

## Rembrandt (1606-1669)

Rembrandt van Rijn was born in Leiden, the son of a mill-owner, and probably grew up in reasonably comfortable circumstances. He attended the local Latin School and in 1620 was enrolled in the town's university, but he never seems to have attended courses there and in 1621 began a three-year apprenticeship with a local painter, Jacob van Swanenburgh. For about six months, in 1623-4, he pursued his studies in Amsterdam with Pieter Lastman, who was then the most highly regarded painter in Holland.

Lastman had been to Italy and introduced the young Rembrandt to internationally current trends in history painting (the representation of stories taken from the Bible, from literature, from antique mythology, or from history). History painting was considered to be the noblest form of art, and Rembrandt's ambitions in this direction are clear from his earliest paintings. These show the influence of Lastman, but were painted in Leiden, where Rembrandt worked closely with a fellow Lastman pupil, Jan Lievens (their works can be hard to distinguish).

Right: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-portrait with mouth open*, pen and brown ink and grey wash, around 1628-29



In 1631 Rembrandt settled permanently in Amsterdam, where he was in considerable demand as a portraitist. He married Saskia van Uylenburgh in 1634, and purchased a large house (now the Rembrandt House Museum) in 1639. The *Night Watch*, a group portrait of one of the city's militia companies and his most celebrated painting, was completed in 1642.

Saskia died in 1642, a year after the birth of their son, Titus. Rembrandt subsequently formed a relationship with a servant, Geertge Dirckx, which ended in bitterness. By 1649 his affections had turned to Hendrickje Stoffels, another servant who frequently modelled for him. She remained his companion until her death in 1663, and bore a child by him, Cornelia, in 1654.

The expense of Rembrandt's house, his outlay on various investments and on works of art for his own collection, brought financial crisis in the 1650s. In 1656 an inventory of his possessions was drawn up and over the next two years his assets, including the house, were made over to the courts and sold. He nevertheless continued to receive commissions for portraits and history pieces, including one for the Town Hall which, however, seems never to have been exhibited there. His son Titus died in 1668 and Rembrandt himself died in Amsterdam in 1669.

Throughout his career he attracted students to his workshop, both as trainees and assistants. Their works can be hard to distinguish from Rembrandt's own, a task made especially difficult by a general tendency, which began in the seventeenth century, to attribute any Rembrandtesque works to the master himself. While agreement now surrounds the attribution of most of his prints, his drawings and paintings are still subject to debate. Among his best-known pupils and followers were Gerrit Dou, Ferdinand Bol, Govert Flinck, Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Nicolaes Maes, Willem Drost and Aert de Gelder. The latter continued to paint in Rembrandt's late style, which had become somewhat unfashionable, until the early eighteenth century.

Rembrandt experimented in both etching and drypoint, transforming the expressive possibilities of printmaking. He made some three hundred prints altogether, of every kind of subject (illustrations, portraits, landscapes, nudes), and impressions of almost all of them are held in the British Museum. Where different states of the same print exist, the collection often includes examples of each one, allowing a fascinating glimpse into Rembrandt's working methods. A comprehensive exhibition of the etchings was held at the British Museum in 2001 (see below for catalogue).



Above: Rembrandt van Rijn, *An Elephant*, black chalk and charcoal, around 1637

The drawings collection amounts to some eighty sheets, from every period of the artist's career. They encompass every type of subject and range from rapid sketches to finished composition drawings, whether in pen and brown ink with wash applied with the brush, or in chalk. A few were made as preparatory studies for etchings and paintings, but in general Rembrandt's drawings are distinct from his activity as a painter and etcher. They were all exhibited in the British Museum in 1992, when a full catalogue was published. The Museum also holds a strong collection of drawings made by his pupils and followers.

<b>London</b>	National Gallery, London
<b>UK</b>	Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow
	Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
	Burrell Collection, Glasgow
	Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
	National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh
<b>Austria</b>	Albertina, Vienna
	Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
<b>Denmark</b>	Statens Museum, Copenhagen
<b>France</b>	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
	Institutut Néerlandais, Paris
	Louvre, Paris
	Musée Bonnat, Bayonne
	Musée du Petit Palais, Paris
<b>Germany</b>	Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen
	Alte Pinakothek, Munich
	Gemäldegalerie, Dresden
	Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin
	Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden
	Gemäldegalerie, Berlin
<b>Netherlands</b>	Mauritshuis, The Hague
	Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam  
**Sweden** Nationalmuseum, Stockholm  
**USA** Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge  
Frick Collection, New York  
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
National Gallery of Art, Washington  
Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

### Further Reading

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