

ART Facts™

FEB/MAR 2002

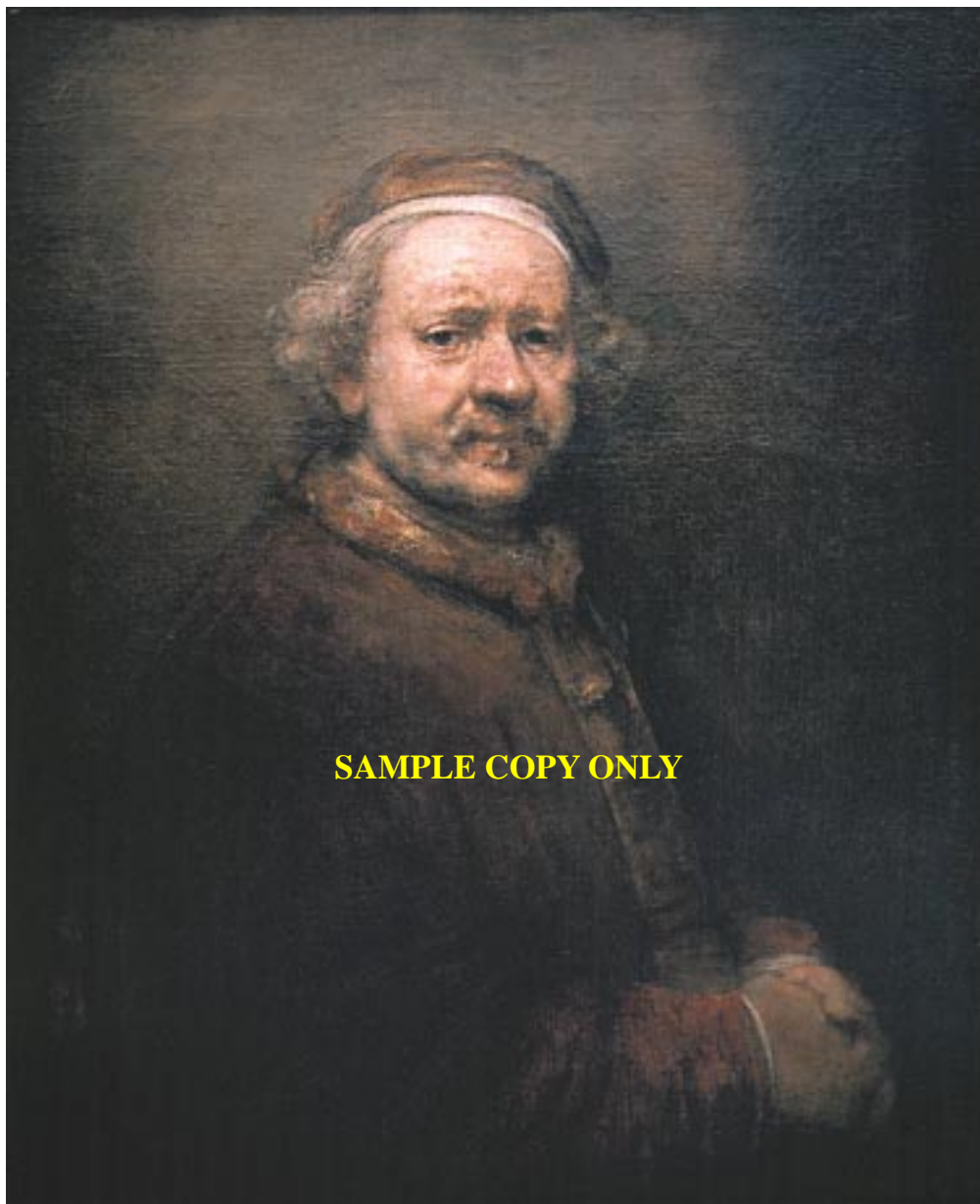
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Rembrandt

1606 - 1669



SAMPLE COPY ONLY

Rembrandt (rem-brant) Harmensz van Rijn (van ryne) was born in Leiden, Holland in 1606. He was the eighth of nine children. His father, Harmen, was a miller who produced malt, the main ingredient of beer. The family owned a large and busy windmill on the Rhine river for at least four generations. The last part of his name, van Rijn, probably referred to the Rhine river.

Because his family was well-off, young Rembrandt, unlike his brothers, was not expected to learn a common trade or follow in his father's footsteps and become a miller. His parents sent him to grammar school, hoping he would enter a profession or obtain an administrative job in local government.

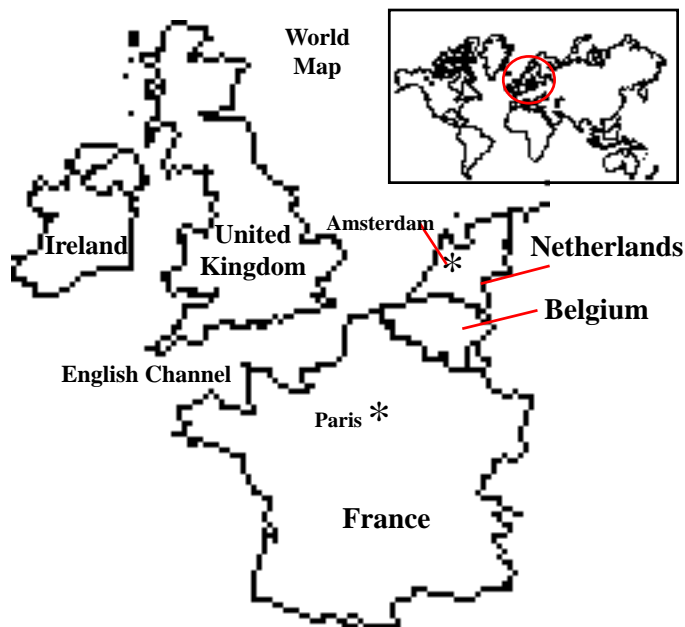
In 1620, when Rembrandt was only fourteen years old he attended the University of Leiden for a short time.

At age fifteen it became obvious that Rembrandt was very gifted at drawing. His father agreed with him that he

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669)
Self Portrait at Old Age, 1669. Oil on canvas. National Gallery, London, Great Britain © Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY

Where In Time ?

1600 - 1620	1620 - 1630	1630 - 1640	1640 - 1650	1650 - 1670
Rembrandt born 1606 Jamestown, VA 1607. Galileo telescope 1609. Dutch exploration Baroque Period 1600s	Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock 1620. 1626 New Amsterdam/New York City founded by Dutch.	East India Trading Co. trades with the Far East. Taj Mahal built 1635. Geometry used 1637.	Isaac Newton born 1642. Barometer 1643. Sun King, Louis XIV rules France 1643-1715.	Anglo-Dutch Wars 1652-1674. Europe's Great Plague 1665. Great Fire in London 1666. Rembrandt dies 1669



should give up his academic studies and be apprenticed to local painter Jacob van Swanenburgh.

Though not a master, Jacob was a good history painter who taught his pupil current techniques and subjects. This type of painting contained political, mythological and often religious subjects taken from the scriptures or the lives of saints. Rembrandt stayed in this workshop from 1621 to 1624, when he was considered mature enough to be instructed by master Pieter Lastman, also a history painter who had studied in Italy. After spending six months in his workshop in Amsterdam, Rembrandt returned to Leiden and set up a studio in his father's house. He became closely associated with another local painter, Jan Lievens, who was a year younger.

Not content with just painting, Rembrandt began work as an engraver and sold many prints of his **etchings** to the public. He thought this was a good way to become known. He is regarded as the greatest printmaker of the 17th century. Rembrandt often drew, painted, or engraved

subjects from episodes in the Bible but always marked them with his own experience and personality.

Other European countries at this time were ruled by kings or queens who, along with the Catholic Church, were the major patrons of the arts. A Protestant, democratic Holland saw the rise of merchants and businessmen who sought to be portrayed as hard-working, worthy citizens and members of charitable organizations. It was the first democracy of modern Europe and its Protestant beliefs discouraged religious art. The wealthy merchants and professionals of the new middle-class preferred portraits, landscapes or scenes from daily life. They were rich, open to ideas, and became the new patrons of the arts. The many individual and group portraits they commissioned provided work for many painters in Holland. This time in history is considered the Golden Age of Holland.

His painting, *Anna and Tobit*, done in 1626, is considered Rembrandt's first real masterpiece. This painting shows he had already mastered the difficult technique of painting **chiaroscuro** light and dark contrasts. Every detail of the painting is either highlighted or is casting a shadow, depending on its position in relation to two light sources, the window and the fire. Also, very detailed objects add to the realism of the setting. By 1628, at age twenty-two, Rembrandt had made a name for himself as a painter.

Photography was not yet known about so Rembrandt's painted **portraits** were in great demand. The height of fashion in 17th century Holland was a **realistic** portrait by Rembrandt. He was careful to adapt the style of the work to the status of the person commissioning the painting,

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) *Rembrandt (self-portrait) and Saskia in the parable of the Prodigal Son*. 1635-39. Oil on canvas, 131 x 161 cm. Gemaeldegalerie, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, © Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NYKunstsammlungen, Dresden, © Erich Lessing/ Art Resource, NY

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Rembrandt van Rijn (1609-1669). *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*. Oil on canvas, 170x217 cm. 1632. © Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY Mauritshuis, The Hague, The Netherlands

Leiden and enter a wider market in Amsterdam. In 1631 he went to live with art dealer Hendrick van Uykenburgh. Rembrandt got to know the art dealer's niece, Saskia, who was the daughter of a wealthy magistrate. When they married in 1634 they continued to live in the art dealer's house, where Rembrandt and his pupils had already set up a workshop. In 1635, Rembrandt and Saskia moved to a new house. At the same time he also had to find a new workshop for his flourishing business. He located an old warehouse which he remodeled to meet his own needs and those of his pupils, who would live and work on the premises. Meanwhile, Rembrandt was enjoying a lavish lifestyle. His collection of rich fabrics, jewels, weapons, paintings, sculptures, engravings and antiques prompted Saskia's family to accuse him of squandering her inheritance. He used them for props in his paintings, so his opinion was that these items were needed for his professional work. In 1639 the couple moved to a much finer house. Two years later Saskia had a son, Titus, and the following year she died.

He hoped the 1632 commission, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp*, would establish his reputation as an artist. In it, people have gathered for a lecture by Dr. Tulp, a celebrated surgeon and magistrate. Earlier artists began the practice of setting a **group portrait** in an anatomy theater, which was a specially designed room where students and other spectators could observe a human corpse being dissected. The onlookers here are government officials who are attending an exhibition given by a distinguished scientist, just as they might go to an important theater performance, in order to see and be seen. Notice how Dr. Tulp's hand draws the onlookers' attention to what he is doing.

Night Watch, painted in 1642 and originally titled *The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq*, is a group portrait of a militia company leaving for a battle exercise. It was commissioned for the headquarters of the municipal guard. Instead of a posed portrait, Rembrandt wanted to create a natural, animated scene using light, color and depth. The scene is filled with physical action and entertainment, yet the groups of figures seem to be frozen in time, which allows the viewer to study their actions. The painting appeared to be a night scene but when the darkened varnish that coated it was cleaned off in 1946, it showed the scene to be taking place in the morning. It has become one of the most famous paintings in the world.

Landscapes were greatly prized and hung in prominent locations in the homes of middle-class Dutch families.

Rembrandt painted few, but *The Mill*, in 1650, was his largest and most successful landscape. It was a personal work inspired by long walks in the country to find peace in his time of sadness after Saskia's death.

Why do you think Rembrandt painted so many self portraits? Describe the progression of changes in the way he painted as he grew older.

How does Rembrandt emphasize areas in his paintings he thinks are important? What happens to less important areas?

Rembrandt's critics say the darker side of his portraits suggests the inner self of the subject to us while the lighter side suggests how the person wants to appear to the public. Choose a Rembrandt portrait and describe what you think the person in the portrait is like.

Describe how *Night Watch* differs from other group portraits.

Between 1643 and his death in 1669, Rembrandt's facial portraits developed a deeper, quieter style. His complex Biblical scenes were simplified. His art turned psychological, with solitary figures and themes of loneliness. Reds and browns dominated his

whether they were merchants, clergymen or tradesmen. His portraits from 1622 to 1642 were done in a highly detailed technique. His dramatic light and dark contrasts often left half the subject's face in shadow.

Rembrandt appears in costume in many **self portraits**. He and other family members appear in his paintings of mythological subjects, perhaps to avoid paying for models. Rembrandt felt if he painted himself he wouldn't have to account to anyone for what he painted. He said he could show his true spirit only through painting. Rembrandt painted his self portrait throughout his career.

Rembrandt decided to leave

paintings, while subtle shades of light and dark conveyed mood and emotion.

About ten years after Saskia's death Rembrandt began a relationship with country girl Hendrickje Stoffels, who had been hired to take care of Titus. Together they indulged in extravagant tastes and ran up huge debts. A daughter, Cornelia, was born to them in 1654. He did not marry Hendrickje because he would lose his inheritance from Saskia's will.

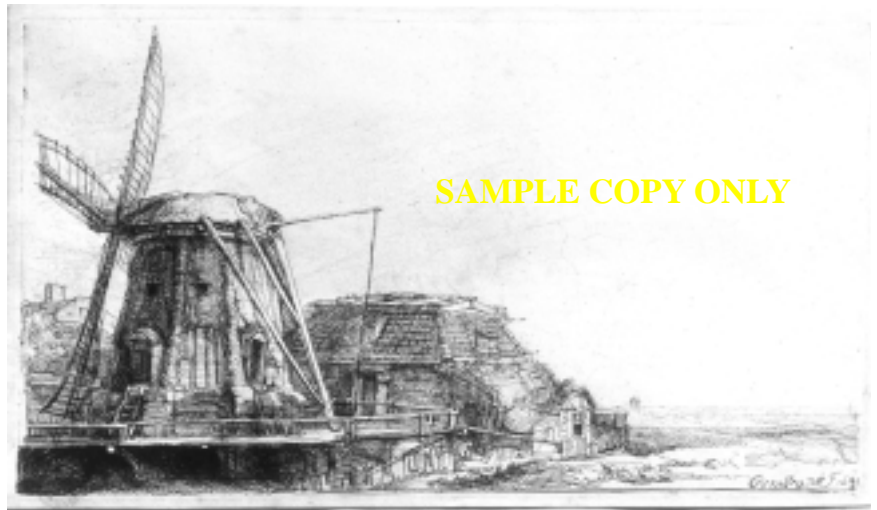
Rembrandt was not selling many paintings and his debts were growing. His financial situation was aggravated by the Anglo-Dutch war and bankruptcy could not be avoided. Rembrandt's possessions were auctioned. He signed a contract with Titus and Hendrickje which gave them the exclusive right to market all works produced by him until seven years after his death. In exchange, they gave him free board and lodging. This allowed Rembrandt to get on with his work in peace.

In 1663 Hendrickje was one of 1700 people who died from a terrible plague that broke out in Amsterdam. Her will left everything to her daughter, named Rembrandt her guardian and, granted him the use of her estate for his lifetime.

The Syndics of the Clothmakers' Guild, 1662, is thought to be his greatest portrait. These portraits were usually displayed in the guilds' chambers and served as records of membership. Guild members were professional people and owners of craft workshops and trading companies who had exclusive control of goods made and sold by various occupations.

Rembrandt was asked to paint *The Jewish Bride* in 1665. In portrait painting it was not uncommon to cast the sitter as a character from history or the Bible. Looking closely shows he did not paint in his usual photographic-like detail but instead used only a few brush strokes to suggest shiny satin, soft velvet, delicate laces, and fluffy feathers. He was constantly experimenting with texture in his later paintings, as he sought to suggest it rather than represent it realistically. This portrait and later paintings tended to be loaded with thick slabs and clots of paint worked over the surface with a palette knife. Some customers refused the painted commissions and few peers appreciated them.

Rembrandt died alone in 1669. After his death he was even forgotten by the critics. Today, Rembrandt is his country's most admired and celebrated artist and is referred to as the greatest Dutch painter of his era.



Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) *The Mill*, 1641 © Giraudon/ Art Resource, NY Musee du Petit Palais, Paris, France

BOOKS ABOUT REMBRANDT

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REMBRANDT WEBSITES

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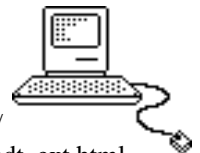
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www.aa.psu.edu/courses/ART122W/REMBRANDT.HTML

www.edgate.com/summergames/inactive/parade_of_nations/



MUSEUMS



Where YOU can find Rembrandt's art:

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

Fine Arts Museum of Boston

National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Toledo Museum of Art

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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