

[PRD 120187 Rembrandt panels #1 EDIT jla]

Rembrandt in America

"Rembrandt in America" is organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh.

[ENTRY ROOM]

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Who was Rembrandt?

Rembrandt van Rijn was a 17th-century Dutch artist. He was famous in his own time, and now, 300 years later, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest painters, printmakers, and draftsmen of all time.

Rembrandt belongs to the pantheon of artists who are known by a single name, such as Michelangelo, Raphael, and Rubens. His inclusion among such artists is remarkable because Rembrandt made no gigantic paintings such as the frescoes found in the Vatican or altarpieces in the churches of Antwerp. As a painter, Rembrandt remains known more for his deeply personal inventions, astonishing illusions, sense of intelligence and emotion, and startling artistic growth.

Rembrandt was full of contradictions. He combined impulsiveness with perfectionism. He appears to have started his paintings—often seeming to attack the panels—without making the elaborate preparatory drawings typical of most artists. Yet he fussed with his pictures, often changing the compositions as he went along, sometimes focusing on the finest details of an otherwise unfinished painting. He was one of the most insightful

interpreters of religious stories ever known, yet he was not a member of any congregation. He sought the patronage of wealthy merchants, aristocrats, and civic leaders, yet he bristled at their demands. He was intensely competitive, yet he reserved his harshest criticism for himself. He revisited subjects repeatedly, rethinking, and re-presenting them in new and more penetrating ways. Rembrandt's name has become synonymous with quality, yet one of the most vexing questions in art history is the distinction between his paintings and those of his students.

If Rembrandt was such a genius, why is it so hard to tell which paintings are originals?

Many factors contribute to the confusion between Rembrandt's paintings and those made by his contemporaries, students, and followers. A major factor is Rembrandt's talent and the fame it brought him while he was still in his twenties. He was so successful that other artists wanted to learn to paint in his style. Rembrandt was sought out as a teacher, and he could earn considerable amounts of money by taking on students. We know the names of 40 of his students; many others may have worked with him as well.

Not only did students pay significant tuition, but also, according to the rules of 17th-century Dutch artists' studios, the work of the students belonged to the master. The students were trained to paint in the master's style, and the master could sell their work as his own. Rembrandt was free to sign his students' paintings and sell them as his productions. Whether buyers always knew what they were getting is unclear, but even if they knew they had bought a studio product rather than an autograph work of the master, they may well have invited their families and friends to admire their "Rembrandts."

Rembrandt was in such demand as a teacher that he had his choice of students. Most of them were already trained artists. That freed him from having to teach the basics, and these protégés could quickly become productive members of the studio. Many of them could produce good paintings in Rembrandt's style, and some could produce excellent ones.

The notion of Rembrandt's style is complicated because it changed throughout his career, and he would sometimes work in a variety of styles simultaneously. His students seem to have learned to paint in the style of a given phase of Rembrandt's career. Often, when they left his studio to become independent masters, they continued to paint in that manner for years before developing

their own ways of painting as they matured or adapted to new trends.

Over the centuries, many of Rembrandt's and his students' paintings have been copied by other artists. Additionally, many scholars, dealers, collectors, auctioneers, and curators have been overly eager to assign authorship of paintings to Rembrandt. Sometimes their motivations were venal, but just as often, they were honest, well-intentioned mistakes. There will probably never be an irrefutably authoritative list of Rembrandt's paintings. Each generation seems to paint its own picture of the master.

"Rembrandt in America" does not pretend to provide definitive answers regarding the authorship of all the paintings on view. There are many open questions, and we invite you to look at the pictures and discover in them the qualities that may help to clarify their origins.

Why Rembrandt in America?

Since the Gilded Age, wealthy American collectors have eagerly sought Rembrandt's pictures. Largely through their gifts and legacies, dozens of his paintings have entered American museum collections. Even today, Americans—both private individuals and major institutions—are the world's most aggressive collectors of Rembrandt paintings. The result is a wealth of these originals in America, but until now a dearth of opportunities to see them gathered together.

This exhibition is an extraordinary opportunity to become familiar with Rembrandt's work. The largest gathering of his paintings ever assembled in America, "Rembrandt in America" comprises 50 paintings: 30 by Rembrandt, plus about 20 previously considered to be his own work but now thought to be the work of his younger contemporaries.

In these paintings, we can observe Rembrandt's growth from brash, young artist to confident master, to timeless observer of humanity. Remarkably, all of the paintings in the exhibition come from American collections. "Rembrandt in America" draws from two dozen American museums as well as a few extraordinary private collections, whose owners are generously making their rarely seen treasures available to the public.

America has long catalyzed new research on Rembrandt. Our country's hunger for his work stimulated efforts to rediscover long-forgotten paintings, and it gave new urgency to questions of authenticity as prices for the pictures reached astronomical heights. America became a proving ground where pictures were tested for authenticity.

In their efforts to determine bona fide paintings, Americans have subjected pictures to examination, using microscopes, X-rays, infrared light, ultraviolet light, pigment sampling, tree-ring measuring, and even nuclear irradiation. While these techniques can offer new understanding of pictures and sometimes conclusively eliminate a painting from the body of Rembrandt's work, the final judgment often comes down to the connoisseur's eye—the ability to recognize the work of an artist, much as one recognizes the face of an old friend. The best way to develop such skill is to see and compare as many pictures as possible, and the present exhibition provides that rare opportunity.

Rembrandt's boyhood in Leiden

Rembrandt was born July 15, 1606, in the town of Leiden, which lies along the Rhine river, about 30 miles southwest of Amsterdam. His father, Harmen, owned a malt-processing windmill on the opposite side of the river. Hence Rembrandt's full name came to be "Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn" (Rembrandt, son of Harmen, of the Rhine).

Leiden's origins date back to Roman settlements, and the town received its charter in 1266. Over time, it grew into a major wool-weaving center. During the Eighty Years War, Leiden sided with the Dutch in the revolt against Spanish rule of Holland (now The Netherlands). In 1574, the town was besieged, causing a third of its 15,000 inhabitants to perish. The siege was lifted by breaching the surrounding dikes to flood the town and permit ships to bring in supplies.

The town's heroism led Prince William I of Orange, leader of the rebellious Dutch, to choose Leiden as the site for a new university, founded in 1575. As home of the first university in the seven independent provinces that now make up The Netherlands, the town attracted many renowned scholars and became a publishing center.

By the time Rembrandt was a teenager, the town had more than recovered from the siege. With an influx of skilled craftsmen from the Spanish-dominated southern Netherlands, Leiden's population grew to 45,000, making it the second largest city in Holland.

Rembrandt attended Latin school until he was about 13 years old. There he would have learned about the history and mythology of

antiquity. We cannot say how the boy reacted to such stories, but they seem to have influenced the artist throughout his career.

Rembrandt enrolled in the university, but his primary interest may have been the student exemption from beer taxes. There is no record of his having attended classes. Instead, he followed his inclination and became apprenticed to the painter Jacob van Swanenburgh.

[Map of Leiden showing locations of home, mill, school, university, Swanenburgh]

Rembrandt learns to paint

Rembrandt served a three-year apprenticeship with Leiden artist Jacob Isaacsz. van Swanenburgh (1571-1638), who, had he not been Rembrandt's first teacher, would probably now be a largely forgotten specialist in dramatically illuminated scenes of hell. As van Swanenburgh's pupil, Rembrandt would have learned the many disciplines required to move from raw materials to finished painting. In broad terms, the training included the preparation of materials, the establishment of a composition, and the application of paint—but each of these stages encompasses countless details.

As part of his training, Rembrandt may have been called upon to assist with or make versions of his master's paintings. Though such activities were common practice and later became central to the functioning of Rembrandt's own studio, no painting has yet been recognized as a Rembrandt/Swanenburgh creation.

Two paintings in this gallery, *The Operation (Touch)* and *The Three Singers (Hearing)* demonstrate Rembrandt's level of accomplishment at the conclusion of his time with van Swanenburgh. Rembrandt would soon surpass his teacher's efforts in the expression of light and dark, but the painter of hell scenes may have provided the underpinnings of his student's later achievements.

When Rembrandt was about 18 years old, he must have envied Jan Lievens, a precocious Leiden painter, more than a year his junior, who had already established himself as an independent master and was capable of producing impressive paintings, such as *The Feast of Esther*, which is displayed nearby. Lievens had completed a two-year apprenticeship in Amsterdam with the celebrated painter, Pieter Lastman.

Rembrandt hastened to Amsterdam to work as a journeyman in Lastman's studio. Unlike Lievens, Rembrandt stayed there only six months, returning to Leiden to open his own studio. Though his exposure to Lastman was brief, it spurred Rembrandt on. He

quickly made a number of paintings that inventively reworked Lastman's themes and compositions. Emulation—the concept of both imitating and improving upon an exemplar—was a central concept in 17th-century Dutch art theory. Rembrandt put it into practice and went on to foster it in his students.

Rembrandt as an independent master in Leiden

By about 1625, Rembrandt was back in Leiden, at last an independent master. Rembrandt and Lievens developed a friendly rivalry. Because they depicted each other and often shared models, it is possible they also shared studio space. And here the great confusion begins. Though hindsight tells us that Rembrandt was the genius, Lievens was the more experienced of the two artists. They shared the experience of Lastman's studio, and they could look over each other's shoulders to share and steal ideas. The subjects of their paintings and the materials they used were often identical.

The two young painters attracted attention, most notably from a high court official, Constantijn Huygens, who wrote about the experience. He noted their industry, and worried that their unstinting labors would ruin their health. He saw in Lievens a greater degree of bravura showmanship, a desire to make large, elaborate paintings. In Rembrandt he saw a streak of intense perfectionism, which achieved in small works a degree of expressiveness exceeding that in much larger paintings.

Early 20th-century connoisseurs would have done well to heed Huygens's comparison of the two artists. Rembrandt's eventual stature blinded them to Lievens's ambitious early productions. Upon seeing *The Feast of Esther*, they recognized it as originating in Leiden due to its theatricality and palette of colors, but they automatically assigned the brilliant painting to the heralded genius, Rembrandt. After all, in retrospect, Rembrandt remained interested in the story of Ester throughout his life. Only in the 1970s did Lievens's authorship become clear.

Though Rembrandt probably aspired to win fame as a painter of historical scenes, he clearly knew that portrait painting would bring him a steady income as well as connections to patrons who might commission the type of work he most desired. He practiced his craft by depicting himself and other people with particularly interesting faces, such as the old man with weathered skin and flowing beard seen in this gallery.

When Rembrandt felt ready to offer his services to the most discriminating clientele, he painted a splendid picture that demonstrated his capability as a portraitist. Quite likely the painting in question shows an aged warrior, wearing bit of armor (a gorget), an elaborate gold chain, a pearl earring and a plumed

beret. The painting would, in effect, serve as his calling card in Amsterdam.

Until recently, Rembrandt was thought to have left Leiden for Amsterdam about 1631. New research suggests he maintained a Leiden studio for a few more years and shuttled back and forth between the two cities. In this interval, it is difficult to determine just where Rembrandt painted certain pictures. The exquisite portrait of a girl with red hair, pearl earrings, and a collar embroidered in gold is just such a painting. Traditionally she was identified by Rembrandt's sister, but it is perhaps more likely that she was a member of the Amsterdam family with whom he worked most closely. Paintings of this quality would soon bring clients to Rembrandt.

Rembrandt begins to teach

By 1628, Rembrandt had acquired his first student, Gerard Dou (1613-75), who was with him until 1631. Dou's later pictures are considered seminal for the minutely detailed, highly polished style of painting known as "Leiden fine painting" (*fijnschilderij*, in Dutch), which flourished for decades. His earliest dated picture was completed in 1636; what he painted earlier remains a matter of speculation. In Rembrandt's shop Dou may have painted small Rembrandtesque compositions, perhaps such as *A Scholar by Candlelight*, a tiny picture on view in this gallery. Some researchers have rejected an attribution to Dou on stylistic grounds, but because Dou was in Rembrandt's studio to learn to paint like the master, it could well be that to some extent he succeeded. This is a murky area of Rembrandt's own activity; trying to define a pupil's work within it is difficult. Recently some excellent connoisseurs have forwarded the idea that *A Scholar by Candlelight* may well have been painted by Rembrandt himself.

Somewhat better defined is the output of another student, Isaac de Joudreville (1613-48), who worked in Rembrandt's studio from 1629 until at least 1631. Joudreville would never attain the status Dou reached, but with Rembrandt's guidance, he learned to paint very good pictures. There is only one known painting signed by Joudreville, but its distinctive character allows others to be assigned to him with some confidence, including *Bust of a Young Man with a Gold Chain*, seen in this gallery. A more difficult question is whether Joudreville grew skillful enough to paint *Bust of a Young Man in a Gorget and Plumed Cap*, a painting of greater coherence that features almond-shaped eyes similar to those of the young man with the gold chain.

Rembrandt may well have had other students while in Leiden, but there is no documentation. During the period when he was dividing his time between Leiden and Amsterdam, several pictures made by his associates can be seen as satellites orbiting around his ravishing *Portrait of a Girl Wearing a Gold-trimmed Cloak*. One such painting is the portrait of a young red-haired woman wearing necklaces of gold and pearls. The system of allowing the master to sign and sell his students' work created great incentive to teach well, and Rembrandt did.

Amsterdam: The city of riches

In the 17th century, Amsterdam became the wealthiest city in the world. Ships came and went from the busy port, bringing goods from Indonesia, Japan, India, Africa, the Baltics, the Americas, and more. The Dutch East India Company was founded in 1602 with the intent of monopolizing trade with Asia. It came to dominate trade *within* Asia, with the spectacular profits flowing back to Amsterdam. Within Rembrandt's lifetime, the company grew to about 50,000 employees operating a fleet of 150 merchant ships, 40 warships, and a large private army. It was the forerunner of today's multi-national corporations.

The population boomed as well, growing from about 60,000 to 200,000 in Rembrandt's lifetime. The establishment of the Dutch Republic in 1581 had created a haven of religious tolerance. Protestants arrived from the southern Netherlandish provinces that remained under Spanish oppression. They were joined by rich Sephardic Jews, poorer Askenazic Jews, French Huguenots, and others seeking religious freedom and financial opportunity.

Though religion was a primary driver of immigration, the spare interiors of Dutch Protestant churches reduced opportunities for artistic commissions. Domestic and civic patronage, however, provided great opportunities.

Ambitious merchants were streaming into the city, and Amsterdam's physical infrastructure was greatly enlarged to accommodate the influx. The elaborate system of canals, making Amsterdam "The Venice of the North," was built in the 17th century. New neighborhoods rose, and the rich moved to ever-grander homes in need of ever-more paintings to adorn their walls. Additionally, the rising middle class required portraits in part to stake their claims to parity with the old aristocracy.

[Map of Amsterdam, c. 1630s, marked with Uylenburgh's house, Rembrandt's house behind the bakery, Rembrandt's grand house]

Rembrandt and the Uylenburgh studio in Amsterdam

Rembrandt wanted to seize the opportunities in Amsterdam, but getting started was daunting. His decision to maintain ties with Leiden suggests he was aware of the possibility of failure in Amsterdam, where he was unknown. He could not afford to buy a house in which to establish a studio, and he had no entrée into the polite society of art patrons. Rembrandt's solution was to go to work for Hendrick Uylenburgh (1584/89-c. 1660), an art dealer who had a studio and connections.

Uylenburgh owned a major art dealership that among other services maintained a portrait-painting studio. His business was well established, and he evidently had an eye for talent. He would have recognized the extraordinary quality of Rembrandt's work and accepted him on the basis of merit. He installed Rembrandt as the new head of the studio. The relationship would prove so successful that Rembrandt invested in the business and eventually married Uylenburgh's cousin, Saskia.

Rembrandt quickly made a name for himself—literally. At this time he started signing his work "Rembrandt," rather than with the monogram he had used in Leiden. He became the most sought-after portraitist in Amsterdam. He and his assistants began to turn out portraits at a prodigious rate. Some are still considered to be entirely the work of Rembrandt, others are extremely skillful imitations of his style, and some appear to be collaborations.

Rembrandt's style became the Uylenburgh style, and Rembrandt's signature—or a facsimile—was applied to the paintings that emerged from the studio. All these paintings would have been sold as "Rembrandts," because the master defined the style and exerted quality control. It is difficult to say the degree to which the patrons understood the difference between paintings by Rembrandt's hand and those painted under his supervision. Even if they did know exactly what they were getting, those who sat for assistants could have become complicit in the confusion when they invited friends and family to admire their "Rembrandts."

[Photo of Uylenburgh's house]

Rembrandt on top of the world

Having successfully led a busy studio and garnered prestigious commissions, Rembrandt had proven both his ambition and his ability. He had become a man of substance and was ready to marry. In 1634 he wed Saskia van Uylenburgh, his employer's first cousin and daughter of the mayor of Leeuwarden. It was truly a love match; Saskia became Rembrandt's mate, model, and muse. At first the newlyweds lived in Hendrick Uylenburgh's house, but anticipating the arrival of their first child and fueled by Rembrandt's desire to become an independent master, the couple moved to a rented house less than a year later.

Their first three children died in infancy, but Rembrandt's new studio prospered. He took on many students, several of whom went on to prominence themselves. Everything was going well. Trained artists were willing to pay to work for him, and they helped him meet the demand for his paintings. As was customary, his assistants lived with him. Additionally, he took on beginners as paying day students.

By 1639, Rembrandt had risen to the top echelon of artists in Amsterdam. He decided to purchase a large house next door to Uylenburgh's. In the elegant reception rooms, where he showed paintings and his ever-growing collections of art and curiosities from the far reaches of the world, he could present himself as a gentleman. He had two large studios—one in which he painted and the other for his assistants. The house brimmed with creativity, productivity, and commerce.

At 13,000 guilders, the house was very expensive, so Rembrandt contracted to pay in installments. Perhaps he was unconcerned because the house seemed to bring him fortune. That same year he received a commission for a major group portrait of an honorary militia. Officially titled *The Company of Frans Banning Cocq*, it is far more widely known than *The Night Watch*, and remains one of the greatest treasures of Amsterdam.

In 1641, Saskia gave birth to a healthy son, Titus, and Rembrandt's happiness seemed assured.

[Photos of the Rembrandt house and of Berlin silverpoint drawing of Saskia.]

Saskia's death and the aftermath

In the summer of 1642, Saskia died, deeply affecting Rembrandt and his art. While paintings usually had to meet the requirements of patrons or at least be suitable for decor, etchings could be more personal. Shortly after he lost Saskia, Rembrandt produced some remarkably melancholic etchings and turned to landscape, perhaps in search of comfort in walks through the outskirts of Amsterdam.

Saskia's will gave Rembrandt the use of her estate until such time as he remarried, which would trigger an obligation to pay it in full to their infant son, Titus. Such a provision was not uncommon, for it protected the child from losing his or her inheritance to a stepparent. Typically, clauses of this type were strongly enforced, for in a time when life expectancies were short, the relatives of the deceased were alert to money they could claim. Because Rembrandt's spending habits always kept him short of cash, he was unable to remarry. This situation led to major problems for him as the years passed.

To care for Titus, Rembrandt hired a childless widow as a nurse. Her name was Geertje Dircx, and she soon became Rembrandt's mistress. In 1649 they had an acrimonious breakup, probably over Rembrandt's attentions to a new housekeeper, the young Hendrickje Stoffels. Rembrandt offered Geertje a sixty-guilder annual pension, but she decided to file a breach-of-promise suit. Rembrandt was ordered to pay her two hundred guilders per year. When it came time to sign the agreement, Geertje created a scene and would not cooperate. With the aid of Geertje's brother, Rembrandt had her confined to a *spinhuis*—a workhouse for deranged women—for a term of 12 years. After five years Geertje was released on grounds of ill health, and she died a year later.

Against this troubling backdrop, Rembrandt began an enduring love affair with Hendrickje. Twenty years his junior, she became his muse and mistress.

History paintings

In the 17th century, history paintings—those dealing with stories from history, religion, and mythology—comprised the most prestigious genre of all. Rembrandt created many history paintings (although not as many as his portraits). Some were scenes containing many figures interacting, others focused on a single figure. Americans have succeeded in obtaining superb examples of the latter, but the multi-figure works have proved more elusive.

Jupiter and Mercury in the House of Philemon and Baucis is an autograph work by Rembrandt, and *The Descent from the Cross* originated in his studio. *Jupiter and Mercury* exemplifies Rembrandt's expressive use of light. He drew viewers into a dark, mysterious space punctuated by the blazing light of revelation. *The Descent* demonstrates his students' full absorption of his brand of realism and vivid, convincing emotion.

Some of the multi-figure history paintings formerly attributed to Rembrandt have been reassigned to other artists with some confidence, most notably *The Feast of Esther*, now given to Jan Lievens. Others almost certainly emanated from Rembrandt's studio, such as *The Descent from the Cross*, a work of substantial quality that may be the product of two painting campaigns 20 years apart.

More difficult to place are *The Lamentation of Christ* and the large painting that may show the death of Lucretia. These rather awkward pictures might be termed "Rembrandtesque," but from today's standpoint, it is difficult to comprehend their acceptance by earlier experts. The paintings certainly rely on Rembrandt's imagery. For example, the face of the man wearing the ermine-trimmed coat and supporting the dying woman, strongly

resembles a type that Rembrandt employed for biblical Jews in his works of the 1630s. Yet the execution of the painting has little of the exquisite brushwork and emotional impact one expects from Rembrandt.

America is rich in Rembrandt's single-figure history paintings. In this exhibition, we have already seen the imposing portrait of Saskia in the guise of Minerva from the 1630s. In the present gallery are two very different interpretations of the Apostle Bartholomew, one from 1657, the other from 1661. Rembrandt's personal circumstances had changed considerably between these dates. One of the greatest Rembrandt paintings in America is the MIA's *Lucretia*, which appears in the next gallery.

Such single-figure paintings strongly resemble portraits, and some of them are both portraits and history paintings. Rembrandt made the actors of the Bible, ancient history, and mythology into real people. In the 17th century, just as today, the humanity of Rembrandt's subjects calls upon viewers to reflect on the often-complex emotions engendered by the situations his subjects faced.

Hendrickje and bankruptcy

Hendrickje Stoffels came into Rembrandt's home as a maidservant in 1649. The two entered into a romantic relationship, which led to Rembrandt's rejection of Geertje Dirckx. Hendrickje and Rembrandt's love proved to be deep and enduring. Although unable to marry, due to Rembrandt's inability to pay Titus his portion of Saskia's estate, they lived as husband and wife.

Rembrandt lived outside the bounds of convention in other ways, especially when it came to financial matters. He probably failed to invest in Holland's booming businesses. Instead, he avidly collected art and gave little heed to settling the debt owed for his house. He compounded his problems by borrowing money to pay off debts.

Rembrandt's production of paintings declined in the 1640s, a phenomenon reflected in the small number of pictures from that period in this exhibition. Had he saturated his market? Were patrons tired of his difficult personality? Should he have followed the rising fashion of lighter and brighter painting? Whatever the case, he seems to have been ill-prepared for the economic disruptions that occurred when the Dutch and English went to war in 1652.

Personal happiness met social ostracism when, in the summer of 1654, Hendrickje became pregnant. The church council repeatedly summoned her, but only after the fourth request did she appear before them. She was forced to confess that she was living with Rembrandt as a whore, and was excommunicated. This was a serious punishment, for in addition to spiritual exile, it meant she could no longer count on the church for help if she should fall into poverty. The incident also meant that for many, Rembrandt became a social pariah, a difficult situation for an artist relying on the patronage of thriving members of a highly organized society.

By 1655, Rembrandt could predict his financial ruin. He made plans to transfer the house to Titus so that his creditors could not seize it. He tried to buy a much smaller house, and he auctioned off parts of his art collection and perhaps some of his own work. By 1656, he filed for bankruptcy, apparently a desperate effort to avoid imprisonment.

As the situation played out, Rembrandt lost his house and most of his possessions. He and his family moved to a small rented house in the Jordaan, a working-class neighborhood of Amsterdam. Hendrickje and Titus formed a company with Rembrandt as their employee, thus keeping money out of Rembrandt's hands and away from creditors.

Rembrandt's last days

For the last decade of his life, Rembrandt lived in a small rented house and technically had no income. Yet he remained famous, and lovers of art who did not follow current fashions continued to want his paintings. Students, too, came to him until the very end. Most important, Rembrandt's fall from grace seemed to free him from the social bonds that he had resisted since Saskia's death. He could concentrate on making art in accord with his own vision.

The competitive spirit Rembrandt displayed in his youth remained unbroken. As a youth, he measured himself against the artists with whom he had the closest contact, such as Jan Lievens and Pieter Lastman. As he matured, his horizon widened, and his art became a critical commentary on the most famous artist of his time, Peter Paul Rubens. In Rembrandt's later years, two artists seem to have fascinated him: the Venetian renaissance master, Titian, and the legendary master of Greek antiquity, Apelles.

Titian's later paintings were famous for their broad, expressive brushstrokes. Sometimes he even laid aside his brush to slather on the paint with a palette knife. He could paint pictures of loving beauty or raw brutality. When he painted his own likeness, he did not flinch from showing the effects of time. Rembrandt's admiration of Titian is clearly seen in the Dutchman's late work.

Apelles provided the perfect model. None of his works survived. He existed as an ideal; ancient texts lauded him as the greatest of all painters. Apelles was known for the extraordinary speed with which he painted. His most valued works were those left unfinished, for, as his contemporaries wrote, in them one could observe his working process. His palette was limited to just four colors: red, yellow, black, and white. Rembrandt adopted Apelles's palette, painted with bravura technique, and often left passages seemingly unfinished. One of Rembrandt's students recalled being told that a painting is finished when the artist's intention is fulfilled.

This gallery contains several of Rembrandt's most remarkable late pictures. Their poignancy and depth of human understanding should be understood against a backdrop of the artist's personal suffering. Hendrijke died during an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1663. Rembrandt buried her in a rented grave. Titus married in 1668, but died six months later. Rembrandt died the following year and was buried in an unmarked grave.

Rembrandt's world in miniature: Prints in the MIA's collection

Because of his inventive approach to etching and drypoint, the amazing variety of his subject matter, and his remarkable facility as a draftsman, Rembrandt is considered by many to be the greatest printmaker of all time. He essentially taught himself the techniques and struggled at first, but prints came to play a multifaceted role in his career. He used them for self-promotion, as a source of income, and as a locus of free artistic expression.

Most of Rembrandt's prints were entrepreneurial endeavors. Instead of having to satisfy the demands of a specific patron, he sold them to enthusiastic fans. Since a single copper plate could produce many impressions, his prints spread his fame. In 1661, the first English book on printmaking described Rembrandt as "incomparable"—despite the fact that the author misspelled his name.

In 35 years of activity, Rembrandt worked about 290 plates. Religious subjects account for about a third of his output. They probably had a ready market, and they allowed him to think critically about previous artists' religious depictions. Rembrandt would re-interpret the stories, driving to penetrate the core human reality implicit in the text.

As a young man Rembrandt made many self-portraits. They were a form of practice. Later he told his students to position themselves before a mirror so they could study themselves in various emotional states, simultaneously becoming both actor and audience. This lesson in empathy gave him a reservoir of experience from which he could draw when planning his religious images.

Some of his portraits called for official decorum, but others were sketches made for pleasure or perhaps as models for his students. His often casual, intuitive approach to line and composition served as counterpoints to the stiff, methodical conventions of academic drawing manuals. Rembrandt's alternative approach to human form can be seen in his un-idealized nudes.

Landscape seems to have provided Rembrandt with a means of escape and solace. Shortly after Saskia's death, he began to take walks in the countryside around Amsterdam. He made sketches of picturesque places, which became studies for etchings made in his studio.

We are fortunate to have at the MIA a broad collection of Rembrandt's prints. We present a selection here and welcome visitors to explore the collection in greater depth in the Herschel V. Jones Print Study Room. Please call or e-mail for an appointment: (612) 870-3015 or printstudy@artsmia.org.

