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Rembrandt van Rijn

(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

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According to Rembrandt's first biographer, Jan Jansz. Orlers (1570–1646), the most famous Dutch painter of the seventeenth century was born in Leiden on 15 July 1606, the ninth child of the miller Harmen Gerritsz van Rijn (1568–1630) and the baker's daughter Neeltje Willemsdr van Suydtbrouck (ca. 1568–1640).[1] The painter grew up in the Weddesteeg, across from his father's mill. He attended the Latin school in Leiden, and his parents enrolled him in the University of Leiden when he was fourteen, "so that upon reaching adulthood he could use his knowledge for the service of his city and the benefit of the community at large."[2] This, however, did not come to pass, for Rembrandt's ambitions lay elsewhere, "his natural inclination being for painting and drawing only."[3] His parents took him out of school in 1621, allowing him to follow his passion. They apprenticed him to Jacob Isaacsz van Swanenburgh (1571–1638), who had just returned from Italy, "with whom he stayed for about three years."[4] It is during this time that Rembrandt probably painted his earliest known works: *Stone Operation (Allegory of Touch)*, *Three Musicians (Allegory of Hearing),* and *Unconscious Patient (Allegory of Smell)*.[5]

Rembrandt moved to Amsterdam in 1625 to complete his training with the leading painter of his day, Pieter Lastman (1583–1633), with whom, according to Arnold Houbraken, he stayed for six months."[6] When Rembrandt returned to Leiden, he set up his own workshop in his parents' house. *Stoning of Saint Stephen*, dated 1625, and the many biblical scenes that followed suggest that he aspired to be a history painter.[7] He also began taking on pupils. For example, Gerrit Dou (1613–75), who lived nearby, came to study with him in 1628, and was soon followed by another neighbor, Isaac de Jouderville (ca. 1612–48).[8] In these years Rembrandt produced his first etchings, the technique that would bring him great renown and even today still largely determines his fame.

In the meantime he had become friends with his contemporary Jan Lievens (1607–74), and the evident correlation between their work in the second half of the 1620s indicates that they maintained close ties for some time.[9] Around 1630 Constantijn Huygens (1596–1687), secretary to Stadholder Frederik Hendrik (1584–1647) and an art lover, considered the two friends to be the most talented artists of their generation, destined to enjoy a glorious future.[10] Huygens also had a hand in the commissions Rembrandt received from the Hague court beginning in 1627.[11] Frederik Hendrik and his consort Amalia van Solms (1602–75), however, were not his only clients from The Hague. In 1632 Rembrandt portrayed the wine merchant Joris de Caullery (ca. 1600–61), Jacob de Gheyn III (1596–1641), a draftsman/engraver who was a friend of Constantijn Huygens, and Maurits Huygens (1595–1642), Constantijn's brother. All three also owned other work by Rembrandt.[12]

By then Rembrandt was no longer living in Leiden, at least not permanently. In 1631 he had been entrusted with running the well-patronized Amsterdam workshop of the renowned art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh (1587–1661), with whom he lodged.[13] He worked for Uylenburgh until 1635, during which time he painted an unprecedented number of portraits, including those of the clergyman Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557–1644), who came to Amsterdam from The Hague especially to sit for Rembrandt in 1633.[14] Another famous work from this period is *The Anatomy Lecture of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* of 1632.[15]

In 1634, in the Frisian Sint Anna Parochie, Rembrandt married Saskia Uylenburgh (1612–42), the daughter of a burgomaster of Leeuwarden and a cousin of Hendrick Uylenburgh.[16] When Rembrandt set up his own workshop in 1635, the couple moved to rented quarters on the Nieuwe Doelenstraat. They did not stay there long; in 1637 they occupied De Suijckerbackerij, a house on the Binnen-Amstel, and in 1639 they moved into a house on the Sint Anthoniesbreestraat, the

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present Rembrandthuis. In the meantime, Rembrandt was prospering. In 1647 his property was valued at 40,750 guilders. The “wijt-beruchten” (widely celebrated) artist lived up to both the promise that Huygens had seen in him and Orlers’s assessment that Rembrandt “has become one of the most famous painters of our century.”[17]

Because he was held in such high esteem, Rembrandt could charge steep prices for his work into the 1650s. For instance, in 1639 the court in The Hague paid him 1,200 guilders for two scenes of the Passion: *The Entombment of Christ* and *The Resurrection of Christ*.[18] In 1646 Frederik Hendrik paid him 2,300 guilders for two more Passion scenes: *The Adoration of the Shepherds* and *The Circumcision of Christ*.[19] This astonishing amount was approximated only by the honorarium he received for his most famous painting, *The Night Watch.* Rembrandt worked on this singularly original civic guard picture between 1639 and 1642, and received an average of 100 guilders from each of the eighteen officers portrayed in it.[20] Eventually, however, Rembrandt gradually lost ground as a sought-after portraitist to his former pupil Govaert Flinck (1615–60) and to Bartholomeus van der Helst (1613–70), both of whom catered better to the changing taste of the elite.[21] Even so, Rembrandt remained in demand, both as a painter and as a teacher. He had an active workshop and a large number of students; according to Joachim von Sandrart, Rembrandt earned more than 2,000 guilders a year from teaching alone.[22] He had pupils throughout most of his career, including some of the most celebrated painters of the Dutch Golden Age, such as Flinck, Ferdinand Bol, Carel Fabritius (1622–54), Nicolaes Maes (1634–93), and Arent de Gelder (1645–1727).[23]

Though Rembrandt met with great success as an artist, he also had great difficulties in his life. Rembrandt and Saskia buried three children before the birth of their son, Titus, in 1641. Misfortune overcame the artist yet again when Saskia died in the summer of 1642, at the age of twenty-nine. This marked the beginning of a difficult and scandalous period for the master, one in which his own unsavory actions played a major role. Rembrandt had hired the widow Geertje Dircks (ca. 1600/10–56) to care for Titus in his home and they entered into a relationship. Things degenerated between them, however, when Rembrandt met Hendrickje Stoffels (1626–63) in 1647. After much drama and diverse summonses, matters came to a head in the summer of 1650 with Geertje’s detention in a House of Correction in Gouda. Rembrandt did not marry Hendrickje either, causing her to receive an official reprimand from the church for living “in hoererij” (in whoredom) in 1654.[24] Both of these affairs were ruinous for Rembrandt’s reputation, and it can hardly be a coincidence that he received few portrait commissions in the decade after 1649.

Rembrandt also struggled financially. Though he earned a great deal of money, he had no qualms about spending it. Already in 1638 a relative of Saskia’s accused them of “having squandered her parents’ inheritance on pomp and vanities.”[25] And indeed, they lived well above their means. Rembrandt regularly purchased costly exotic objects for his work and bought pricy art at auctions. In 1638, for example, he bought prints and drawings from the Spranger collection, including works by Raphael (1438–1520), Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617), and Lucas van Leyden (1494–1533), for 224 guilders.[26] He later purchased fourteen more prints by Van Leyden for an exorbitant 1,400 guilders.[27] His debts mounted. The expensive house, the mortgage of which he had only partially paid off, was a huge burden. When he could no longer meet his obligations in 1656, his creditors called in the Insolvency Court, after which an inventory of his possessions was drawn up. Although incomplete, the inventory gives evidence of an artistic treasure trove, including more than 130 paintings and 70 albums of graphic art. He also owned “a great quantity of horns, shells and coral branches, casts taken from life, and many curiosities.”[28]

Rembrandt’s house and furnishings were auctioned off in 1658, and he moved into a smaller, rented space on the

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Rozengracht. Still, he had work. Although he was not initially involved in the decoration of the Amsterdam Town Hall, in 1661 Rembrandt was engaged to paint a truly monumental scene of *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis*.[29] The following year, he painted *The Syndics,* one of his most famous pictures.[30] In the early 1660s he again began receiving portrait commissions from distinguished individuals such as the immensely rich iron magnate Jacob Trip (d. 1661) and his wife, Margareta de Geer (1583–1672).[31]

Hendrickje died in 1663, followed by Titus in 1668, who only shortly before had married Magdalena van Loo (1641–69), a niece of Saskia's sister Hiskia.[32] In 1669 Rembrandt painted his last self-portrait, one of more than forty examples that are known.[33] Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici probably bought one of them directly from Rembrandt when he visited Amsterdam in 1669.[34] Other Italians were interested in the master's art during the last two decades of his life. Between 1652 and 1663 Rembrandt sold three works to the Sicilian art collector Don Antonio Ruffo (1610–78).[35] Moreover, in 1666, the Genoese nobleman Francesco Sauli (1620–99) asked Rembrandt to paint an altarpiece. However, this commission never actually came to pass as the preliminary studies that he sent to Genoa never arrived there.[36]

Rembrandt died on 4 October 1669.[37] The "onopgemaeckte stucken schilderijen" (unfinished paintings) in his estate suggest that he was working right up to his death.[38] On 8 October he was buried in the Westerkerk, where Titus and Hendrickje had also been laid to rest. The funeral was a sober affair. The artist, who in a 1664 list of the most distinguished European painters had been called "het wonder van onze tijd" (the miracle of our age), received neither a special memorial nor lofty encomiums.[39] Titus's daughter Titia continued living in Amsterdam and, as her grandfather's only legal heir, inherited 3,150 guilders from the sale of paintings, drawings and curiosities in 1671.[40] Cornelia (1654–84), Rembrandt's illegitimate daughter with Hendrickje Stoffels, married the painter Cornelis Suythof (1646–91) in 1670 and moved with him to the East Indies, where she died in 1684.[41]

- Piet Bakker, 2017

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Endnotes

1. Jan Jansz. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden* (Leiden, 1641), 375.
2. “Op dat hy tot zijne Jaeren ghecomen wesende de Stadt ende tgemeene besten met zijn wetenschap zoude mogen dienen ende helpen bevorderen.” Jan Jansz. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden* (Leiden, 1641), 375.
3. “Zijne natuyrlicke beweginghen alleen streckten tot de Schilder ende Teycken Conste.” Jan Jansz. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden* (Leiden, 1641), 375.
4. “By den welcken hy gebleven is ontrent de drie Jaeren.” Jan Jansz. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden* (Leiden, 1641), 375. On Van Swanenburgh, see Roelof van Straten, *Young Rembrandt: The Leiden years, 1606–1632,* trans. R. Quartero and D.J. Martin (Leiden, 2005), 24–25. In his 1672 chronicle of Leiden, Simon van Leeuwen states that Rembrandt’s first teacher was Joris van Schoten. Simon van Leeuwen, *Korte besgryving van Lugdunum Batavorum nu Leyden* (Leiden, 1672).
5. See their entries in this catalogue. *The Spectacle Seller* (*Allegory of Sight*) is in the Museum de Lakenhal, Leiden.
6. “By den welken hy zes Maanden bleef.” Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980), 1: 254. For the year of his departure to Amsterdam and his sojourn there, see Ben Broos, “Rembrandts eerste Amsterdamse periode,” *Oud-Holland* 114 (2000): 1–6. See the biography of Pieter Lastman in this catalogue. According to Houbraken, Rembrandt worked not only with Lastman in Amsterdam, but also for some time with Jacob Pynas; Arnold Houbraken, *De groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* (Amsterdam, 1718–21; rev. ed., The Hague, 1753; reprint, Amsterdam, 1980) 1: 254–55. On this matter, see Roelof van Straten, *Young Rembrandt: the Leiden years, 1606–1632,* trans. R. Quartero and D.J. Martin (Leiden, 2005), 32.
7. *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*, 1625 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon); Josua Bruyn et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 1, *1625–1631,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1982), no. A 1.
8. See the biographies of Gerrit Dou and Isaac de Jouderville in this catalogue.
9. See the biography of Jan Lievens in this catalogue.
10. Albert H. Kan, *De jeugd van Constantijn Huygens door hemzelf beschreven* (Rotterdam, 1971), 78–81.
11. For a list of the various commissions, see Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt, His Life, His Paintings: A New Biography with All Accessible Paintings Illustrated in Colour* (New York, 1985), 69.
12. Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt, His Life, His Paintings: A New Biography with All Accessible Paintings Illustrated in Colour* (New York, 1985), 67, 69, 91–97; Roelof van Straten, *Young Rembrandt: the Leiden years, 1606–1632,* trans. R. Quartero and D.J. Martin (Leiden, 2005), 225–28

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13. Rembrandt may well have maintained his workshop in Leiden until 1632. See S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, "Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), een veranderend schildersportret," in *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop*, ed. Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch, and Pieter J.J. van Thiel (Exh. cat. Berlin, Altes Museum; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; London, National Gallery) (New Haven, 1991), 54; Frise Lammertse and Jaap van der Veen, *Uylenburgh & Son: Art and Commerce from Rembrandt to De Lairesse, 1625–1675* (Exh. cat. London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 2006), 127.

14. *Portrait of Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557–1644)*, 1633 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam); Josua Bruyn et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2, *1631–1634*, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1986), no. A 80.

15. *The Anatomy Lecture of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, 1632 (Mauritshuis, The Hague); Josua Bruyn et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 2, *1631–1634*, Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1986), no. A 51. For a survey of all the sitters between 1631 and 1635, see Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt, His Life, His Paintings: A New Biography with All Accessible Paintings Illustrated in Colour* (New York, 1985), 143–66.

16. On Saskia Uylenburgh, see Ben Broos, *Saskia: De vrouw van Rembrandt* (Zwolle, 2012).

17. Philips Angel, *Lof der schilderkunst* (Leiden, 1642), 47; "geworden is, een van de tegenwoordighe vermaertste Schilders van onse eeuwe." Jan Jansz. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden* (Leiden, 1641), 375.

18. *The Entombment of Christ*, ca. 1638 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich); Josua Bruyn et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 3, *1635–1642,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1989), no. A 126. *The Resurrection of Christ*, ca. 1638 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich); Josua Bruyn et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 3, *1635–1642,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1989), no. A 127.

19. *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1646 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich); Ernst van de Wetering et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 5, S*mall-Scale History Paintings,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (Dordrecht, 2011), no. V(1). *The Circumcision of Christ* was destroyed. A copy, ca. 1646 is in Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig; Ernst van de Wetering et al., *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 5, S*mall-Scale History Paintings,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (Dordrecht, 2011), no. V 10. For the payment by Frederik Hendrik, see Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 249, Doc. 1646/6.

20. *The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willlem van Ruytenburch ("The Night Watch")*, 1642 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam); Josua Bruyn et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 3, *1635–1642,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (The Hague, 1989), no. A 146. For the payment, see Walter L. Strauss and M. van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 446, Doc. 1659/16 and 448–49, Doc. 1959/19.

21. See the biography of Govaert Flinck in this catalogue.

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22. Joachim von Sandrart, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Lebem der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister,* ed. Arthur R. Peltzer (Nuremberg, 1675–79; reprint, Munich, 1925), 202–3.

23. For a complete survey of (supposed) pupils, see Ben Broos, "Fame Shared Is Fame Doubled," in *The Impact of a Genius: Rembrandt, His Pupils and Followers in the Seventeenth Century: Paintings from Museums and Private Collections*, ed. Albert Blankert et al. (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Waterman Gallery; Groningen, Groninger Museum) (Amsterdam, 1983), 35–58, esp. 46–47. See also Christopher Brown, Jan Kelch, Pieter J.J. van Thiel, eds. *Rembrandt: The Master and His Workshop*, vol. 1, *Paintings* (Exh. cat. Berlin, Altes Museum; Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum; London, National Gallery) (Zwolle, 1991). For (supposed) Rembrandt pupils in the Leiden Collection, see the biographies of Ferdinand Bol, Gerbrand van de Eeckhout (1621–74), Carel Fabritius, Govaert Flinck, Arent de Gelder, Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627–78), Gottfried Kneller (1646–1723), and Nicolaes Maes in this catalogue.

24. Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 318–320, Docs. 1654/11, 12, 14, and 15.

25. "Met pronken ende praelen haer ouders erfenisse hadde verquist." Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 152–55, Doc. 1638/7.

26. Walter L. Strauss and M. van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 150, Doc. 1638/2. Cf. S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, *Dossier Rembrandt / The Rembrandt Papers* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Amsterdam, 1987), 72–73.

27. Joachim von Sandrart, *Joachim von Sandrarts Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste von 1675: Lebem der berühmten Maler, Bildhauer und Baumeister,* ed. Arthur R. Peltzer (Nuremburg. 1675–79; reprint, Munich, 1925), 86.

28. "Een groote quantiteit hoorens, seegewaseen, gietwerck op 't leven afgegooten en veel rariteyten." Bob van den Boogert, ed., *Rembrandts schatkamer* (Zwolle, 1999), 43. For a transcription of the property, see Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 349–88, Doc. 1656/12. See also Jaap van der Veen, "Rembrandts boedelinventaris (1656)," in *Rembrandts Treasures*, ed. Bob van den Boogert (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Zwolle, 1999), 147–52.

29. *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis*, 1661 (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm).

30. *The Syndics*, 1662 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

31. *Portrait of Jacob Trip*, ca. 1660, and *Portrait of Margareta de Geer*, ca. 1660 (both National Gallery, London).

32. Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 524, Doc. 1663/4, 575, Doc. 1668/2, and 579–80, Doc. 1668/8.

33. For one of these self-portraits, see the entry of *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes* in this catalogue.

34. *Self-Portrait*, 1669 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence); Ernst van de Wetering et al. *A Corpus of Rembrandt*

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Paintings, vol. 4, *Self-Portraits,* Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project (Dordrecht, 2005), no. IV 28. G.J. Hoogewerff, *De twee reizen van Cosimo de Medici, prins van Toscane door de Nederlanden (1667–1669)* (Amsterdam, 1919), 66–67.

35. Jeroen Giltaij, *Ruffo & Rembrandt: Over een Siciliaanse verzamelaar in de zeventiende eeuw die drie schilderijen bij Rembrandt bestelde* (Zutphen, 1999).
36. Lauro Magnani, "1666: Een onbekende opdracht uit Genua voor Rembrandt," *Kroniek van het Rembrandthuis* (2007): 3–17.
37. Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 585, Doc. 1669/4, and 589, Doc. 1669/6.
38. Walter L. Strauss and Marjon van der Meulen, *The Rembrandt Documents* (New York, 1979), 586–89, Doc. 1669/5.
39. This passage by the German art lover Gabriël Bucelinus (1599–1681) is a translation of the Latin "nostre aetatis miruculum" in the original text. For the list, see R. Schillemans, "Gabriel Bucelinus and 'The names of the most distinguished European painters,'" *Hoogsteder-Naumann Mercury* 6 (1987): 25–37. Cf. Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work* (Berkeley, 2000), 268.
40. S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, *Dossier Rembrandt / The Rembrandt Papers* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Amsterdam, 1987), 86–88.
41. S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, *Dossier Rembrandt / The Rembrandt Papers* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Museum Het Rembrandthuis) (Amsterdam, 1987), 86–88.

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