



Seated Man, Half-Length, at Work

Rembrandt van Rijn
(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

ca. 1647

black chalk, wetted in darkest accents on paper

12.7 x 10.2 cm

RR-106



How To Cite

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This chalk drawing depicts a seated young man with long black hair parted in the middle as he looks down at an unidentified round object he holds in his hands.^[1] Rembrandt van Rijn carefully indicated the figure's pose with fine lines, visible at the left contour of the shoulder, which he then worked up in darker, broader strokes. With these strokes he clarified the contours of fingers on the sitter's right hand and strengthened the right elbow and lower arm. He then shaded the figure with flat shadows and fine hatching in various directions. While he completely covered the face with uniform light shading, he left areas in reserve in the hair, particularly at the left, which appear to catch the light. The shadow cast by the head falls on the left shoulder.

In 2003 a slightly smaller drawing of the same model, but depicted full-length instead of half-length, was auctioned in London (**fig 1**).^[2] Rembrandt used the same materials and technique in that drawing, but he viewed the subject from a greater distance and rendered him in a less detailed manner. In that drawing, the sitter's head is also bent forward, his hands are in a comparable position, and he holds the same object. Rembrandt clearly drew the two sheets in the same sitting.

It is difficult to say what place these two drawings occupy in Rembrandt's oeuvre, and what purpose they may have served. When Rembrandt worked in Leiden (1625–31), he made figure studies in black and red chalk in imitation of his second teacher, Pieter Lastman (1583–1633). In the 1630s he continued to use these materials, but he also drew in pen and ink. In the 1640s Rembrandt made a number of black-chalk sketches of figures and figural groups and small landscape views in and around Amsterdam.^[3] These drawings generally display similar contrasts between light and dark lines as those seen in the drawings of the seated man, but they differ in the character and width of the chalk, and in the extent of elaboration.

Seated Man, Half-Length, at Work belongs to another group of chalk drawings Rembrandt executed in a somewhat broader and sketchier style. Several of these belong to the core group of Rembrandt's autograph drawings.^[4] Among these is *Young Girl Leaning Out of a Window* in the Courtauld Gallery, London (**fig 2**),^[5] which is a preparatory study for a painting, dated 1645, in the Dulwich Picture Gallery.^[6] This drawing, too, was laid in sketchily with light lines and then worked up with darker

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Seated Man, Full-Length, at Work*, ca.1647, black chalk, 135 x 96 mm, private collection, Amsterdam



Fig 2. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Young Girl Leaning Out of a Window*, 1645, black chalk, 83 x 65 mm, The Courtauld Gallery, London, Seilern Bequest, 1978, inv. D.1978.PG.192, © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

strokes. In particular, the shadows on and around the face, the way the light falls on the hair, and the broad lines that define the forms are comparable to those in the Leiden Collection drawing. *Young Girl Leaning Out of a Window* is also stylistically related to *Seated Old Man Wearing a Hat* in the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.^[7] In the latter work, Rembrandt made improvements and changes to the legs by adding taut lines in darker chalk, much as he did in the Leiden Collection drawing. Also comparable to the Leiden Collection drawing is *Seated Man, Bending Forward*, which displays the same broad, sketchy approach and added details in dark chalk (fig 3).^[8]

Another black-chalk drawing that belongs to this core group is *A Family of Beggars*, since on the verso of that sheet is a preparatory study for Rembrandt's 1647 portrait etching of Jan Six (1618–1700).^[9] Rembrandt executed the family of beggars with a fair amount of detail and only a few darker accents. On the basis of the dated portrait etching, these black-chalk sketches can be dated to around 1645–47. Apart from *Young Girl Leaning Out of a Window* and the sketch portraying Jan Six, the black-chalk drawings discussed here were not made as preliminary studies for paintings or etchings, but as exercise material, possibly as examples for pupils. Rembrandt did not generally prepare his paintings by drawing preliminary studies; instead, he applied the design directly to the support, whether panel or canvas or copper plate.

Sometimes during the course of painting Rembrandt would make drawings to try out alternative solutions. An example of this approach is *Study for the Figure of Susanna* in the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin (fig 4),^[10] which Rembrandt drew as he was finishing the painting *Susanna and the Elders*, 1647 (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), which he had begun at the end of the 1630s.^[11] The black-chalk drawing of Susanna is similar to the drawings of the seated men, although Rembrandt executed it in finer chalk and added white chalk to indicate areas of light, thus increasing its expressive quality. The rendering of Susanna's clothing, in particular—with passages of hatching in various directions to produce shading, and stronger lines to clarify the contours—is comparable to the effect produced in *Seated Man, Half-Length, at Work*.

The broad, dark chalk lines that Rembrandt used to work up drawings in the mid-1640s parallel the technique he used in his pen-and-ink drawings



Fig 3. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Seated Man, Bending Forward*, ca. 1647, black chalk, 123 x 85 mm, private collection, Amsterdam



Fig 4. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Study for the Figure of Susanna*, 1647, black and white chalk, 204 x 164 mm, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. KdZ 5264

from that period, as is evident in his compositional study for his portrait etching of Jan Six.^[12] In this pen-and-ink drawing, Rembrandt used his broader lines to define his forms, much as he did in the chalk drawings of the seated man.

Sumowski observed that the model depicted in the two drawings of a seated man also posed for a series of paintings of the head of Christ.^[13] Indeed, it is likely that Rembrandt considered the model, with his dark hair parted in the middle, suitable for portraying Christ. Rembrandt probably also used this model for the figure of Christ in *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1648, in the Louvre.^[14]

When *Seated Man, Half-Length, at Work* was in the Heseltine collection, it was attributed to Gerard ter Borch the Younger (1617–81), an artist to whom Rembrandt's figure drawings have often been wrongly ascribed because the models were thought to resemble figures in that artist's genre scenes. In 1971 Sumowski rightly published the drawing as a Rembrandt, but he dated it to the late 1640s on the basis of a supposed development toward a more angular style of drawing and regular, dense hatching without detailed lighting effects.^[15] Nevertheless, the similarities between these drawings of a seated man and the core group of drawings discussed above, which can be dated to between 1645 and 1647, make a dating to ca. 1647 the most plausible.^[16]

-Peter Schatborn

Endnotes

1. In Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes, *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus* (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts) (Philadelphia, 2011), 123, it is assumed that he holds a hat in his hands. In a drawing formerly with Bob Haboldt (see note 2), the sitter also appears to hold the same round object, which perhaps has a round opening at its top.
2. Formerly in Paris, art dealer Bob P. Haboldt; sale Christie's, London, 8 July 2003, no. 100. Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes, *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus* (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts) (Philadelphia, 2011), 123, 125, pl. 4.10, 240, no. 33.
3. For these figure sketches, see William W. Robinson, "Five Black Chalk Figure Studies by Rembrandt," *Master Drawings* 36 (1998): 36–45; and William W. Robinson, "A Black Chalk Drawing by Rembrandt," in *Festschrift für Konrad Oberhuber*, ed. Achim Gnann and Heinz Widauer (Milan, 2000), 233–40. For the small landscapes, see Boudewijn Bakker and Peter Schatborn, "Schetsen van Rembrandt," *De Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* (1976), no. 2.
4. Martin Royalton-Kisch and Peter Schatborn, "The Core Group of Rembrandt Drawings, II, The List," *Master Drawings* 49 (2011): 323–51.
5. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 4: no. 700, fig. 889; Martin Royalton-Kisch and Peter Schatborn, "The Core Group of Rembrandt Drawings, II, The List," *Master Drawings* 49 (2011): no. 52, fig. 127.
6. Oil on canvas, 18.6 x 66 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. Abraham Bredius, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, ed. Horst Gerson (London, 1969), no. 368, repro.
7. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Seated Old Man Wearing a Hat*, ca. 1647, black chalk, 135 x 83 mm, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, inv. M 1924. See Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 4: no. 727, fig. 920 (1648–49).
8. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 5: no. 1076, fig. 1366 (1650–51).
9. Black chalk, 131 x 95 mm, Amsterdam Museum, Fodor collection, inv. A 10628; Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 4: no. 749, fig. 946 (recto) and 947 (verso); Martin Royalton-Kisch and Peter Schatborn, "The Core Group of Rembrandt Drawings, II, The List," *Master Drawings* 49 (2011): no. 58 verso, fig. 134. The print is B. 285.
10. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New

York, 1973), 3: no. 590, fig. 765; Holm Bevers, *Rembrandt Zeichnungen* (Ostfildern, 2006), no. 27, repro.; Martin Royalton-Kisch and Peter Schatborn, "The Core Group of Rembrandt Drawings, II, The List," *Master Drawings* 49 (2011): no. 56, fig. 35.

11. Oil on panel, 76 x 91 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. no. 828 E. Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 5, *Small-Scale History Paintings*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering (Dordrecht, 2011), no. 1, repro.
12. Pen and brown ink, brush and brown and white ink, 220 x 177 mm, Six Collection, Amsterdam. Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 4, no. 767, fig. 963.
13. Werner Sumowski, "Rembrandt Zeichnungen," *Pantheon* 29 (1971): 129. For these paintings, which are generally dated between 1647 and 1656, see Lloyd DeWitt, Blaise Ducos, and George S. Keyes, *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus* (Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts) (Philadelphia, 2011), 56–73. None of the heads of Christ are considered autograph, with the possible exception of a painting now in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, inv. 8110 (*Head of Christ*, c. 1648–50, oil on panel, 25 x 21.5 cm).
14. Oil on panel, 68 x 65 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 1739. Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 5, *Small-Scale History Paintings*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering (Dordrecht, 2011), no. V 14, repro.; see esp. p. 476.
15. Werner Sumowski, "Rembrandt Zeichnungen," *Pantheon* 29 (1971): 129: "Das Blatt muss später liegen als die oben besprochenen Kreidezeichnungen, weil die Hauptlinien bereits kantig werden und die Schraffuren schon dicht und systematisch, ohne auf luminarische Feinheiten abzielen, gesetzt sind" (The sheet must have originated later than the chalk drawings discussed above, because the main lines are already becoming angular and the hatching is already applied densely and systematically, with no attempt at any subtle lighting effects). When the drawing appeared on the market in 1990, the sale catalogue stated that Sumowski no longer considered it an autograph sheet but rather the work of an "associate or pupil" (sale, Christie's, New York, 10 January 1990, no. 182, as attributed to Rembrandt). Now, however, he is convinced of the drawing's authenticity (personal communication, 30 January 2012).
16. Benesch dates *Seated Man, Bending Forward* and two other black-chalk drawings of seated men (National Museum, Gdansk, and Albertina, Vienna) to 1650–51 on the basis of their "simplicity and monumentality," which he finds characteristic of the late period. See Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva Benesch, 6 vols. (London and New York, 1973), 5: no. 1076, fig. 1366; no. 1974, fig. 1363; no. 1075, fig. 1365. The similarity to the above-mentioned drawings of 1645–47, however, is so great that a later dating is unlikely. This is also true of a black-chalk drawing in the Amsterdam Museum, Fodor collection, *Christ among the Doctors* (Otto Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, ed. Eva

Benesch, 6 vols. [London and New York, 1973], 4: no. 714, fig. 906; Ben Broos, *Oude tekeningen in het bezit van de Gemeentemusea in Amsterdam, waaronder de collectie Fodor*, vol. 3, *Rembrandt en tekenaars uit zijn omgeving* [Amsterdam, 1981], no. 15, repro.), which Broos dates to 1652 on the basis of the resemblance of the figures to those in two etchings of 1652 (B. 65) and 1654 (B. 64), both representing *Christ among the Doctors*.

Provenance

- P. Heseltine, London, 1910 (as by Gerard ter Borch).
- (Sale, Christie's, New York, 10 January 1990, no. 182, as attributed to Rembrandt).
- Private collection, New York (sale, Christie's, New York, 24 January 2008, no. 144 [Otto Naumann Ltd., New York, 2008]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner.

Exhibition History

- Paris, Musée du Louvre, "Rembrandt et la figure du Christ/Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus," 21 April–18 July 2011; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 3 August–30 October 2011; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts, 20 November 2011–12 February 2012, no. 32 [lent by the present owner].

References

- Heseltine, J. P. *Collection of Dutch Drawings*. London, 1910, no. 29.
- Sumowski, Werner. "Rembrandt Zeichnungen." *Pantheon* 24 (1971): 129–32, fig. 9.
- DeWitt, Lloyd, Ducos, Blaise and Keyes, George S. *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*. Exh. cat. Paris, Musée du Louvre; Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts. Philadelphia, 2011, 123–24, pl. 4.9, 242, no. 32. (French edition, *Rembrandt et la figure du Christ*. Paris, 2011.)

Technical Summary



The support, a sheet of white laid paper, has been adhered to a cream-colored mat board with a narrow, approximately 1 cm border on all four sides.

The design layer is executed in black chalk, which has been wetted in the darkest accents.

The drawing is unsigned and undated.

The drawing underwent conservation treatment in 2011 and is in excellent condition and in a good state of preservation.^[1]

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Entry based on 2011 examination and treatment 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.