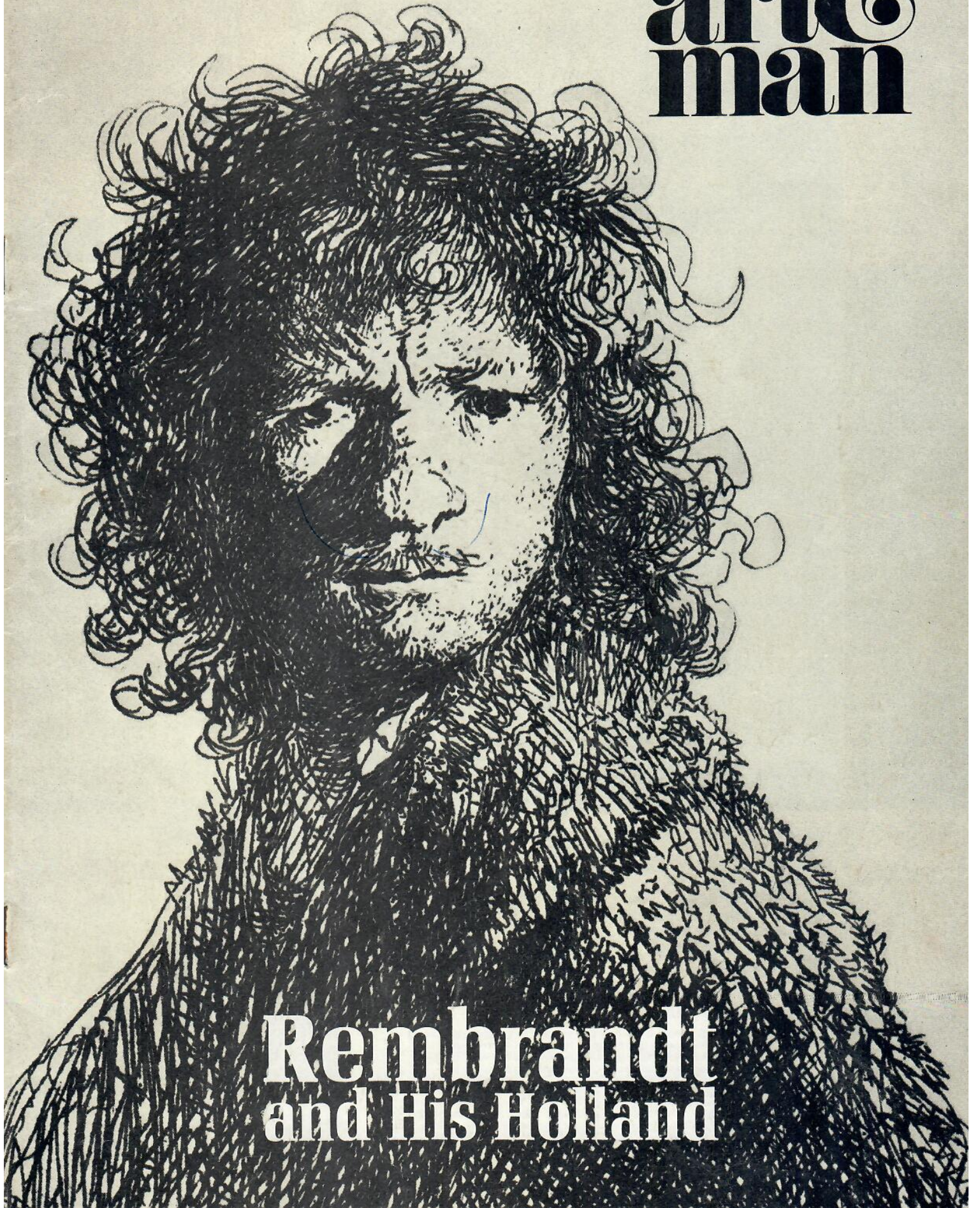


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art & man



Rembrandt and His Holland



ABOVE:

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669). Silverpoint drawing inscribed "This is drawn after my wife, when she was 21 years old, the third day after our betrothal—the 8th of June, 1633." Print Room, State Museum, Berlin.

COVER:

Self-portrait, about 1630. Etching. National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection.

RIGHT:

Sick Woman, 1641. Etching. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Triumph

"Sold!" the auctioneer shouted. "For two guilders — an etching by the master Rembrandt!" Rembrandt van Rijn, once one of the most successful artists in Amsterdam, was bankrupt. Everything he owned, even his fine house, was being sold to help pay his creditors.

This was not the first misfortune that Rembrandt had suffered, nor would it be the last, in a life filled with personal tragedies. Yet from his suffering Rembrandt drew strength and the insights that elevated his art to great heights.

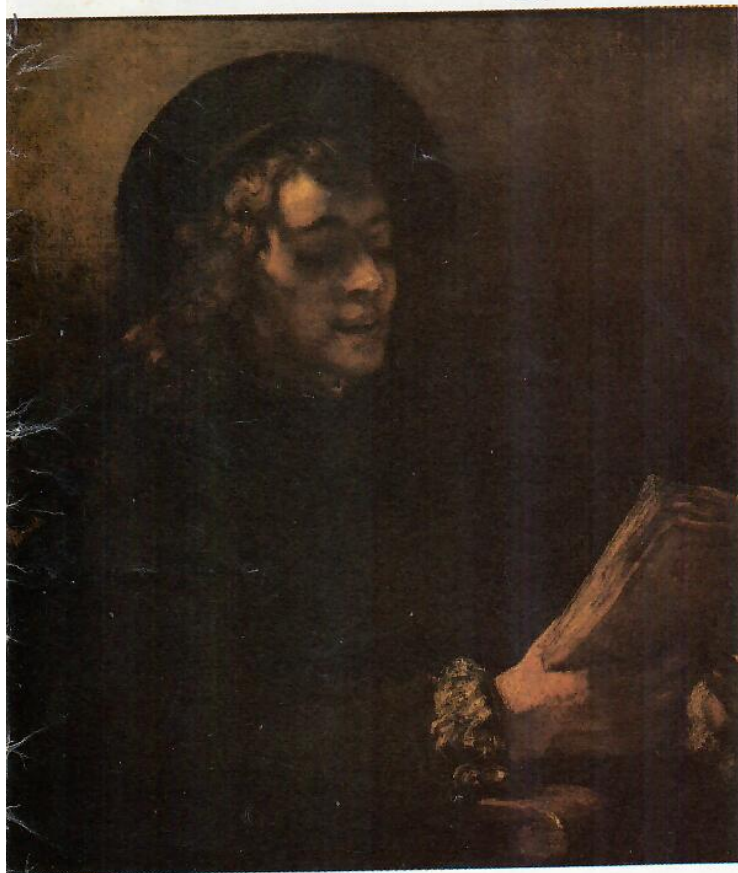
Rembrandt was born July 15, 1606, in Leyden, Holland. He was the eighth of nine children of a miller who lived simply but was not poor. The boy was bright, and his parents sent him to the Latin School to prepare him for a profession. But at 14 Rembrandt began studying art instead. At 19 he set up shop in Leyden and became moderately successful.

But Leyden couldn't hold Rem-



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out of Tragedy

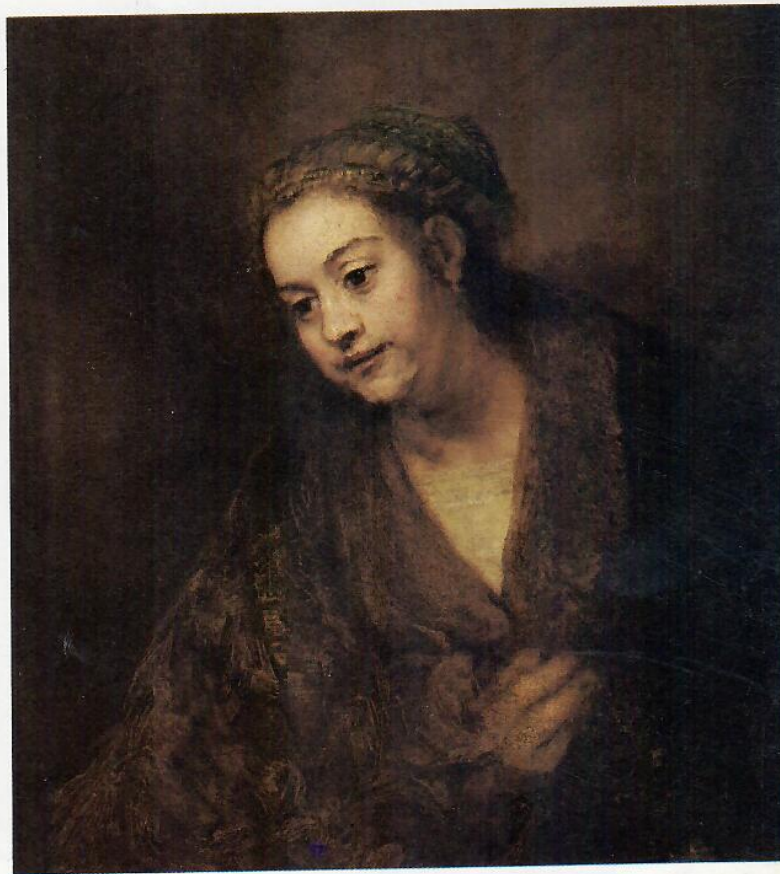


BELOW LEFT:

Titus Reading, about 1659.
Vienna Museum.

BELOW RIGHT:

Hendrickje Stoffels, 1660.
Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Gift of Archer M. Huntington, 1926.



brandt for long. The scowling self-portrait on the cover suggests the energy and egotism that drove the young artist of 23. A year or two later, his ambition led him to move to Amsterdam, Holland's greatest city and art center. Soon he had more commissions than he could handle.

At this time he courted Saskia van Uylenburgh, the daughter of a rich burgomaster. The drawing that he made of her right after their engagement clearly shows his love for her (opposite page, above).

The brief time after their marriage in 1634 was probably the happiest of Rembrandt's life — an in-

terlude before a series of tragedies struck. Saskia's first three children died in infancy and she became increasingly ill (opposite page, below). A fourth child, Titus (above, left), survived, but his birth in 1642 hastened Saskia's own end. She died the same year at the age of 30, a loss that affected Rembrandt for the rest of his life.

A few years later, Rembrandt hired a gentle, warm-hearted girl name Hendrickje Stoffels (top, right) as a maid. Though they never married, she bore him two children, only one of whom survived (unintentionally, Saskia's will

kept Rembrandt from remarrying). Then Hendrickje, too, became ill, and died in 1663 at the age of 37. The death of Titus in 1668 may have been the final blow for Rembrandt, who died himself the following year at 63.

Yet Rembrandt never gave way to bitterness or defeat. On the contrary, he grew both as an artist and as a man, and his paintings probe ever more deeply into the human spirit. As critic Kenneth Clark has written, "The psychological truth in Rembrandt's paintings goes beyond that of any other artist who has ever lived."



birthplace, Leyden, was a haven for England's Pilgrims before they sailed for the New World aboard the *Mayflower*.

In art, the Dutch preferred what was familiar to them, and most Dutch artists obliged them. Cuypp's painting (opposite page, top) reflects Holland's closeness to ships and the sea. The lady in Vermeer's interior (top, left), and the officer

in Hals' portrait (top, right) reflect the comfortable, middle-class status of so many Hollanders. Even the poorer classes were not badly off and could enjoy the lusty pleasures depicted in Steen's painting (below).

While these artists were recording scenes of everyday life, reality for Rembrandt was becoming something much deeper.

ABOVE RIGHT:

Frans Hals (1580-1666).
Portrait of an Officer, 1640.
National Gallery of Art,
Andrew Mellon Collection.

BELOW:

Jan Steen (1626-1679). *The Dancing Couple*, 1663.
National Gallery of Art,
Widener Collection.





"God made the world -but the Dutch made Holland"

Dutch proverb

OPPOSITE PAGE
ABOVE LEFT:

Jan Vermeer (1632-1675).
A Woman Weighing Gold,
1657. National Gallery of
Art, Widener Collection.

What was it like to be an artist in Holland during Rembrandt's time? During the 17th century, the Dutch were fascinated by art, and bought pictures so enthusiastically that they kept literally thousands of painters busy. Some of these artists were so gifted that the era is often called Holland's "Golden Age."

It was a golden age in many ways. More than 2,000 Dutch merchant ships dominated the seas. From the Far East, Africa, and the New World, they brought back precious cargoes of spices, silks, china, coffee, tobacco, and furs. As a result, Holland was easily the most prosperous

nation in Europe during the 17th century. As paintings of the time suggest, the Dutch were an affluent people, who enjoyed the pleasures of art, music, and well-kept homes. Holland was ruled by its Protestant merchants, who were guided by a faith that stressed thrift and hard work.

Holland was remarkably tolerant for its time, and became a refuge for persecuted peoples. Its own hard-won liberation from harsh Spanish rule early in the 17th century had quickened its democratic spirit. Rembrandt himself chose to live among the Jews in Amsterdam's comfortable Jewish quarter. His





LEFT:

Landscape with an Obelisk, 1638.
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

BELOW:

The Philosopher, about 1640.
National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection.

Hitting His Stride

Rembrandt's middle years — his late thirties and early forties — were a period of transition. More than ever, he was interested in the inner emotions of his subjects, in the deeper truths that lay beneath the surface. And his technique, always original, became even freer and more imaginative. The contrast between light and dark, always a central quality of his work, became more subtle. He applied paint with brushes, palette knife, and even with his fingers in heavy, luminous layers, veiled with delicate, translucent glazes.

The self-portrait at the left was painted when Rembrandt was 44. The loss of Saskia and deepening money troubles had apparently taken a heavy toll on him. The half-concealed face, with its questioning look, seems to imply that the inner nature of man is beyond explana-

tion, and the full meaning of life is unknown.

The portrait of one of his Jewish neighbors (right) shows the same effort to go beyond a mere likeness, and to discover an inner reality. The piercing eyes, the pursed, inquisitive mouth imply intense, profound thought, raised almost to the level of an ideal. For this reason, the painting has come to be known as *The Philosopher*.

The landscape (above) is a fantasy — no such scene exists in Holland. But it is an expression of the turbulent emotions that Rembrandt himself felt throughout his life and which he often conveyed in his art.

Rembrandt became a more powerful, greater artist around the 1640's. On the next pages is one of his largest and most famous works, painted early in this period of transition.



The Night Watch

The epic group portrait on these pages is the center of a popular Rembrandt myth. Usually called the *Night Watch*, it was commissioned by a group of civic guardsmen in 1642, when Rembrandt was at the height of his popularity. According to the myth, the painting so outraged and offended its subjects (and everyone else) that it brought about Rembrandt's immediate "downfall."

What is the basis for this persistent story? Group portraits of proud Dutch burghers were a popular form of art in Rembrandt's time. Like today's class-album photos, they gave equal stress to each individual. Rembrandt's *Night Watch* was quite unusual because it played up some figures, played down others, and added some that weren't even supposed to be there. Despite this, the painting was accepted, and hung for years in the militia headquarters. There is no evidence that Rembrandt fell in disgrace because of it.

There is, however, just a germ of truth in the tale of Rembrandt's "downfall." The *Night Watch* was, in a way, a turning point in Rembrandt's career. This dazzlingly dramatic scene, with all its color and motion, shows Rembrandt's growing impatience with the elegant, but often dull, "album" portraits of his time. Rembrandt wanted to capture all the excitement of a particular moment and, at the same time, to probe the personalities of his subjects. He did not want merely to record a group of faces as a camera might.

But such probing was not fashionable, and it would become less so as time went on. While Rembrandt penetrated more and more deeply into the inner nature of men and events, his art became less popular. But in forsaking popularity in his own lifetime, Rembrandt developed into an artist who spoke for all time.





The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch (Night Watch), 1642. Detail to left. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Master

To his drawings and etchings, Rembrandt brought the same inventiveness and disdain for convention that he brought to his paintings. His drawings were usually dashed off very spontaneously; they give the impression of coming straight from the artist's mind and hand. They are marked by an extraordinary economy of line, and sometimes seem deceptively simple. At the same time, they are wonderfully expressive.

The resting lion (top, left) is relaxed and watchful, yet the short, jagged lines suggest that it can easily become a terrifying beast in a moment. With the same economy of line, but using gentle, flowing strokes, Rembrandt brings to the woman carrying a child (below, left) a feeling of great tenderness.

When Rembrandt brought his mastery of line to etching, he elevated what had been a minor art form to a major one. Rembrandt was so superb an etcher that many 17th century art collectors prized his prints even more than his paintings. Though none of his etchings was larger than 21 by 18 inches, some of them managed to achieve the grandeur of great frescoes.

In etching, a copper plate is coated with resin. The artist then scratches his design on the metal with a needle. When the plate is dipped in acid, the acid "bites" into the metal wherever the resin has been scratched through. Ink is spread over the plate, and remains in the etched parts when the rest of the plate is wiped clean. Prints are made on damp paper pressed hard against the plate.

OPPOSITE:

The "Hundred Guilder Print," about 1648-1650.
National Gallery of Art,
Gift of R. Horace Gallatin.



ABOVE:

Lion Resting, about 1660. Drawing. Rijksmuseum Print Room, Amsterdam.

RIGHT:

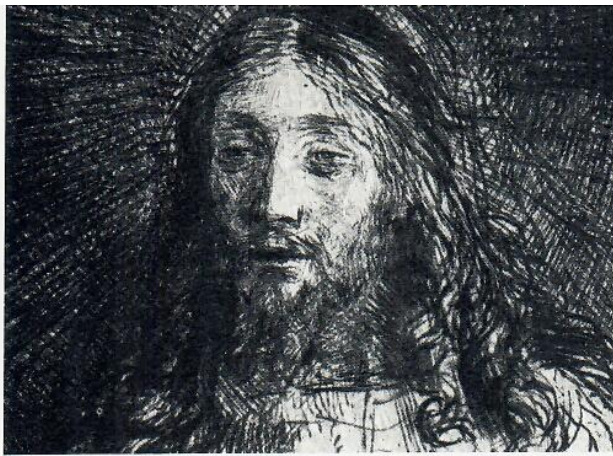
Woman Carrying a Child Downstairs, about 1636. Drawing. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.



of Line

Copper plates can easily be altered, and sometimes Rembrandt revised his three or four times over a period of years. Collectors eagerly bought the variations and boasted of having more than one version or "state" of the same etching.

Rembrandt's etchings are noted for their painstaking attention to detail while preserving a sense of spontaneity. The etching of *Christ Healing the Sick* (bottom, right; details above), often called the *Hundred Guilder Print* because of the high price it once brought, shows the countless number of hair-thin lines that Rembrandt used to achieve contrasts in light and shadow and a variety of gestures and expressions.



Detail of Christ.



Detail of a rich young man.





The Polish Rider, about 1655.
Frick Collection, New York.

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom
shall I fear? the Lord is the strength
of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
Though a host should encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear: though war should rise
against me, in this will I be confident.*
Psalm 27

Return of the Prodigal Son, 1636.
Etching. National Gallery of Art.

*For this my son was dead, and is alive
again; he was lost, and is found.*
Luke, 15:24



Rembrandt and the Bible

Rembrandt was not a churchgoer, but he was deeply religious, and many of his works deal with Biblical subjects. Rembrandt regarded the Bible as something more than a sacred book. To him, it was a great human document whose stories and poetry had universal meaning. He saw the figures of the Testaments as people that one might meet anywhere, in any age. They were basically very human — imperfect, sometimes erring, often suffering, and always deserving of sympathy.

Rembrandt saw these timeless figures in his own Jewish neighbors, and he broke with tradition by using them as models for his Biblical themes. Unlike another famous painter of the period, Peter Paul Rubens, who idealized Biblical figures as muscular, handsome people, Rembrandt often portrayed them as frail, flawed creatures whose true beauty was spiritual.

The mysterious *Polish Rider* (top, left) does not come directly from the Bible, but may represent the idealistic Christian soldier going to fight for his faith. *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (bottom, left) expresses the universal idea of forgiveness and compassion. *The Sacrifice of Abraham* (top, right) conveys the inner conflict of a man who would sacrifice his own son to prove his obedience to God, and is then spared the ordeal by divine intervention.

After Rembrandt's death, an unfinished painting, *Simeon in the Temple* (bottom, right), was found in his studio. Simeon, having lived long enough to see the coming of Christ, then begged God to release him from the trials of life—a touchingly fitting subject for Rembrandt's last work.



Abraham's Sacrifice, 1655.
Etching. National Gallery of Art,
Rosenwald Collection.

*Lay not thine hand upon
the lad, neither do thou any
thing unto him: for now I
know that thou fearest God.*

Genesis, 22:12



Simeon in the Temple, 1669.
National Museum, Stockholm

*Lord, now lettest thou thy
servant depart in peace,
according to thy word: For
mine eyes have seen
thy salvation.*

Luke, 2:29-30

The Timeless Re



What do Rembrandt's life and works mean for people today? As a teacher, of course, Rembrandt left his impression on a generation or more of Dutch artists who came to study at his studio. (One of them made the charming sketch below of Rembrandt examining a pupil's work in class.)

But Rembrandt's greatest legacy to us is his essential humanism, his feeling for mankind. The tragic struggles of his own life gave him an understanding and sympathy for people that, expressed with his unique mastery of technique, raised his art to timeless grandeur. Rembrandt tried to express in the faces of his subjects all that he sensed about man — suffering, endurance, love, and salvation. In so doing, he made them universal beings who might have lived in the days of David and Saul, in 17th century Amsterdam, or today, anywhere.

Rembrandt's humanism, his search for the inner life and meaning of his subjects rather than mere surface beauty, is strikingly revealed in the three paintings on these pages. The self-portrait at the left, painted soon



ABOVE:
Self-portrait, 1659. National Gallery of Art, Andrew Mellon Collection. (Enlarged detail on back cover.)

RIGHT:
Unidentified Pupil. *Rembrandt's Studio with Pupils Drawing from the Nude*. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.

mbrandt

after bankruptcy doomed him to poverty, expresses both sadness and the capacity to endure. In the portrait of *Two Negroes* (top, right), he emphasizes the great dignity of his subjects.

Rembrandt could also take a classical theme and give it new meaning. His *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* contrasts Aristotle, the thinker, and Homer, the poet, with Alexander the Great, the man of action. (Aristotle was Alexander's teacher and in this painting wears a miniature portrait of him.) But Aristotle's melancholy expression suggests a larger meaning: that human life and glory pass, while art and ideas endure.

In all his works, Rembrandt seems to be saying that man is not godlike but vulnerable, flawed — and always worthy of compassion. For him, beauty is never external, but spiritual, as when someone is described as "a beautiful person." As Rembrandt grew older, his knowledge of himself deepened, too. The scowling, vain young man on the front cover had become the older, gentler, infinitely more understanding man shown here.



LEFT:

Two Negroes, 1661.
Mauritshuis,
The Hague.
Photograph
European Art
Color Slides.

BELOW:

*Aristotle Con-
templating a Bust
of Homer*, 1653.
Metropolitan
Museum of Art,
purchased with
special funds and
gifts of friends of
the Museum, 1961.

