



Young Lion Resting

Rembrandt van Rijn
(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

ca. 1638–42

black chalk, white chalk heightening, and gray
wash, on brown laid paper

11.5 x 15 cm

RR-100

How to cite

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Young Lion Resting belongs to a group of three powerful drawings of the same beast closely related in style and technique that Rembrandt van Rijn executed in the late 1630s. The other two drawings of this lion are in the British Museum (**fig 1**) and (**fig 2**).^[1] In both of those drawings Rembrandt depicted the lion from the side, whereas he drew *Young Lion Resting* in three-quarter profile.^[2] In each of these drawings Rembrandt carefully worked up the head of the young lion in a similar manner, and in each he captured a sense of the animal's inner life by accentuating the eyes with firm strokes. He also discretely applied gray washes to draw the viewer's attention to the beast's head and forequarters. Slight differences among these drawings, however, do exist. Rembrandt rendered the bodies of the London lions in graceful, evocative lines, whereas in the Leiden Collection drawing contour lines give the animal its final form. The master used similar lines to alter the position of the forepaws.

Despite their remarkably similar appearance, Rembrandt may have used somewhat different materials to make these drawings. Marjorie Shelley, paper conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, has determined that for *Young Lion Resting* Rembrandt used black chalk modified with oil or black chalk with a high clay content, as well as white chalk and gray wash applied with the brush.^[3] Martin Royalton-Kisch has concluded that Rembrandt drew the lions in the British Museum with charcoal and gray wash,^[4] while Jeroen Giltaij believes he used black chalk.^[5]

North African lions were brought on ships of the Dutch East India Company to the Netherlands, where they were kept in menageries and shown at fairs.^[6] Among the various animals Rembrandt drew, lions intrigued him the most. In addition to his drawings of other animals—including horses,^[7] elephants,^[8] pigs,^[9] and birds of paradise^[10]—six autograph drawings of lions are known, including one at the Louvre (**fig 3**) and the aforementioned two at the British Museum.^[11] He drew these animals to acquaint himself with their appearance and character, so that later on he could portray them from the imagination. For example, he included an elephant in the background of an etching of Adam and Eve, 1638,^[12] after having drawn the animal from life a couple of times the previous year. Rembrandt's representations of Saint Jerome in the wilderness always contain a lion, but the animal in his etching of 1634^[13] is vastly different in appearance from the lion he depicted in these drawings, which date a few years later. This difference in portrayal before and after Rembrandt had seen actual lions emerges clearly in the etching *Saint Jerome in an Italianate Landscape* of ca. 1653.^[14]

Rembrandt's drawings of lions also served as examples for his pupils. Not surprisingly, drawings of lions by pupils and followers of Rembrandt have sometimes been wrongly attributed to the master himself.^[15] Constantijn van Renesse (1626–80),

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *A Lioness Devouring a Bird, Lying Down with Her Head to the Left*, ca. 1637, charcoal with gray wash heightened with white on paper prepared with brown wash, 126 x 239 mm, British Museum, London, inv. no. Oo, 9.71, © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *A Chained Lioness, Lying on the Ground in Profile to the Right*, ca. 1637, charcoal and gray wash touched with white oil paint on paper prepared with brown wash, 125 x 180 mm, British Museum, London, inv. no. Oo, 9.75, © Trustees of the British Museum



Fig 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Study of a Lion at Rest*, ca. 1640, pen and brown ink and wash on paper, 138 x 207 cm, Musée de Louvre, Paris, © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

a pupil of Rembrandt around 1650, made a drawing with lions based on those drawn by his teacher in a portrayal of Daniel in the Lions' Den.^[16]

Young Lion Resting and the two London drawings are usually connected with Rembrandt's grisaille in Rotterdam, *The Unity of the Country*.^[17] In this detailed composition, a chained lioness lies below the coat of arms of the city of Amsterdam. This design for a political print has been given dates that range from ca. 1637 to 1642.^[18] The inscribed date on the painting—164.—indicates that Rembrandt finished it in the 1640s, though it is impossible to be more precise because the last digit is no longer visible. Dendrochronological examination has shown that the painting is executed on a panel from the same tree as the support of a painting in Washington D.C., *Portrait of a Polish Nobleman*, dated 1637.^[19] It is possible that these three drawings inspired Rembrandt's depiction of the lion in the Rotterdam painting, which would suggest a date for the three drawings of about 1637.^[20]

Drawings of animals were listed separately in Rembrandt's inventory of 1656: "A ditto [art book] full of drawings by Rembrandt, consisting of animals [drawn] from life."^[21] The art dealer Jan Pietersz Zomer (1641–1724) owned 19 drawings of lions by Rembrandt that were recorded in the catalogue of his collection compiled in about 1722.^[22] Rembrandt's *Recueil de Lions*, engraved by Bernard Picart (1673–1733) and published in Amsterdam in 1729, contained eighteen lions—perhaps the same as those published by Zomer. The two previously mentioned drawings in London both figure (in reverse) in Picart's lion series.^[24] The 1800 sale catalogue of the collection of Cornelis Ploos van Amstel (1726–98) also lists 14 lions.^[25] Drawings of lions were exceptionally popular, as is evident from the numerous copies made after them.

- Peter Schatborn, 2017

Endnotes

1. Although the lion in this drawing has been described as the same animal as the one in the British Museum sheets, Luke Hunter, President of Panthera, has suggested that this is a male cub, rather than a lioness. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 3: no. 474, figs. 974 and 475, fig. 978; Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Catalogue of Drawings by Rembrandt and His School in the British Museum* (London, 2010), nos. 29 and 30 (ca. 1638–42).
2. It is unclear whether he holds captured prey between his paws, as he does in one of the London sheets.
3. See Technical Summary.
4. Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Catalogue of Drawings by Rembrandt and His School in the British Museum* (London, 2010), nos. 29 and 30.
5. Jeroen Giltaij, “Review of Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Drawings by Rembrandt and His Circle in the British Museum*, London, 1991,” *Simiolus* 23 (1995): 98.
6. A drawing of 1653 by Jan van Goyen (1596–1656) in the J. Paul Getty Museum depicts a large tent, pitched just outside a village, with a sign depicting an elephant. Lions were no doubt presented to the public in the same way. See George R. Goldner, *European Drawings I: Catalogue of the Collections* (Malibu, 1988), 244–45, no. 108 (*A Village Festival with Musicians Playing outside a Tent*, 1653, black chalk and gray wash, 17.0 x 27.7 cm.).
7. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 2: no. 461, fig. 549; Martin Royalton-Kisch, *Catalogue of Drawings by Rembrandt and His School in the British Museum* (London, 2010), no. 73, inv. Ff,4.121.
8. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 2: nos. 457, 458, and 459, figs. 546, 548, and 549.
9. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 4: nos. 777, 778, and 779, figs. 980, 981, and 982.
10. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 2: 456, fig. 544.
11. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 3: no. 474, fig. 974, and no. 475, fig. 978; 5: no. 1211, fig. 1511, no. 1214, fig. 1514, and no. 1246, fig. 1516.
12. *Adam and Eve*, 1638, etching, 162 x 116 mm (Bartsch 28).
13. *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness*, 1634, etching, 119 x 105 mm (Bartsch 100).
14. *Saint Jerome in an Italianate Landscape*, ca. 1653, etching, 259 x 210 mm (Bartsch 104).
15. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 4: no. 776, fig. 975; no. 781, fig. 976; no. 782, fig. 977; no. 979, fig. 783.
16. *Daniel in the Lions’ Den*, 1649–52, black chalk, pen, and brown ink, brush and brown wash, heightened

- with white, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. MB 200. Werner Sumowski, *Drawings of the Rembrandt School*, ed. and trans. Walter L. Strauss, 10 vols. (New York, 1979–92), 9: no. 2145.
17. *The Unity of the Country*, oil on panel, 74.6 x 101 mm, signed lower right: *Rembrandt 164*. (last digit missing), Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. 1717.
 18. Josua Bruyn, et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 3: 1635–1642, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1989), A 135: late 1630s, signed in the 1640s; Jeroen Giltaij, Guido Jansen, and Josua Bruyn, *Een gloeiend palet: Schilderijen van Rembrandt en zijn School*, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (Rotterdam, 1988), ca. 1638, early 1640s; Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: A Life in 180 Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2008), ca. 1637.
 19. *Portrait of a Polish Nobleman*, 1637, oil on panel, 97 x 66 cm, signed and dated at upper right: *Rembrandt ft./1637*, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1937.1.78. See Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *The Collection of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogues: Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 222–26, repro. *A River Landscape with a Windmill* in Kassel is painted on the same piece of wood (oil on panel, 67 x 87.5 cm, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, inv. GK 242). Josua Bruyn, et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 3: 1635–1642, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1989), B 12. This painting was executed in two stages, first in a Rembrandtesque style in around 1640, possibly by Rembrandt himself, and then overpainted about 1650–55, probably by Ferdinand Bol.
 20. The lioness sheets would therefore date to around same time as the black chalk drawing of an elephant in Vienna, dated 1637. Black chalk, 233 x 354 mm, Albertina, Vienna, inv. 17558. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London, 1973), 2: no. 457, fig. 546.
 21. Walter L. Strauss, and Marion van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 1656/12, no. 249.
 22. Peter Schatborn, “Van Rembrandt tot Crozat: Vroege verzamelingen met tekeningen van Rembrandt,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 32 (1981): 21–24.
 23. Peter Schatborn, “Van Rembrandt tot Crozat. Vroege verzamelingen met tekeningen van Rembrandt,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 32 (1981), 25–28.
 24. Bernard Picart, *Recueil de Lions* (Amsterdam, 1729), nos. F 5 and F 6.
 25. Sale, Amsterdam, 3 May 1800, VV, nos. 32–45. The four drawings from this group that have been accepted as the work of Rembrandt do not correspond to the drawings used by Picart. See Peter Schatborn, “Van Rembrandt tot Crozat: Vroege verzamelingen met tekeningen van Rembrandt,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 32 (1981): 28.

Provenance

- Jean-Jacques de Boissieu (1736–1810), France.^[1]
- Robert Lebel (1901–86), Paris, by 1968.^[2]
- [Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, London/New York, together with Artemis Fine Art, London/New York, 2000; Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox, London/New York, 2005; Otto Naumann Ltd., New York, 2005].
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Provenance Notes

1. Based on the RKD photo archive mount, not currently available online. French draughtsman and engraver Jean-Jacques de Boissieu collected works on paper by Rembrandt and other seventeenth-century Dutch artists and referenced them in his own artwork.
2. Based on the RKD photo archive mount, not currently available online. Lebel was also a major collector of Dutch drawings.

Exhibition History

- New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, 2006 [lent by the present owner].
- Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, “Drawing Life: The Dutch Visual Tradition,” 24 November 2009–28 February 2010, no. 7 [lent by the present owner].
- Ithaca, Cornell University, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, “An Eye For Detail: Dutch Painting from The Leiden Collection,” January–May 2015 [lent by the present owner].
- Paris, Musée du Louvre, “Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection: The Age of Rembrandt,” 22 February–22 May 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre,” 14 February–18 May 2019 [lent by the present owner].

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and the *Musée du Louvre*. Edited by Blaise Ducos and Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 49, n. 21. Exh. cat. Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi. London, 2019. [Exhibition catalogue also published in French and Arabic.]

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Technical Summary

The support, a sheet of brown laid paper, has been hinged to a decorated historic mount with its outer margins trimmed. The support has been laid down, and small areas extend beyond the mount edges. Although the mount does not bear any collector's marks, it appears the drawing was once adhered to it. Layers of paper from an earlier mounting are present along the corners, and a layer of modern laid paper adhered to the central area serves as a barrier between the drawing and the mount.

The drawing is executed in a rich black chalk with white chalk heightening. Under magnification, the black chalk appears to have been enriched with a liquid, possibly a gum, which increased its viscosity and enhanced its blackness. Some strokes and marks have a slightly lustrous quality, whereas others have a drier, matte quality.

The drawing is unsigned and undated.

The drawing has not undergone conservation treatment since acquisition and remains in an excellent state of preservation.^[1]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Entry based on 2009 examination report by Marjorie Shelley, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge, Sherman Fairchild Center for Works on Paper and Photograph Conservation, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.