

REMBRANDT'S PAINTINGS REVISITED

A COMPLETE SURVEY

Stichting Foundation
Rembrandt Research Project

A CORPUS OF
REMBRANDT
PAINTINGS

VI

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ERNST VAN DE WETERING
**REMBRANDT'S
PAINTINGS REVISITED**
A COMPLETE SURVEY

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Frontispiece:

Rembrandt, *Self-portrait with two circles*, c. 1665/1669,
canvas 114.3 x 94 cm.
London, Kenwood House



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A CORPUS OF REMBRANDT PAINTINGS VI

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Foreword

This is the last of a series of books titled *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* published in the context of the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP). In five earlier Volumes, which appeared in 1982, 1986, 1989, 2005 and 2010, large sections of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre were catalogued. The present volume gives a complete and where necessary revised overview of Rembrandt's entire painted oeuvre. The Rembrandt Research Project (RRP) was an endeavour first set up by a group of Dutch art historians in 1968 with the aim of systematically investigating the nature and extent of Rembrandt's known paintings. As the last member of that group still active, I am now bringing the project to its close with a volume, which contains all the paintings of which, I am convinced, Rembrandt was the author or co-author.

The plates of course constitute the most important part of the book. Thanks to modern printing techniques, they show the treasure-house of the images that determined the greater part of Rembrandt's life as an artist. In that section (pp. 70-477) each painting of Rembrandt's oeuvre is reproduced in the best available quality. Each image is accompanied by an elucidatory Note (see the Notes to the Plates pp. 480-687). These Notes vary markedly in their level of detail and extent of argumentation, mainly depending on the complexity of the problems of attribution in certain cases. The following categories of paintings required special attention in this regard:

1. *Paintings not previously dealt with in the earlier Volumes of the Corpus*

As owners and users of *A Corpus* will know, the first three consecutive Volumes were organized in a strictly chronological order (from 1624-1642). For various methodological reasons, this chronological approach was exchanged for a thematic approach after Vol. III. In Vol. IV, which appeared in 2005, all Rembrandt's self-portraits and studies in the mirror were dealt with by placing them in a wider context (including drawings and etchings with Rembrandt's effigy). The same approach was used in Vol. V for the so-called small-scale history paintings.

This change in the order of working and related methodology was necessary to gain a deeper insight into essential aspects of Rembrandt as an artist, which in turn enabled us to get to grips with the works from the puzzling decade of the 1640s and from Rembrandt's complex late period up to 1669. The approximately 100 possibly autograph paint-

ings that were not considered in Volumes I-V were almost all painted after 1642. These comprise portraits, group portraits and 'tronies'; large-scale history pieces; life-size biblical, mythological and allegorical figures; and landscapes. The most problematic paintings from the period after 1642 were investigated afresh in the course of my extensive travels between 2005 and 2012. On the basis of new insights, I became convinced that Gerson and Tümpel, in their surveys of Rembrandt paintings, and various museum curators, in the catalogues of their collections, had unjustifiably disattributed from Rembrandt 26 paintings from the period after 1642. These can be found in the section [191]-[324] of this book. The relevant Notes to the Plates are marked with an *.¹

2. *Reassessments of works that had been disattributed by the RRP in Vols. I-III*

A second reason for presenting a revised image of Rembrandt's complete painted oeuvre in the present Volume is that among the paintings strongly doubted or disattributed from Rembrandt in Volumes I-III of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* there are 44 works which, as a result of the insights I have arrived at in the meantime, and thanks to new information that has become available, need to be re-introduced into Rembrandt's oeuvre. The reattributed paintings of this category can be found in the section [1]-[190] in this book and are also marked with an *.² A number of these reattributions have already been announced in the *Corrigenda* sections of the Volumes IV and V, in Chapter II of *Corpus V* and elsewhere. However, in view of the relative inaccessibility of the *Corpus* volumes up till now, they are again included with the re-attributed paintings in this book.

3. *Re- or newly discovered paintings*

Another important reason for rounding off the *Corpus* in this Volume with a survey of Rembrandt's

1 List of reattributed paintings from after 1642 that were rejected by various authors: 189, 191a, 193, 195, 203, 206, 212, 216, 221, 230, 235a, 238, 251, 259, 263, 266, 271, 275, 276, 277, 280, 285, 288, 293, 309, 310.

2 List of reattributed paintings from before 1643. These paintings were either rejected or strongly doubted by the majority of members of the Rembrandt Research Project (the C and B numbers in *Corpus I-III*) and by other authors who in certain cases followed their opinions or v.v.: 1, 2, 3, 13, 17, 19, 32, 33, 35, 36, 42, 44, 45, 46, 61, 63a/b, 79, 81, 82, 85, 86, 87a/b, 109, 115, 118b, 126, 130A, 134, 141, 142, 146, 151, 152, 154, 156, 157, 170, 171, 172, 173, 180, 188.

entire painted oeuvre is that, since the discovery of the *Baptism of the eunuch* in 1973 [9], eight paintings that are now widely accepted as authentic have been discovered, or have re-surfaced, having been lost sight of for decades. These paintings need to be incorporated in the chronology of Rembrandt's oeuvre as well. They are marked with an ☆ in the Notes to the Plates.³

It may come as a surprise to the reader – if it does not sound altogether shocking – that 70 paintings which had been removed from Rembrandt's oeuvre or were strongly doubted should now be reinstated. Not that the negative judgments of the original Rembrandt Research Project – or for that matter those of other Rembrandt scholars of the previous generation such as Gerson and Tümpel – have all been universally accepted without reservations. However, the conspicuous disparity between the number of paintings accepted as Rembrandts in this book and the markedly smaller number accepted by specialists of that generation – and also by more recent scholars influenced by them – does call for some explanation.

It will be evident from Chapter I in this book, which is devoted to the history of attribution and rejection of paintings in the style of Rembrandt (pp. 1-53), and in the considerable number of Notes to the Plates marked with an asterisk, that the older generation of Rembrandt researchers – including the founding members of the Rembrandt Research Project – worked according to traditional connoisseurship, i.e. their judgments were largely based on intuitively applied criteria concerning style, brushwork and quality. They did, however, apply such criteria within more stringent – in fact overly strict – norms. In retrospect, it is surprising to note how shallow the underpinning of these frequently negative opinions was. In the present book, the arguments put forward by the various scholars for these disattributions are evaluated in a rigorous, often unsparing manner, and confronted with alternative facts and new insights.

I gradually came to realize that a subtler approach with a greater range of arguments of different kinds was called for. Arguments based on technical evidence as well as those of a more art-historical or art-theoretical nature, could lead to a greater degree of certainty than previously thought. Although not all of these arguments were *decisive* when taken alone, when considered together they frequently *converge* towards a more definitive conclusion (see on p. 65: the 'Bayesian approach'). This approach also embraces insights into Rembrandt's painting technique, the operation of his workshop and teaching practice, as well as the study of the possible functions of his paintings. Moreover, it was found rewarding to pay more attention to the fact

that paintings age in a variety of different ways (see, for instance, the Notes to [206] and Plates [275a/b]).

The Plates and Notes to the Plates

The paintings are presented in the Plates section in chronological order (pp. 70-477). For various – usually obvious – reasons it was decided sometimes to group them in small clusters (even when separated by a year or even two), in order to demonstrate more clearly the connection between certain works or certain trends and changes in the way Rembrandt seems to have been thinking and acting.

In the main, the Notes on re-attributed paintings are for obvious reasons quite extensive: after all, the purpose of these Notes is to justify the re-attribution. But I also wanted and indeed had to comment on the other paintings. The reader will find that these Notes vary quite radically in their structure, length and content. Their terse and often somewhat essayistic tone is due to the fact that as a rule no defence is offered for the inclusion of the painting concerned in Rembrandt's oeuvre, such as was provided in Volumes I-III for each so-called A-number. With works that are documented as autograph it was of course unnecessary, but along with those works there are many others which, although not explicitly documented as such, are so clearly authentic that their attribution may be accepted as self-evident. In the case of a great many paintings, therefore, I saw no reason to provide explicit arguments for their attribution, all the more so since that has already been done convincingly in many cases in the five volumes of *A Corpus*.

Nevertheless, in all cases I have included information in the Notes. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Notes to the Plates will find that they provide a kaleidoscopic image with a range of very different kinds of data, views, hypotheses and questions relating to Rembrandt's theory of art, painting technique and workshop practice. Sometimes it may be biographical matters, or questions relating to his family and friends; but iconographic, pictorial and aesthetic points of view are also raised. My occasional expressions of surprise or amazement will perhaps invite the reader to look at a painting with different eyes, in which case the analyses of pictorial characteristics of the works concerned that are frequently offered may be of assistance.

In short, there has been no effort to provide a sequence of 324 standard catalogue texts, except in the case of portraits, where as a rule brief attention is given to the identity and biography of the sitter, often on the basis of data taken from *Corpus* Volumes I-III.

A more detailed account of the order of presenting the Plates and associated Notes can be found on pp. 63-65.

³ List of paintings discovered or that have re-surfaced since 1976: 9, 18, 21, 22, 30, 69, 122, 182.

Pendants

Leafing through the Plates in this book the reader will notice that, in the case of those portraits painted by Rembrandt for which a pendant has survived, the relevant pairs are reproduced next to the other under a single number (a and b). This arrangement is maintained, even if one of the two paintings is painted, either wholly or in part, by a hand other than Rembrandt's. This solution was chosen in accordance with 17th century workshop practice. In the accompanying captions and Notes to the Plates the extent of Rembrandt's autograph contribution in the relevant pair is briefly indicated. In making these assessments connoisseurship inevitably played a role.

The chapters

It is clear from the above discussion that the present revision of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre is not the first. Do my efforts come any nearer to the truth? Or can one speak of a wave movement, whereby reduction and expansion of the oeuvre succeed one another like some natural process?

This history is outlined in Chapter I under the title *What is a Rembrandt? A personal account*. The narrative begins around 1870, the period in which art historians began to engage systematically with the problem of the nature and extent of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre. I shall draw frequently from Catherine Scallen's book *Rembrandt, Reputation, and the Practice of Connoisseurship* (2004) devoted to the first sixty years of this history. Attention will then shift to the following episode, when Horst Gerson became increasingly influential. The narrative spotlight will then turn to the 'pre-history' and history of the Rembrandt Research Project, which for many still remains opaque. I have given this part of the narrative a relatively personal touch because only in this way could it be made clear why the canon of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre presented here differs so markedly from those of my predecessors and older colleagues.

The second (small) chapter of this book 'What is a non-Rembrandt?' is devoted to an attempt to discern some structure in the large body of paintings from Rembrandt studio and beyond.

The scholarly apparatus

As indicated above, this book should not be considered as a conventional *catalogue raisonné* with a complete art-historical apparatus. The rationale behind this free approach is that volumes I-V of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* will be readily accessible online with comprehensive references and indices by the time that this volume appears (in Springerlink and The Rembrandt Database <http://www.rembrandt-database.org>). Moreover, many museums with Rem-

brandts in their collections have devoted extensive catalogue entries to the paintings concerned. The form adopted for this book is rather intended to convey to the reader the essence of my approach and the insights to which this has led during the latter phase of the Rembrandt Research Project.

I myself, of course, do not consider this book to be 'the definitive' catalogue of Rembrandt paintings. The diaspora that Rembrandt's oeuvre has undergone, and in the case of many paintings their relative inaccessibility for systematic investigation, plus the fact that the mystery of Rembrandt's creative mind will never be fully fathomed, mean that this work will never end, even though I believe that demonstrable advances over the past 20 years have been achieved.

To this it should be added that those who try to demarcate the limits of Rembrandt's autograph oeuvre should not be seen as *douaniers* – a kind of 'Rembrandt police' whose judgment is decisive in any way. Unfortunately, the money and prestige of owners play a role in the Rembrandt world; whereas actually everyone should be free to set his or her own label under a particular painting on the basis of their own admiration, love or knowledge of the painting concerned – or indeed to reject such a label. The only really significant reason for compiling critical oeuvre catalogues is that art-lovers and art-historians simply cannot do without surveys of the oeuvres of artists they admire or study that are as thoroughly grounded as possible.

Acknowledgements

The nature of this book, for which many paintings have been investigated *in situ* over the past years, has involved innumerable others, museum directors and collectors, curators and restorers, art dealers, researchers of various kinds, documentalists and many others, who have extended to us their courtesy, hospitality, assistance and expertise. There have been so many that it is impossible to thank them all individually, and we only hope that all those who recall our work contacts will recognize themselves as the recipients of our deep gratitude.

Many people were also involved in the financial support of our work. In lending their assistance they had in mind above all, and without exception, the scholarly significance of this book. Without their support it would not have been possible to undertake the necessary work trips, the research associated with them, or the translation and editing of the book. We want those who count themselves among this group of benefactors also to know that they have our most sincere and deep thanks for their generosity, in the knowledge that they have rendered an important service to art historical scholarship, the museum world and the wider public of art lovers and museum visitors.

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My deepest feelings of gratitude go to my partner in life, Carin van Nes, not an art historian herself but at home in the world of conservation and a gifted painter. In 1976 she helped me write my first article on Rembrandt's way of working and since then has been my muse in my work on Rembrandt.

We also organized and supervised together the content of the Amsterdam exhibition '*Rembrandt. All his paintings*' (December 2012-April 2014), with life-size reproductions of all the works included in this book.

During the work on this Volume Carin overcame countless obstacles to mastering the digital management of the project. Day in and day out she stood by and advised me, since at my age I am unfortunately incapable of entering the digital age. We have hugely enjoyed this exciting life with the works of Rembrandt, the development of ideas about it, and making new discoveries; and equally the joint work during lecture tours. Without her, this onerous but inspiring project could never have led to the publication of this book within four years.

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