuseum in its full glory may be in for a long

wait, however, as the museum is due to shut down at the end of this year for a major facelift.

If the asbestos cannot be made inoffensive or removed before the end of this year it will take until mid-2008 for the museum to re-open completely after much needed renovations, officials say.

From Dec. 20, 2003 only the Philips Wing will be open to the public with a selection of 17th-century masterpieces of

Dutch art.

The exhibition will show Delftware, sculptures and paintings by Johannes Vermeer, Jan Steen, Frans Hals and Rembrandt.

The museum offers a small consolation for tourists flying into Schiphol airport. They can visit the museum's annex in the tax free shopping area of Schiphol which houses ten works by Dutch masters from the Golden Age, including Rembrandt and Jan Steen.



Rembrandt's 1642 oil on canvas painting *Nightwatch*.