

EAST BUILDING, MEYMANDI EXHIBITION GALLERY

Rembrandt

IN AMERICA

OCTOBER 30, 2011–JANUARY 22, 2012



Rembrandt in America

Rembrandt in America represents the first major exhibition to explore the collecting of Rembrandt paintings in America. Consisting of nearly fifty paintings, the show brings together autograph works by Rembrandt (1606–1669), as well as those thought to be by the master when they entered American collections but whose attribution to Rembrandt can no longer be maintained. The NCMA and its fellow organizers of the exhibition, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, have assembled a diverse yet representative group of pictures highlighting issues associated with the collecting and connoisseurship (expertise regarding a work's authenticity) of Rembrandt paintings in America. In addition to presenting Rembrandt's genius as a painter and teacher, this exhibition offers visitors a unique opportunity to develop their own insights into what makes for an authentic painting by Rembrandt. 🗣️

For a project as ambitious as *Rembrandt in America*, we sincerely acknowledge the many individuals and institutions who contributed to its success. The NCMA is grateful to its museum partners, to those individuals and institutions who generously lent their paintings to the exhibition, to the show's sponsors, and for an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.



The Life of Rembrandt

Rembrandt van Rijn is the best-known and was the most influential artist active during the Dutch Golden Age. His incomparable gifts as a painter, printmaker, and draftsman are well documented, as are events in his life. Born in Leiden and the son of a miller, Rembrandt began his artistic training in his hometown and moved to Amsterdam for a brief time to study with the history painter

Pieter Lastman. Rembrandt then became an independent master in Leiden about 1625. By the time he relocated to Amsterdam in the early 1630s, his reputation as an artist and teacher was well established. At first Rembrandt flourished in Amsterdam, as success in his personal and professional lives catapulted him to the position of the city's most important portrait and history painter during the 1630s and 1640s. During these years he married Saskia van Uylenburgh, bought a large house (today the Rembrandt House Museum), and oversaw a large workshop with many students. Rembrandt's good fortune eventually abandoned him, and as his career progressed, his financial circumstances deteriorated. Declaring a form of bankruptcy in 1656, Rembrandt died in Amsterdam on October 4, 1669. He was buried four days later in a rented grave within the city's Westerkerk (West Church). 🗣️

Rembrandt van Rijn, **Self-Portrait (Study in a Mirror)**, circa 1629, oil on wood panel, 17 ½ × 13 ½ in., The Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Clowes Fund Collection (C10063)

Rembrandt in America: Collecting and Connoisseurship

Pictures by Rembrandt became highly valued by America's fledgling art collectors during the last years of the nineteenth century, and this interest has continued largely without interruption. The intense competition among American collectors for Rembrandt paintings followed a similar course in England, France, Germany, and even Russia in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the frenzy for Rembrandt paintings grew during the early decades of the twentieth century, so too did the number of pictures assigned to him. With every new discovery or new attribution, Americans, in particular, were willing to compete with each other to obtain a Rembrandt "masterpiece," often for a record price. America, in fact, had essentially become a proving ground for new Rembrandt attributions.

The majority of the paintings selected for the exhibition continue to be accepted as works by Rembrandt, including many of his greatest masterpieces, among them *Joris de Caulerij*. Most of the other pictures in the show, for example the NCMA's *Young Man with a Sword*, have been removed from his oeuvre (complete body of work). In a handful of cases, the attribution to Rembrandt is still problematic. The task of determining the validity of an attribution falls under the inexact science of connoisseurship. The opinions of connoisseurs have long been an essential component of the study of Rembrandt paintings, with an early plateau reached a century ago when "experts" expanded the number of his accepted pictures to over seven hundred. 🗨️



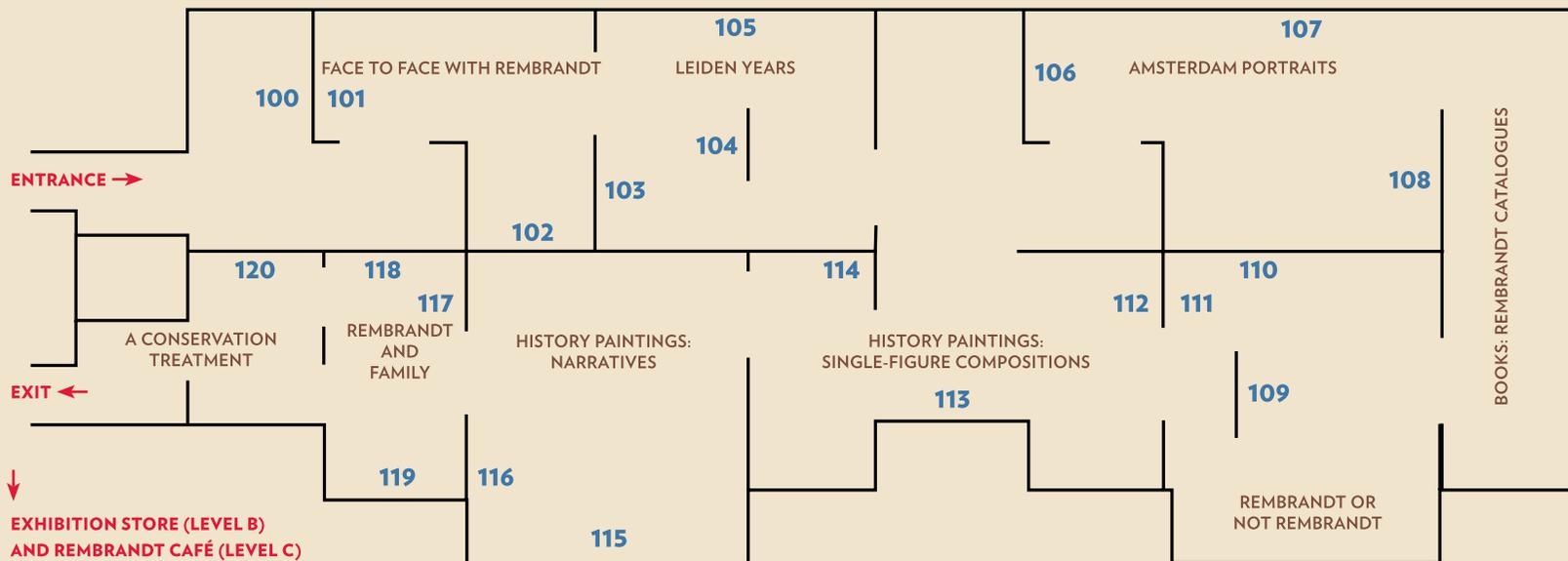
Rembrandt van Rijn, *Joris de Caulerij*, 1632, oil on canvas transferred to panel, 40 ½ x 33 ¼ in., Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Roscoe and Margaret Oakes Collection (66.31)



Rembrandt van Rijn (circle of), *Young Man with a Sword*, circa 1633–45, oil on canvas, 46 ½ x 38 in., North Carolina Museum of Art, Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation (60.17.68)

Gallery Map

EAST BUILDING, MEYMANDI EXHIBITION GALLERY



ACOUSTIGUIDE STOPS indicated in blue.

Face to Face with Rembrandt



As one of Rembrandt's best-known and most iconic works in America, the self-portrait now housed at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., makes one wonder what the painter may have been thinking when he pictured himself in 1659. One in a long line of Rembrandt self-portraits, this image offers telling reminders of a life filled with triumphs and tragedy, successes and failures. The year Rembrandt painted this self-portrait, he was entering the last decade of his life. By then his popular-

ity among the Dutch elite was already on the wane. His expressive manner and increasingly coarse style stood in stark contrast to the controlled, decorative approach finding popularity among his contemporaries. Rembrandt, however, remained committed to his art, clearly unwilling to change it in order to appeal to the tastes of others. Instead he chose to turn inward in his examination of himself, his self-portraits serving as a vehicle to express his soul and to document his passing years. 🎨

Rembrandt van Rijn, **Self-Portrait**, 1659, oil on canvas, 33 ¼ x 26 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Andrew W. Mellon Collection (1937.1.72)

Leiden Years



Rembrandt van Rijn (attributed to), **A Scholar by Candlelight**, circa 1628/29, oil on copper, 5 ½ x 5 ½ in., Collection of Alfred and Isabel Bader, Milwaukee

How would history have judged Rembrandt if we only had the works he produced in his native Leiden in the second half of the 1620s and early 1630s? Certainly one can argue that during this period he executed many competent paintings, successfully experimented with the etching medium, and proved to be an excellent draftsman. Taken collectively, however, the work Rembrandt produced in Leiden does little to validate the enormous fame his art has generated over the centuries. His hometown production, in fact, represents a part of his oeuvre little understood until recent decades, when a number of rediscovered and reattributed pictures effectively provided a more complete understanding of his sources, his artistic development, and hints of his genius. In these paintings, including examples hanging nearby, we find an artist whose work is uneven and suggestive of someone still struggling to find his artistic voice. 🎨

Amsterdam Portraits



LEFT TO RIGHT: Rembrandt van Rijn, **Portrait of the Reverend Johannes Elison**, 1634, oil on canvas, 68 ½ × 49 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William K. Richardson Fund (56.510)

Rembrandt van Rijn, **Portrait of Maria Bockenolle (wife of Johannes Elison)**, 1634, oil on canvas, 68 ⅞ × 48 ⅞ in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William K. Richardson Fund (56.511)

Rembrandt van Rijn, **Man in a Fur-Lined Coat**, circa 1655–60, oil on canvas, 45 ¼ × 34 ¾ in., The Toledo Museum of Art, Clarence Brown Fund (1977.50)

After becoming an independent master in Leiden and refining his artistic skills, Rembrandt seemed eager to attain wealth and fame in Amsterdam. Transitioning there in the early 1630s, the artist almost overnight became the city's most sought-after portrait painter. Serving as the head painter in the studio of Hendrick Uylenburgh—the gallery owner with whom he lodged and whose niece Saskia he would marry in 1634—Rembrandt soon received portrait commissions from some of Amsterdam's leading citizens. His rising fame and ties to Uylenburgh also enabled him to connect with important patrons elsewhere in Holland. At the same time, Rembrandt recruited other painters active in the studio to assist him with the increasing workload. The full extent of their contributions has long been debated and has led to many of the lingering questions regarding whether a “Rembrandt”

painting was executed entirely by the master, by a studio assistant, or as a collaborative effort.

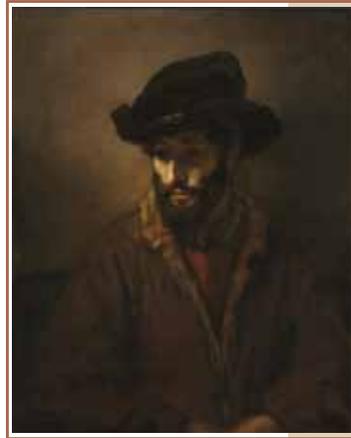
This early flurry of activity in Amsterdam saw Rembrandt produce some of his most important portraits, those typically painted in a more controlled style. Many of these pictures are found in American collections today, with the first making their way here in the late nineteenth century. As the decades passed, Rembrandt's engagement with portraiture would continue. In terms of numbers, however, he never again matched his efforts from the first half of the 1630s. In his later portraits, viewers are confronted with the full measure of his brilliance. In these pictures he explored the emotional depths of his sitters, including himself on numerous occasions. His late portraits typically express a more painterly style, with broader brushstrokes having replaced the smoother, more modulated application seen in his earlier works. 🙌

Rembrandt or Not Rembrandt



LEFT TO RIGHT: Rembrandt van Rijn and workshop, *An Old Lady with a Book*, 1637, oil on canvas, 43 ¼ × 36 in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Andrew W. Mellon Collection (1937.173)

Rembrandt van Rijn (workshop of), *Portrait of a Man*, circa 1655–60, oil on canvas, 33 ¼ × 27 ¼ in., The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund (1950.252)



At the core of Rembrandt studies is the issue of connoisseurship—is the painting by Rembrandt or not? Answers to this seemingly simple question have proven elusive, as each generation of Rembrandt scholars has formulated its own vision of the painter and his art. Consequently, Rembrandt oeuvre catalogues produced from 1836 to the present—all on display in the exhibition—confirm that the number of pictures assigned to the artist has ranged widely over nearly two centuries, from approximately 265 to 715 paintings. The NCMA's first director, William Valentiner, was arguably the most accepting scholar, whereas members of the Rembrandt Research Project in their recent publications represent the other end of the scale. Each new attribution, discovery, or reattribution continues to be a noteworthy event, and considering Rembrandt's lasting fame and the increasingly high prices his autograph works fetch at auction, it is likely the attribution controversy will live on.

In looking at the paintings in this gallery, one should remember they were all previously assigned to the master, including a number still firmly attributed to him. Still, others are not, and the question arises: why not? As one attempts to formulate an understanding of what constitutes an original Rembrandt, there are many things to consider, not the least of which is the condition of the painting. Among other factors worth noting are the nature of the light effects, the application of the paints, the subtlety of the palette, the manner in which certain details are depicted, the volumetric quality of the figures, and each sitter's expression. Autograph paintings by Rembrandt tend to stand out, while works by his followers typically appear less accomplished. With so many outstanding examples of Rembrandt's masterpieces hanging throughout the exhibition, visitors are provided an excellent opportunity to engage in the debate. 🗣️



Rembrandt van Rijn (workshop of; probably Constantijn van Renesse, 1626–80), **The Descent from the Cross**, circa 1650/52, oil on canvas, 55 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 43 $\frac{5}{8}$ in., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Widener Collection (1942.9.61)



Rembrandt van Rijn, **Lucretia**, 1666, oil on canvas, 43 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 36 $\frac{3}{8}$ in., Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund (34.19)

History Paintings

When one thinks of Rembrandt's history paintings—stories from the Bible, mythology, and classical antiquity—it must be noted that few of his major paintings in this genre made their way into American collections. To a large degree, this situation was market driven, as the majority of these masterpieces had entered European royal and public collections long before Americans focused their energies (and dollars) on Rembrandt. His history paintings, which represent approximately one-third of his extant oeuvre, can be divided largely into two categories—narrative scenes depicting two or more figures and single-figure compositions.

It appears wishful thinking may have precipitated the purchase of a number of the early acquisitions of large-scale history narratives, for many of these paintings were wrongly attributed to Rembrandt when they entered the country. Nearly the opposite held true with regard

to the artist's single-figure history compositions. Depictions of saints, mythological goddesses, and the Roman heroine Lucretia all fall within this category, and these examples can be counted among the most important and masterful pictures by Rembrandt found in America. The images of "saints" are particularly noteworthy, as it has been theorized they collectively formed either one or two series painted by Rembrandt in the late 1650s and early 1660s. Conjectures about the identification of the subjects and whether the paintings were indeed a series have proven problematic. Nevertheless, single-figure history paintings were popular with American collectors, as a large number have made their way across the Atlantic since the end of the nineteenth century. Not all these pictures have remained here, however, for in at least two cases, paintings in this category were sold at auction in New York and returned to Europe with their new owners. 🏠

Rembrandt and Family



REMBRANDT is understandably famous for his many self-portraits, but in addition to detailing his own features, he seems also to have produced portraits of family members. This production is not surprising: not only were these individuals important to the painter, but also they represented readily available models. Similarly, many of his pupils and studio assistants produced portraits of Rembrandt “family members,” thus raising questions by

scholars regarding attributions as well as identifications. For example, is the young man seen in a number of pictures the painter’s son Titus? Did Rembrandt ever portray his sister Lysbeth, or do the portraits thought to show her actually depict a servant girl who occasionally posed for him and his pupils? Hanging in this gallery are portraits of Rembrandt; his wife, Saskia; his son Titus; his common-law wife, Hendrickje; and probably his sister Lysbeth, shown in examples by both Rembrandt and a follower. 🎨

Rembrandt van Rijn, *Portrait of a Girl Wearing a Gold-Trimmed Cloak*, 1632, oil on panel, 23 ⁷/₈ × 17 ³/₄ in. (oval), Private collection, New York

A Conservation Treatment: *Bust of a Young Woman*

his charming portrait of a fair-haired young woman, perhaps Rembrandt’s sister Lysbeth, was considered, until the 1980s, an autograph picture by the master. At that time the Rembrandt Research Project downgraded the work, noting the “painting offers a strange contradiction in that it shows a very Rembrandtesque subject combined with an execution that clearly differs from Rembrandt’s manner of painting.” The picture therefore makes an interesting comparison to other portraits of the same sitter, including one by Rembrandt, hanging nearby. For the exhibition, and prompted by the work’s state of preservation and discolored varnish, the NCMA and the Morehead Planetarium agreed to have the painting cleaned. Here it is shown in a partially cleaned state. Technical photographs and a pretreatment image hanging nearby have been installed to assist the visitor in further understanding some of the issues linked to the initial execution of the painting in the 1630s and its current conservation program. 🎨



Rembrandt van Rijn (circle of; probably Isaac de Joudreville, circa 1612–before 1648), *Bust of a Young Woman*, circa 1632, oil on panel, 22 × 16 ⁵/₈ in. (oval) Morehead Planetarium and Science Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Rembrandt Copper Plates | West Building, European Galleries



In addition to painting, Rembrandt excelled as a printmaker and draftsman. In the NCMA's West Building, eight of his copper etching plates have been installed in the Circle of Rembrandt gallery. Nearby one also finds an outstanding collection of paintings executed during the Dutch Golden Age, including masterpieces by Hendrick Ter Brugghen, Jan Steen, Jacob van Ruisdael, and Rembrandt followers Nicolaes Maes and Govert Flinck. 🧑🎨

Rembrandt van Rijn, ***Self-Portrait Etching at the Window***, etching (with reworking), circa 2000, from 1648 copper plate, On loan from the Park West Gallery and the family of Albert Scaglione

Rembrandt in America is organized by the North Carolina Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support is provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This exhibition is also made possible, in part, by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources; the North Carolina Museum of Art Foundation, Inc.; and the William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment for Educational Exhibitions.

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North Carolina Museum of Art

2110 Blue Ridge Road
Raleigh, NC 27607
(919) 839-NCMA
Box Office (919) 715-5923
www.ncartmuseum.org/rembrandt