

Rembrandt Hermanszoon Van Rijn

(Rhem-brant Herman-zon van Rhine)

Dutch “Golden Age” Artist

Baroque Period

B: 15 July, 1606, Leiden, Holland, Netherlands

D: 4 October, 1669, Amsterdam, Holland, Netherlands



Rembrandt was one of the youngest of nine children. His father, Herman, was a miller (someone who grinds things for a living) and his mother, Neeltje, was a baker’s daughter. The family were well-off enough they could afford to send their children to school.

As a child, Rembrandt and his family attended Pieterskerk (St. Peter’s Church), the same church the English Pilgrim Separatists worshipped in while they stayed in Leiden. Rembrandt’s family probably knew several Englishmen who later settled Plymouth Rock in 1620.

Rembrandt

Rembrandt learned drawing as part of his classical education in Leiden’s Latin school, where all classes and tests were in Latin! After four years there, Rembrandt enrolled in University at Leiden at the age of 14, but chose to apprentice to a painter instead, then opened a studio, quickly becoming popular.¹

After a few years, Rembrandt had an opportunity to work at the Dutch court in the Hague, (which didn’t work out well) and a year after that, he moved to Amsterdam, the largest city in the Netherlands. Initially, he stayed with Heinrich van Ulyenbrugh, his new art dealer, while he looked for lodgings and studio space. Heinrich’s cousin, Saskia, came to visit, and she and Rembrandt fell in love and married. Rembrandt then bought the large house next door to Heinrich, which is a museum dedicated to Rembrandt today.

Rembrandt and Saskia had a son named Titus, who would become a painter and art dealer. As an art dealer, he managed his father’s sales and bills, which worked well, because Rembrandt was notoriously hopeless at accounting. (His spending habits forced him into bankruptcy at one point.)

After Saskia died, Rembrandt had a common-law marriage with Heindrike Stoffels, the daughter of a soldier. They had a daughter, Cornelia. Cornelia eventually married another painter, Cornelis Suythof, and moved to the Dutch Colony of Batavia (Modern-day Jakarta, Indonesia).

Rembrandt’s paintings are noted for their intense bright highlights and dark shadowy backgrounds, as well as the vivid expressions on people’s faces, showing their cares, joys, woes, or cruelty. When he painted historical or Biblical scenes, he loved to hide himself somewhere in the background. His works were known, then and now, as some of the best works in the Netherlands, and some of the best Baroque period paintings in the world.

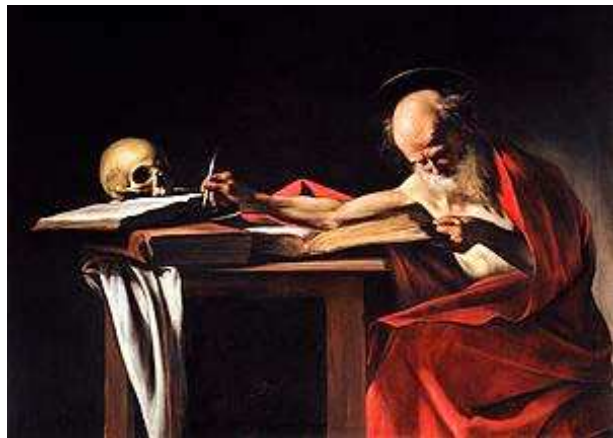
¹ You can still visit Rembrandt’s childhood home, church, school, and his first studio in Leiden.

VOCABULARY

CHIAROSCURO: (*Key-a-row-scoo-row*) and **TENEBRISM** (*Ten-ey-bris-em*)

From the Italian Chiaro (“light”) and scuro (“dark”). From the Italian Tenebroso (“dark, gloomy, mysterious)

In visual art, Chiaroscuro is the strong contrast between light and dark areas on a subject, which often creates a three-dimensional look in the piece. DaVinci and other Renaissance artists were known for their use of bright highlights and strong shadows molded around their subjects, giving them a rounded, three-dimensional look, including their backgrounds. Baroque artists, like Rembrandt, took Chiaroscuro to a new level, frequently darkening everything BUT their subjects, creating a “spotlight” effect. The spotlight effect is also called “tenebrism” (Ten-ey-bris-em)



To the left, Da Vinci carefully layered thin layers of paints (called “glazes”) to create the gently curving forms of his subjects in his 1510 painting, “The Virgin and Child with St. Anne,” now in the Louvre Museum in Paris. This form of Chiaroscuro used light and shadow nearly equally, creating a balanced scene. Above, Baroque artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (AKA: Caravaggio) pioneered the extreme Chiaroscuro effects of dramatically “spotlighting” the main focus of the work and darkening the background to near obscurity, as seen in this 1605 painting, “St. Jerome in His Study,” in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. As you look at Rembrandt’s works, do you see more of the brightly-lit Leonardo or the dramatically-lit Caravaggio style?

REMBRANDT LIGHTING:

In portraits, this is a lighting effect where a strong light comes in from one side of the face (often the right side of the face, the left side from the viewer’s perspective), while a weaker light, or reflection of the initial light, softly lights up the other side. The characteristic “triangle of light” along the cheekbone ridge on the weakly-lit side of the subject is the main characteristic of “Rembrandt lighting.”

To the right is a detail from Rembrandt’s 1658 self-portrait, shortly after his bankruptcy. His painting style is becoming looser, with coarser brushstrokes, but the “Rembrandt lighting” is still in full effect—notice the brightly-lit triangle along the right-hand cheekbone under his eye. Look at Rembrandt’s portraits and other portraits, painted and photographed. Do you see this style of lighting?



PORTRAIT

“Pour-trayt”

Entering the English Language as an art term in the 1560s, *“Portrait”* comes from the Old French *“Portret”* which itself comes from the Latin, *“Portraire”*, which could mean both *“to paint”* and *“to depict”* (the English word *“Portray”* also comes from this word).

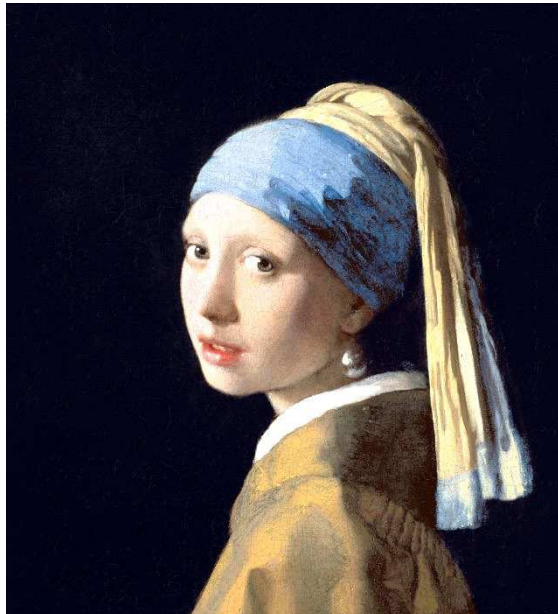
A portrait showed a particular person’s face, and a painter’s skill was often judged based on how closely a portrait matched the client’s looks and expression.

Portraits were, and still are, mostly hired work: the painter creates a portrait only after he or she has been approached to do so by a client who wants the finished work, and the work is created in a style which will please the client.

A self-portrait is when a painter paints him or herself. Most artists created at least one self-portrait in their careers. Rembrandt created so many self-portraits (over 70!), we know what he looked like from his first professional year to the last year of his life.



SELF PORTRAIT WITH HAT" 1632
Oil on Oak Panel; 21.8 cm x 16.3 cm (8.5 in x 6.4 in)
Private Collection



GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING
JOHANNES VERMEER (1632 - 1675)
OIL ON CANVAS; 44.5 CM X 39CM (17.5 IN X 15.3 IN)
Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands

TRONIE [Portrait]

“Tron-ee”

“Tronie” is a Dutch word meaning *“face”* or *“head.”*

Unlike most portraits, a Tronie work is of a model who the artist chose because they liked their face or expressions, or wanted to try something new in style or composition without upsetting a client. Rembrandt created many tronie paintings of himself, trying out different expressions. Sometimes, a painting is classified as a *“Tronie”* when the model is not known.

One of the most well-known Tronie paintings in the world was created by a contemporary of Rembrandt: Johannes Vermeer. We don’t know what Vermeer intended to call this work, but today, it’s known as *“Girl with a Pearl Earring”*.

Rembrandt Quotes:

“Practice what you know, and it will help to make clear what ...you do not know.”

“Life etches itself onto our faces as we grow older, showing our violence, excesses or kindnesses.”



This etching is called "Self-Portrait in a Cap, Wide-eyed and Open Mouthed." Created in 1630, this is Rembrandt just before he left his first hometown of Leiden to move to the fashionable capital of Amsterdam. The print itself is tiny; the small image on the lower right is about the correct size: two inches high by 1- ¾ inches wide. Because it is a print, there are several in existence around the world (think of this etching as Rembrandt's early business card.) What do you think? Is this a Tronie or a standard portrait?

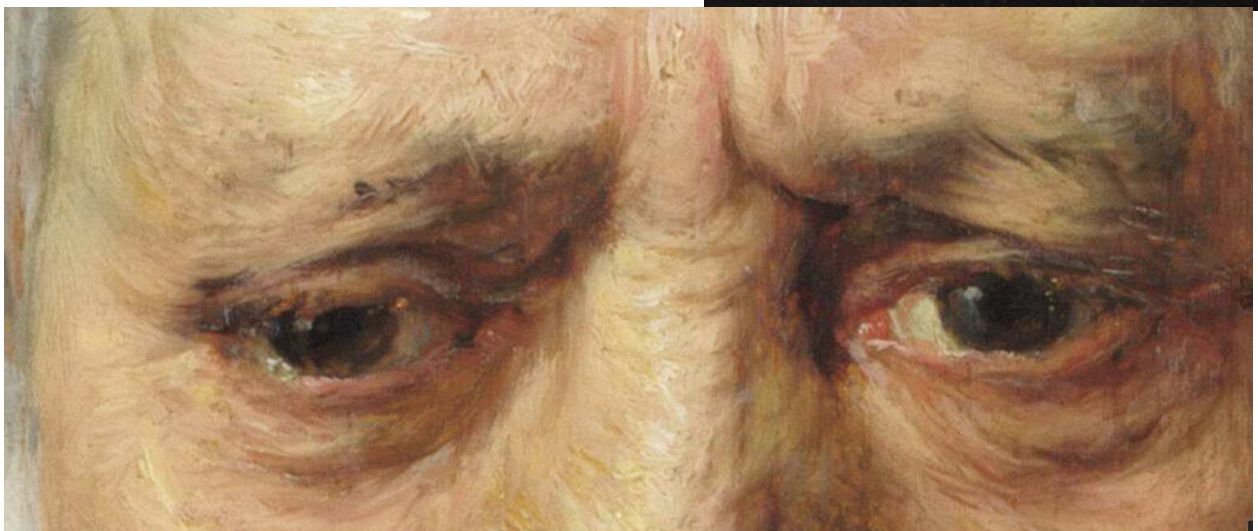
PORTRAIT OF AN 83-YEAR OLD WOMAN, (PROBABLY AECHEJE CLAESDR. [1551 – CA. 1635])



**REMBRANDT VAN RIJN
OIL ON PANEL; 1634;
71.1 x 55.9 CM (27.9 x 22 IN);
NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON,
ENGLAND**

This family must have liked Rembrandt's work. Not only this matriarch, but her son and his wife commissioned portraits from Rembrandt in the same year. The oval shape was a fashionable style during this time.

The wrinkles of the face were created by loose brushstrokes that followed the lines on Claesdr.'s face, while Rembrandt used tiny strokes of bright white to accent the ruff around her neck. (See detail insets.)





PENDANT PAINTINGS OF A MAN (PROBABLY CORNELIUS VAN BERESTEYN [1586 – 1638]) AND A WOMAN, (PROBABLY CORVINA (VAN HOFDYCK) VAN BERESTEYN [1602 – 1667]);

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN
 OIL ON CANVAS, 1632;
 111.8 CM X 88.9 CM (44 IN X 35 IN);
 THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK CITY, USA

Pendant paintings are paintings commissioned, painted, and hung in pairs. Siblings, parent-and-child, and wedding portraits were a common style of pendant paintings, and this set was most likely a wedding set. Over time, most pendants were separated, but this pair remained together, and now are in the Metropolitan Museum in New York City.

These were commissioned during Rembrandt’s very short time in The Hague in 1631-32, between his time in Leiden and Amsterdam. Rembrandt had been brought there to do some court paintings, and several prominent people also requested portraits at this time, the prosperous Van Berestejns among them.

These portraits were joining several other portraits of Van Berestejn relatives already at the house, and Rembrandt appears to have painted this pair to compliment the style of Cornelius’s parents wedding pendants painted 40 years earlier. (see Portraits on the right-this pair has been separated from each other, and the whereabouts of the wife’s portrait is currently unknown)

Rembrandt had no assistants or students while at The Hauge, so this Pendant Pair are 100% his work.



3 Jacob Willemz Delff, Portrait of Paulus Cornelisz van Berestejn, 1592, oil on wood, 115 x 83.5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum



4 Jacob Willemz Delff, Portrait of Volkens Claesdr Koofter, 1592, oil on wood, ca. 115 x 83.5 cm, location unknown



REMBRANDT LAUGHING

Oil on Copper, 1628

22.2 cm x 17.1 cm (8.75 x 6.75 in) (size of an iPad or Tablet)

Getty Museum, Los Angeles USA

This portrait is the earliest one in this packet: Rembrandt is still living in his birth-town of Leiden, and is a new professional artist, only about 20 years old. Rembrandt loved to practice with expressions, seeing how the face expressed different moods. However, since most of his clients wanted serious, sober portraits, Rembrandt couldn't practice on them and risk losing the commission...so he practiced on himself! Over 70 self-portraits of Rembrandt survive. Is this a tronie or a standard portrait? What do you think?



OLD MAN WITH GOLD CHAIN

Oil on Canvas, 1630

83.1 cm x 75.7 cm (32.7in x 29.8in)

Art Institute of Chicago

Rembrandt painted this model several times early in his career. Some historians believe this person is Rembrandt's father, but there is no paperwork to prove or disprove that idea. Rembrandt's signature is in the lower left-hand corner, and reads "RL," meaning "Rembrandt of Leiden." He wouldn't adopt "van Rijn" until later in his career. Some of the paint strokes Rembrandt used are so thick, they actually stick up from the canvas.

Take Home Ideas:

Look at Rembrandt's paintings online in an online gallery like;

- Rembrandtonline.org
- Rembrandtpainting.net

Be aware, Rembrandt occasionally painted nudes, for example “Danae,” “Bathsheba in her Bath,” and “Susanna and the Elders.” If you are concerned, be sure to pre-screen anything. (A few of his etchings are adult-only. Be careful and pre-screen those.)

Video:

The Rijksmuseum, the home of “The Night Watch”, organized a really clever flash mob to celebrate one of Rembrandt’s most-famous paintings. Google “**Night Watch Flash Mob**” to find the video on youtube or other video platforms. Ask your child to look at the painting (Easily available online and most books on Rembrandt) and this video and see what story the museum created, and whether you see the same people in the real painting. Ask what sort of story might the painting be telling?

The YouTube channel “**Art with Mati and Dada**” has a wonderful Rembrandt episode focusing on his self-portraits in particular. On YouTube, search “**Art with Mati and Dada Rembrandt.**”

Articles and Websites:

“**Hand Me Down: African Women in Their Grandmother’s Clothes**” The Guardian, dated 3 May 2016 (Google title)

This article features a gallery of photographs by African photographer Joana Choumali. In many interviews, she cited Rembrandt’s use of light and shadow as one of the inspirations for this work. What do you think?

“**Dutch Art Dealer Says He’s Discovered a New Rembrandt**” Smithsonian Magazine Online, by Bridgit Katz, dated May 17, 2018 (Google Title)

The man in this article is a descendant of a different Jan Six, who was one of Rembrandt’s greatest patrons and supporters. As a Rembrandt scholar, he discovered a Baroque-era painting might actually be a previously-unknown Rembrandt portrait. .

Books:

Getting to Know the World’s Greatest Artists: Rembrandt by Mike Venezia

This book is a great combination of cartoons by Venezia and reproductions of Rembrandt’s actual work to tell the story of his life. My only complaint is he includes the “Night Watch Ruined Rembrandt’s Career” legend, which isn’t true. There’s no contemporary evidence for that legend, but otherwise, the book is a great intro to Rembrandt.

