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**Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes**

Rembrandt van Rijn  
(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

1634

oil on panel

71.1 x 56 cm

signed and dated in dark paint, lower right  
quadrant: "Rembrandt. f. / 1634"

RR-110



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## How To Cite

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This image of the young Rembrandt van Rijn, proud in bearing as he gazes directly out at the viewer from within an oval framing device, is not easily forgotten. With eyes gently shaded by his beret's soft brim, Rembrandt's gaze is compelling in its directness, yet one senses a restless mind that is only partially revealed. One cannot help but stare back, and thus become engaged in silent communication with the artist. It is a strange phenomenon, but suddenly, without recognizing the moment in which it occurs, the physical reality of the painted image blurs, and the psychological rapport between the viewer and Rembrandt begins.

Rembrandt's expression reinforces the impression that he was not only a self-assured young man, uncompromising in his approach to the world, but also an enigmatic individual whose true personality he kept largely to himself. The painting seems so characteristic of Rembrandt's work from the early 1630s that it is easy to overlook how striking its psychological ambiguity must have appeared to his contemporaries. Twenty-first-century viewers have come to judge Rembrandt's character and artistic personality through the sum total of his life and work. Numerous paintings, drawings and etchings, as well as documents, stories and myths, have left an indelible impression of his extraordinary artistic achievements through a long, memorable career. Therefore, it is difficult to place oneself in Amsterdam in 1634, imagining how such an image would have been received by contemporaries familiar with a far more descriptive portrait tradition.

Rembrandt began exploring the expressive character of self-portraits in Leiden in the late 1620s, and he continued to depict himself in paintings, drawings and etchings throughout his career. Indeed, self-portraiture constitutes around one-tenth of his total surviving oeuvre.<sup>[1]</sup> He incorporated a wide range of pictorial effects and devices in these works, far more so than he did in his commissioned portraits. The endless variety and invention of his self-portraits is such that no two look quite alike.

A number of Rembrandt's early self-portraits relate to the *tronies* that he and Jan Lievens (1607–74) developed in Leiden, and they feature the kinds of emotional expressions, fancy costumes, loose paint handling, and striking light effects evident in those works. Echoes of Rembrandt's early *tronies* are seen here in the artist's expression, the strong lighting effects, and his imaginative costume, all of which differ from the formal

## Comparative Figures



**Fig 1.** Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, 1634, oil on panel, 63.5 x 46.3 cm, Glasgow Museums, The Burrell Collection, inv. 35.600



**Fig 2.** Photograph of *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes*, RR-110, ca. 1935, with additions (photograph courtesy of Martin Bijl)



**Fig 3.** Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait with Raised Sabre*, 1634, etching, state 2 of 2, 125 x 103

presentation of his *Self-Portrait* of 1632 in Glasgow (**fig 1**).<sup>[2]</sup> Whereas in that *Self-Portrait* Rembrandt closely followed the fashion among Amsterdam's burghers by wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a flat ruff over a black coat, in the self-portrait in the Leiden Collection he has donned a beret, which by the 1620s was considered old-fashioned, although it continued to be favored by artists.<sup>[3]</sup> The fur-trimmed robe he wears here also descends from sixteenth-century dress and relates to the *tabbaard*, a type of fur-lined cloak favored by scholars.<sup>[4]</sup>

This combination of beret and fur-trimmed robe may indicate that Rembrandt sought to portray himself within the framework of a scholarly and artistic tradition. Given that he painted *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* in the year of his marriage to Saskia van Uylenburgh, it is likely that he wanted to present himself as a sincere and legitimate artist-suitor, of a type different from artists who were characterized by such slurs as "hoe schilder hoe wilder" (the more of a painter the wilder he is).<sup>[5]</sup> Rembrandt's restrained modeling of his features in this painting also speaks to the thoughtfulness of his self-representation. As Ernst van de Wetering has emphasized, Rembrandt carefully modeled his flesh tones to capture the effects of reflected light in shaded areas, such as around the eyes.<sup>[6]</sup>

Remarkably, despite its compelling qualities, Rembrandt's self-portrait was entirely overpainted by another hand soon after its completion, and it was only in the late twentieth century that the master's original image was revealed once again. A photograph from the mid-1930s indicates that the overpainted image depicted an exotic middle-aged man with long, dark, curly hair, a moustache, and a thin beard (**fig 2**).<sup>[7]</sup> He wore a fur coat and a tall Polish-style fur hat, a so-called *kalpac* trimmed with gold, similar to Rembrandt's 1634 etched *Self-Portrait with Raised Sabre* (**fig 3**).<sup>[8]</sup> He also wore a golden chain wound twice over his mantle, in a manner similar to that in Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* in the Wallace Collection, also from the 1630s.<sup>[9]</sup>

From the 1950s to the 1980s some of the overpainting was removed (**fig 4**), which revealed the existence of the beret under the *kalpac*. Technical research undertaken by the Rembrandt Research Project in the 1990s posited that the additions had likely been made in Rembrandt's workshop around 1636/37, only a few years after the creation of the original painting. The remaining areas of overpaint were subsequently taken off with a

mm, British Museum, London, inv. 1973-U-840, © Trustees of the British Museum



**Fig 4.** Photograph of *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes*, RR-110, ca. 1950, with additions partly removed (photograph courtesy of Martin Bijl)



**Fig 5.** Photograph of *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes*, RR-110, ca. 1980, with further additions removed (photograph courtesy of Martin Bijl)





scalpel by conservator Martin Bijl (**fig 5**).

Just why this repainting of *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* was undertaken is not known, but it may have occurred if Rembrandt's painting had not immediately found a buyer. In any event, it seems unlikely that the master would have authorized this repainting. A more probable scenario would be that the panel remained in the workshop of Hendrick van Uylenburgh after Rembrandt's departure in 1635, and that Van Uylenburgh decided to update the image. Van Uylenburgh may well have charged his new head painter Govaert Flinck with the task of turning this Rembrandt self-portrait into a *tronie* of an exotic figure.<sup>[10]</sup> Flinck clearly knew Rembrandt's self-portrait in its original format, for in 1636 he used it as a basis for an image of his former master as an amorous shepherd, as part of a pair with a shepherdess (**fig 6**).<sup>[11]</sup> The loose handling of the repainting on Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* corresponds to Flinck's stylistic development around 1637. The fascinating transformation of this sensitive self-portrait into an exotic and somewhat frightening individual, and back again, serves as a powerful reminder of how works of art often have long and complicated lives that reflect differences of taste and values over the years.

-David DeWitt

**Fig 6.** Govaert Flinck, *Rembrandt as a Shepherd with Flute and Staff*, 1636, oil on canvas, 74.5 × 64 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. SK-A-3451

## Endnotes

1. More than 80 self-portraits by Rembrandt are known today, including some 40 paintings, 30 etchings, and 7 drawings; Ernst van de Wetering, "Rembrandts verborgen zelfportretten/Rembrandt's Hidden Self-Portraits," *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 1 (2002): 2. On Rembrandt's self-portraits, see Christopher White and Quentin Buvelot, eds., *Rembrandt by Himself* (Exh. cat. London, National Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis) (London, 1999), and Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 4, *Self-Portraits*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering (Dordrecht, 2005), Addendum IV. See also H. Perry Chapman, *Rembrandt's Self-Portraits: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity* (Princeton, 1990), and the reassessment of her analysis in Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), *passim*, as well as in White and Buvelot, *Rembrandt by Himself*, *passim*, and *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 4, *passim*.
2. See Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2, *1631–1634*, ed. Josua Bruyn et al. (Dordrecht, Boston, and Lancaster, 1986), no. A 58.
3. Marieke de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings* (Amsterdam, 2006), 164f. Although Rembrandt may have worn berets on occasion, he also tended to include them in self-portraits in combination with fanciful or imaginary components of dress, such as the Asian patterned silk scarf and heavy gold chains. See, for example, his 1629 *Self-Portrait* in The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, oil on panel, 89.7 × 73.5 cm, acc. P21n6.
4. Marieke de Winkel, "'Eene der deftigsten dragten': The Iconography of the *Tabbaard* and the Sense of Tradition in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Portraiture," in *Beeld en zelfbeeld in de Nederlandse kunst, 1550–1750/Image and Self-Image in Netherlandish Art, 1550–1750*, Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek 46 (Zwolle, 1995): 145–67.
5. It is possibly significant that Rembrandt's assistant at this time, Govaert Flinck (1615–60), had confronted this stigma as he sought to become an artist: see Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1976), 2:18–19.
6. Ernst van de Wetering, "Rembrandts verborgen zelfportretten/Rembrandt's Hidden Self-Portraits," *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 1 (2002): 15.
7. See the account of the assessment and removal of these additions in Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 4, *Self-Portraits*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering (Dordrecht, 2005), 617–26, no. IV Addendum 2; first published as an article: Ernst van de Wetering, "Rembrandts verborgen zelfportretten/Rembrandt's Hidden



Self-Portraits,” *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* 1 (2002): 16–25.

8. On the Polish character of this head covering, see Michael Zell, *Reframing Rembrandt: Jews and the Christian Image in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2002), 46–48, and Alfred Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume*, 2nd ed. (London, 1973), 104–5.
9. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, second half of the 1630s, oil on panel, 64 × 49 cm, The Wallace Collection, London, inv. no. P 52; see: Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 4, *Self-Portraits*, ed. Ernst van de Wetering (Dordrecht, 2005), 604, Corrigenda III C 96.
10. This assessment draws support from Joachim von Moltke’s attribution of the painting in its overpainted state to Flinck. See Joachim Wolfgang von Moltke, *Govaert Flinck, 1615–1660* (Amsterdam, 1965), 246–47, under no. 101. A somewhat similar painting by Flinck is his *Bust of a Young Man in a Plumed Beret*, 1637, oil on canvas, 73 × 57.5 cm, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, inv. 782 (see *Portrait of Antonie Coopal*, RR-103, fig. 6).
11. This painting is a pendant to Flinck’s *Shepherdess*, 1636, oil on canvas, 74.5 × 63.5 cm, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, inv. 252; Werner Sumowski, *Gemälde der Rembrandt-Schüler in vier Bänden*, 6 vols. (Landau, 1983), 2:1030–31, nos. 655, 656. Sumowski rightly dismisses the traditional identification of the Braunschweig *Shepherdess* as Saskia van Uylenburgh.

## Provenance

- Christian Gottlob Frege, Leipzig (1715–81), possibly by descent to his son Christian Gottlob Frege (1747–1816), and to his son Christian Gottlob Frege (1778–1855).
- Private collection, Paris, as of 1935, possibly André de Hevesy.
- Paul Page, Moulins, France, by 1956, and thence by descent (sale, Sotheby’s, London, 10 July 2003, no. 19).
- Steve Wynn Collection, Las Vegas.
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2008.

## Exhibition History



- Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis, “Rembrandt’s Hidden Self-Portraits,” 31 January–16 March 2003 [lent by a private collection, France].
- Norfolk, Virginia, Chrysler Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, 22 June 2009–22 January 2010 [lent by the present owner].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, January–December 2010, [lent by the present owner].
- Tokyo, National Museum of Western Art, “Rembrandt: The Quest for Chiaroscuro,” 12 March–12 June 2011; Nagoya, Nagoya City Art Museum, 25 June–4 September 2011, no. 13 [lent by the present owner].
- Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, “Rembrandt in America,” 30 October 2011–22 January 2012; Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, 19 February–28 May 2012; Minneapolis, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 24 June–16 September 2012, no. 17 [lent by the present owner].
- Brooklyn, Brooklyn Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, March 2013–December 2014 [lent by the present owner].
- Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts, on loan with the permanent collection, January 2015–January 2016 [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].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].

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## Versions

### Versions and Copies

1. Attributed to Govaert Flinck, copy of *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* in unrestored (pre-1966) state, oil on panel, 69 x 55 cm, present location unknown. Formerly with art dealer J. Boehler in Munich in 1929; with art dealer A. G. Luzern in 1934; and with an unknown art dealer in Berlin in 1962.

### Versions Notes

### Technical Summary

The support, a rectangular composite panel, comprises three vertically grained Eastern Baltic oak planks, a wide central plank flanked by two identical width narrow planks. The planks derive

from at least two different trees felled after 1626, with a first use date of between 1626 and 1658.<sup>[1]</sup> The left vertical panel join runs through the left side of the black cap, the right join through the background to the figure's right.<sup>[2]</sup> Narrow wood shims have been secured to both vertical edges.<sup>[3]</sup> The panel has bevels along all four sides and is unthinned and uncradled. The panel reverse has two identical red wax seals along the central plank but no paper labels, import stamps or obvious panel maker's mark.

A warm, light-colored ground has been thinly and evenly applied. The portrait has been painted in a feigned oval on the rectangular panel support. The paint along the four outer corners has been applied thinly as a glaze with lively brushstrokes that allow the light-colored ground to show through. The brushwork along the brown paint applied to the lower right quadrant of the oval where the signature has been applied also allows the ground to show through. The remainder of the composition within the confines of the oval—the gray background, the face, and the dark garments—has been applied in a paste consistency with low brushwork and low impasto. Under magnification, the hairs that make up the left side of Rembrandt's moustache appear to have been scratched into the wet paint.

In 2000 Martin Bijl restored the painting and removed major restorations that had been applied, presumably by one of Rembrandt's pupils, soon after it was executed, which had altered the half-length self-portrait of Rembrandt as a 28-year-old man into one resembling a Russian aristocrat by adding earrings, a goatee, shoulder length hair, and a velvet cap. Bijl's restoration revealed the original portrait of Rembrandt with the round chin and gentle eyes common in other self-portraits.

No underdrawing or compositional changes are readily apparent in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers.

The painting is signed and dated in dark paint along the lower right quadrant of the feigned oval.

The painting has not undergone conservation treatment since its acquisition in 2008 and remains in a good state of preservation.

### Technical Summary Endnotes

1. The characterization of the wood is based on Ian Tyers's 2003 and 2011 dendrochronology reports. The panel underwent dendrochronology by Peter Klein in 1995.
2. The narrow left and right planks are 13 cm wide.
3. With black tape applied to the panel reverse.