Rembrandt draughtsman

Jacques Roland

June 2025

The text corresponding to « *Rembrandt draughtsman* » can be downloaded from the website: **rembrandt.ovh**.

Rembrandt draughtsman

Jacques Roland

Text corresponding to the course/lecture: « Rembrandt dessinateur ». This lecture was given for the first time on 11 April 2019 at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière (Paris) for the drawing course of Laurent Cattanéo.

Please visit the website **rembrandt.ovh** for more details, reproductions, high resolution images and references.

Table of Contents

Introduction

From Rembrandt's drawings and etchings, we aim to shed light on his method of study and work, hoping that it will inspire those studying and practicing drawing, etching, and any other form of artistic creation.

In his documentary *Le mystère Picasso* (1955), Henri-Georges Clouzot attempts to uncover the creative process by filming Pablo Picasso as he draws and paints. He seeks to answer the following question: what happens in a creator's brain when they are working?

There are enough drawings and etchings by Rembrandt for us to grasp his personality, his study method, and his way of approaching a subject. Rembrandt had a very precise working method. Gifted with extraordinary imagination and memory, he could explore a theme for several years without ever showing the slightest weariness. His sense of humor, capacity for self-mockery, and provocative spirit were integral parts of his personality. A tireless worker but above all a researcher, he knew how to make use of these qualities to survive the material hardship he found himself in, the jealousy of his fellow painters in Amsterdam, and the malice of many of his fellow citizens after his bankruptcy and the sale of his house and press in 1658. For more than ten years, until his death in 1669, he tirelessly pursued his research in painting.

Rembrandt was, above all, a free man, and we will demonstrate how this freedom is reflected in his lines and in the way he constructed his studies. A tireless researcher, he constantly evolved his techniques of drawing, engraving, and painting, paying particular attention to the perception and representation of volume. All his research had a single purpose: to convey and express the emotions of the characters, animals, scenes, or landscapes he depicted. We aim to study how this effort to transmit emotions is manifested in the construction of his work. Rembrandt’s strong personality permeates each of his creations, and a careful observation of them allows one to discover and better understand it.

Finally, it should be noted that Rembrandt’s works possess a universal and timeless quality, giving them a modernity that transcends eras.

Jacques Roland

jacques.roland.7@gmail.com

The gum bichromate technique

The gum bichromate technique was invented with the aim of reproducing artworks without the need for engraving. Indeed, until the mid-19th century, engraving was the only available reproduction technique. Around 1850, the discovery of photosensitive reproduction processes, including the gum bichromate technique, marked a major turning point. At the same time, in the field of printing, the invention of the Linotype by Ottmar Mergenthaler and the Monotype by Tolbert Lanston, around 1880, revolutionized reproduction techniques. These innovations aimed to simplify the process while allowing the production of a large number of prints.

In 1832, Gustav Suckow discovered the light sensitivity of chromates. In 1839, Mungo Ponton observed that paper soaked in a potassium bichromate solution became sensitive to light. In 1840, Edmond Becquerel noted that this sensitivity could be increased by coating the paper with starch or gelatin. Then, in 1852, William Henry Fox Talbot demonstrated that colloids, such as gelatin or gum arabic, became insoluble after being mixed with potassium bichromate and exposed to light. In 1855, Alphonse Louis Poitevin filed a patent for the carbon printing process, which involved adding carbon to the colloid and potassium bichromate mixture. Three years later, in 1858, John Pouncy used colored pigments in the mixture of gum arabic and potassium bichromate, thus defining the gum bichromate technique and producing the first color prints. The great photographer who popularized the gum bichromate technique at the beginning of the 20th century was Robert Demachy.

Watercolor or gouache are primarily composed of a binder, gum arabic, which is a sap from the acacia tree, and pigments that define the color. Gum arabic is a water-soluble glue, known as reversible because, after drying, it can be dissolved in water again. Paints that use gum arabic as a binder are therefore reversible: even once painted and dried, they can be washed since gum arabic dissolves again in water. If potassium bichromate is added to the mixture of water + gum arabic + pigment, a photosensitive paint is obtained which, after exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays, becomes insoluble. To create a gum bichromate print, a layer of this photosensitive mixture is applied to watercolor paper. Once this layer is dry, it is covered with a negative and then exposed to UV radiation. After exposure, the paper is immersed in water: the parts of the photosensitive layer that were exposed to UV adhere to the paper, while the others dissolve in the water. This technique makes it possible to reproduce a photograph, a drawing, an engraving, or even a flower. It is also possible to superimpose several prints in different colors. Thus, gum bichromate is a hybrid technique, at the crossroads of engraving, printing, painting, and photography.

Simple to implement, it allows for very beautiful results.

This technique is particularly well suited to the reproduction of Rembrandt's drawings and engravings. It does not merely produce a simple copy but allows for stable prints, often more aesthetically pleasing than photographs. It thus offers the opportunity to explore and highlight the fascinating world of Rembrandt's drawings while enabling the study of their connections with his etchings. However, it is an artisanal process that is time-consuming to implement and does not allow for the production of a large number of prints.

Omval

Omval (1641), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}, depicts a village located on the outskirts of Amsterdam, along the Amstel River. This etching is an iconic work by Rembrandt, in which he captures life on the river: a pedestrian interacts with the occupants of a passing boat, while, almost imperceptibly, lovers hide in the foliage behind a tree. The lovers symbolize freedom from religious conventions, serving as a subtle defiance by Rembrandt against the

religious authorities who had condemned his lifestyle as immoral. This etching breathes life, far from giving the impression of a static image. For Rembrandt, the village of Omval, though the subject of the etching, becomes secondary to the vibrancy of the riverbank and the flowing water. Notably, in the upper right corner of the etching, small strokes made by Rembrandt can be seen, used to test the point that allowed him to work through the varnish layer. True to his free spirit and indifferent to public opinion, Rembrandt is one of the very few etchers to leave his trials or even his mistakes visible on the plate.

The Run Mill at Omval

The Run Mill at Omval (ca. 1688-90), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}, is an etching made by Jan Vincentsz van der Vinne, after Laurens Vincentsz van der Vinne. This etching, produced about fifty years after Rembrandt's, also depicts life on the river at Omval. From a technical perspective, it is a very beautiful etching. However, it clearly illustrates the difference in subject treatment between Rembrandt and his contemporaries, highlighting the unique freedom and expressiveness that Rembrandt brought to his drawings and etchings.

Rembrandt (1606 - 1669)

Rembrandt possessed a strong and independent personality, refusing to be influenced by conventions, trends, or public opinion. His sole concern was to depict life as it truly was, guided by an exceptional inspiration and vision. This approach puzzled many of his contemporaries, as well as prominent collectors. For instance, his famous painting *The Night Watch* (1642) was admired but left many perplexed. Similarly, his painting *The Conspiracy of the Batavians under Claudius Civilis* (1661), commissioned by the Amsterdam City Hall, was ultimately rejected. Some of his engravings, deemed immoral or vulgar, were never acquired by major collectors. Rembrandt was also criticized for his lifestyle, which was considered immoral by religious authorities and many of his contemporaries. Even at the height of his fame, he was never invited to Muiden Castle, where influential circles of Amsterdam's artistic life gathered.

His love life was far from smooth. In 1634, Rembrandt married Saskia van Uylenburg, his great love. Unfortunately, their first three children did not survive, and only the fourth, Titus, reached adulthood. Saskia passed away in 1642, leaving Rembrandt deeply affected. Afterward, he became involved with Geertje Dircx, but this tumultuous relationship ended in a particularly dramatic way when Rembrandt began a new relationship with Hendrickje Stoffels. From this union, a daughter named Cornelia was born. Tragedy continued to strike Rembrandt: Hendrickje likely died of the plague in 1663, and Titus succumbed to the same disease in 1668, just one year before the artist's own death.

Rembrandt's works often contain hidden, subtle, and profound messages. For example, in the painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1668–1669), Rembrandt intended to depict the prodigal son being welcomed by both his father and mother. However, in the painting, only the father is visible receiving his son. To suggest the maternal presence, he painted the father with two different hands: one is a man's hand, robust and broad, while the other is a woman's hand, more slender and delicate. This detail is so subtly integrated that it almost goes unnoticed at first glance. In another painting, *Landscape with a Stone Bridge* (circa 1638), light breaks through a dark and turbulent sky to illuminate the canal, the bridge, and the farmhouse — places of life — while the church remains in shadow, receiving no light at all. This striking contrast seems to suggest that life is found more in everyday experiences than in religion.

In addition to being a painter, Rembrandt was also an art dealer and a great collector of artworks, various objects, and clothes that he used as models for his paintings. He was in constant conflict with art dealers, demanding that

his works be paid at their fair price. The dealers took their revenge as soon as they had the opportunity, agreeing during the sale that followed his bankruptcy to sell his works at ridiculously low prices, leading to a colossal financial collapse. At the height of his fame, Rembrandt earned a lot of money but spent it just as easily. Several factors, including a risky financial investment, prevented him from repaying the loan he had taken out to buy his house. After his bankruptcy and the sale of all his possessions (1656–1658), Rembrandt continued to paint and produced some of his finest canvases. Although he received a few commissions, he died in poverty. After his death, there was not enough money left to pay for a grave.

Self-portrait : Drawing 1628-29

Self-Portrait (c. 1628–29, Benesch, B 54, c. 1629, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 628), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}, is a drawing made with brush and pen during the Leiden period. It is one of the earliest preserved self-portraits by Rembrandt. The artist created numerous self-portraits, not only in drawing but also in etching and painting. These works allowed him, from the very beginning, to perfect his etching technique and study facial expressions to convey different emotions, such as fear and astonishment. Later, his self-

portraits also became a way to track the evolution of his face throughout his life. His last painting is a self-portrait. The main characteristic of his self-portraits lies in the emotion and humanism they convey. In his works, he frequently portrayed himself. When he became famous, many people wanted to acquire a portrait of Rembrandt, which motivated him to produce even more self-portraits.

Self-portrait : Etching (1629)

Self-Portrait (c. 1629), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}, is an etching made after the drawing *Self-Portrait* of 1628–1629. It is one of Rembrandt's earliest etchings, as he began etching around 1625–1626. To preserve the flexibility and spontaneity of the line, Rembrandt drew directly onto the metal plate, as he would on a sheet of paper, resulting in a reversed print. The engraving technique that maintains this flexibility and spontaneity is etching. In this technique, the copper plate is first coated with a varnish. Rembrandt then draws on it with a fine point, removing the varnish. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath (known as *aqua fortis* in the 17th century), which bites into the copper where the varnish has been removed. It is interesting to compare this etching

with *Self-Portrait with Arm Resting on a Stone Ledge*, made ten years later. When drawing or painting a self-portrait, Rembrandt looked at himself in a mirror, causing the image to be reversed. However, when etching a self-portrait based on one of his drawings, he would reproduce the drawing onto the metal plate, and the final print would be reversed compared to the original drawing. As a result, the final print becomes a non-reversed representation of Rembrandt, as he would have appeared in reality. Rembrandt's most beautiful self-portrait is probably the 1639 etching, which could be considered a true "photograph" of the artist at that moment in his life.

Self-portrait : Etching (1639)

Self-Portrait with Arm Resting on a Stone Ledge (1639), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}, is an etching to be compared with the *Self-Portrait* of 1629. At this time, Rembrandt reached the peak of his etching artistry, creating one of his

most beautiful self-portraits. However, on the right side of the etching, he left a rough sketch and additional pencil strokes (the stones of the wall). These elements suggest that this print is probably one of the first, and that Rembrandt questioned whether he would continue working on the plate. Ultimately, he deemed the etching complete and left it as it was. What seems to interest him most is the portrayal of his facial expression and the luxury of his clothing. The sketched lines also indicate a certain nonchalance towards artistic conventions and a sense of detachment from the image he projects. Rembrandt appears to mock the idea of formal perfection, favoring a more spontaneous and personal representation. The sale of prints from his etchings provided a regular and significant source of income for the artist. This etching would later be followed by the painting *Self-Portrait at the Age of 34*.

Negative of the self-portrait (1639)

Above, one can see the transparent used in the gum bichromate technique

to reproduce the etchving *Self-Portrait with Arm Resting on a Stone Ledge* (1639). The transparent is placed on the sheet painted with the photosensitive watercolor, and the whole setup is then exposed to UV radiation. This radiation passes through the transparent in the white areas, which are clear. After exposure, the sheet is immersed in water. The parts of the photosensitive layer that were exposed to UV adhere to the paper, while the others dissolve in the water. In this way, the reproduction of Rembrandt's etching is obtained. The exposure time to UV radiation depends on the color of the watercolor used. In the gum bichromate technique, the transparent plays a similar role to that of the metal plate in etching, serving as a support for reproduction.

The drawings

We will focus on Rembrandt's drawings as well as his etchings, which are inseparable from his drawings. These two mediums were Rembrandt's preferred means of carrying out his experiments on how to depict life as he observed it around him. Rembrandt was one of the greatest draftsmen and etchers of all time. Alongside Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849) and Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), he was one of the artists who best expressed the feelings of the human beings and animals he drew, as well as the atmosphere of the scenes or landscapes he wished to represent.

The main characteristic of Rembrandt's drawings is the freedom of line and the sometimes completely unpredictable nature of the stroke. In his documentary *The Mystery of Picasso* (1956), Henri-Georges Clouzot attempted to answer the question: what goes on in a painter's mind when he works? We can trace Rembrandt's creative process by observing how his preparatory drawings, sometimes very rudimentary, allowed him, when he felt ready—sometimes after several years of reflection—to produce a masterpiece. The final result, technically unsurpassable, has the appearance of the greatest magic tricks: seemingly effortless, yet technically incomprehensible, and nevertheless perfect (see, for example, the etching *The Hundred Guilder Print* and its preliminary studies). We can follow the various problems Rembrandt solved at each stage of his work. In the first phase, he analyzed issues of movement and construction. In the second phase, once these problems were understood, he focused on the expression of characters or animals, as well as on capturing the atmosphere of the scene he was depicting. Finally, in a third stage, he placed shadows and lights to indicate volumes and the hierarchy of planes. Rembrandt also enjoyed copying the old masters to enrich his practice.

He probably made sketches every day. Over forty years, based on three sketches per day, it can be estimated that he produced a minimum of forty thousand sketches or drawings. Only certain drawings—such as landscapes, biblical scenes, or scenes of everyday life—can be considered highly finished works. But most of the time, they were intermediate sketches, which unfortunately did not attract the interest of his contemporaries or collectors. As a result, the vast majority of his preliminary drawings have disappeared.

Rembrandt had many students who drew in his style. Since most of the drawings were neither dated nor signed, it can be extremely difficult to date and attribute the drawings to Rembrandt with certainty.

After his bankruptcy and the sale of his house, press, collections, and possessions in 1658, Rembrandt had to move in 1660 and focused more on painting. Far fewer drawings from the period 1660–1669 have survived.

Rembrandt's method of study

When Rembrandt observes a scene for a few seconds or imagines it, he breaks down the difficulties into several stages to better understand them.

In the first stage, Rembrandt analyzes and seeks to understand the construction, proportions, and/or movement of the scene. However, he draws the scene in a completely different way depending on whether he observes a static or quasi-static scene (i.e., one with slow movement) or a scene with rapid movement (for example, dancers or a man mounting a horse). In the case of a static or slow-moving scene, Rembrandt's drawing almost resembles a photograph and corresponds to a freeze-frame of the film he observes. In contrast, when he observes a scene with rapid movement, Rembrandt's drawing presents an overlay of photos from the film that illustrate the quick motion. To illustrate these two variants of the first stage, we will present two drawings: *Couple of Beggars with a Dog* (page 17) and *Country Couples Dancing* (page 18). When Rembrandt observes a scene where one part is quasi-static and another is in rapid motion, he combines both variants into the same drawing, as seen in *A Man Helping a rider to Mount His Horse*.

When creating drawings corresponding to this first stage, Rembrandt sketches quickly, immediately after observing the scene, a process that generally lasts no more than thirty seconds.

In the second stage, Rembrandt seeks to understand the expression of the characters or animals present in the scene. To illustrate this stage, we will present two drawings: *The Sacrifice of Manoah* and *Soldiers Carousing with Women*. Some studies combine the methods of the earlier stages with this second stage. In one part of the drawing, Rembrandt studies the composition of the scene, in another he analyzes the movement, and finally, in a third part, he focuses on the expression of the characters or animals (see *Two Horses at the Relay Station*).

In the third stage, Rembrandt places shadows and highlights to indicate the hierarchy of planes and to convey the volume of the scene. To illustrate this stage, we will present the drawings *The Naughty Boy*, *The Soldier in the Brothel*, the etching *The Angel Leaving Tobit and His Family*, and the drawing *Young Woman Lying Down*.

These studies demonstrate Rembrandt's extraordinary ability to memorize, understand, and translate the characteristics of a scene observed in just a few seconds, as well as his exceptional talents as a draftsman. It is worth noting that when Rembrandt sought to solve an artistic problem, certain details of the drawing did not interest him, and he treated them in a deliberately sloppy or casual manner. This approach led some critics—quite surprisingly—to claim that Rembrandt did not know how to draw (!).

One of the great characteristics of Rembrandt's work is that he never drew, etched, or painted the same subject in the same way twice. This approach allowed him to maintain the freshness and spontaneity of his line, whether in a drawing or an etching. Rembrandt significantly altered the representation of a scene when moving from one stage to another or from one technique to another —for example, from drawing to etching, or from drawing or etching to painting. This method not only enabled him to explore different ways of depicting the scene but also to solve the technical challenges it presented. Thanks to this approach, Rembrandt could revisit the same theme over several decades without ever repeating himself, demonstrating his exceptional imagination and memory. It is worth noting that such remarkable skills are maintained and developed through practice. For instance, Katsushika Hokusai decided to draw a different lion every day, eventually creating several hundred of them!

Stage one (proportions and movement)

Couple of Beggars with a Dog

Couple of Beggars with a Dog (c. 1647-48, Benesch, B 751, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 390), {Albertina, Vienna}. The drawing *Couple of Beggars with a Dog* illustrates how Rembrandt studies the construction of a quasi-static, ephemeral scene—that is, one characterized by slow movement. The lines are simple, outlining the forms of the characters and the dog without dwelling on precise details like hands or clothing. Yet, the atmosphere of the scene is already perfectly conveyed: one can sense the slow, trudging walk of the figures and the contrast between the parents' effort and the peaceful sleep of the children carried on their backs. This sketch is a true freeze-frame of the “film” that Rembrandt is watching, showcasing his extraordinary ability to memorize and analyze a scene observed in just a few seconds. It is important to remember that Rembrandt drew daily, both in his studio and during his walks. He sketched life wherever he was—in the street, the countryside, taverns, and all the places where he could observe everyday reality.

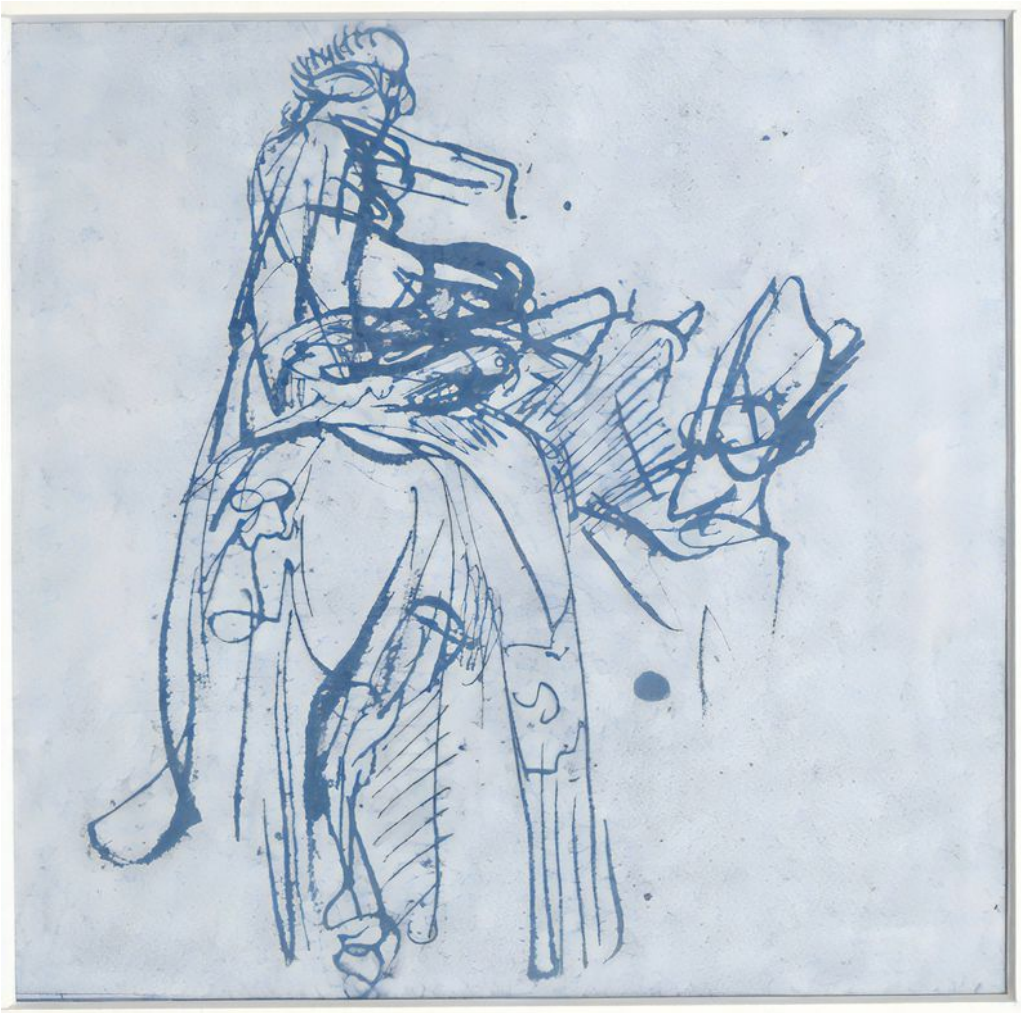
Country Couples Dancing

Country Couples Dancing (c.1635, Benesch, B 258 verso), {Graphische Sammlung, Munich}. This drawing depicts two country couples dancing at a festivity. It demonstrates how Rembrandt approaches the challenge of movement in a fleeting and rapid scene. Unlike his treatment of quasi-static scenes, here he seeks primarily to understand and suggest movement rather than precisely delineate the characters' forms. No detail is truly defined: with just a few strokes, he evokes the swaying of the dancer leading his partner, enhancing the sense of movement by doubling the dancers' arms and the woman's legs. This drawing gives the illusion of superimposed successive images, like snapshots from a rapidly moving film (see also the drawings *A Man Helping a Horseman to Mount His Horse* on page 19 and *Two Horses at the Relay* on page 23). The impression of dance and dynamism emerges powerfully from this spontaneous sketch, created with just a few lines. Rembrandt does not aim to accurately represent the dancers but rather to convey their momentum and

liveliness. As a finishing touch, he draws the women's faces, clearly expressing their amusement, while the man's head is merely sketched. This depiction of the women's faces, reflecting their joy, corresponds to the second stage of his method, in which he focuses on conveying the characters' emotions.

Combination of the two variants of the first stage

When Rembrandt observes a scene that combines both a quasi-static part and a rapidly moving part, he merges the two variants into a single drawing.



A Man Helping a Rider to Mount his Horse

A Man Helping a Rider to Mount his Horse (c. 1637, Benesch, B 363 recto, c. 1640-41, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 48), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}. Rembrandt observes a man helping a rider to mount his horse. This drawing is a perfect example of how Rembrandt combines a quasi-static part and a rapidly moving part within the same composition. The quasi-static part of the drawing

is represented by the horse and the man standing beside it, drawn simply and precisely, like a freeze-frame. Rembrandt sketches the horse's hindquarters and a leg, hints at the head and neck, and roughly draws the man assisting the rider. The horseman is depicted with his left foot in the stirrup and his left hand holding the saddle, right at the moment he is mounting the horse. The rapidly moving part corresponds to the horseman in the act of climbing onto his horse. To capture this dynamic motion, Rembrandt uses an image overlay technique, doubling the right arm and torso, and tripling the horseman's right leg. This approach perfectly conveys the momentum and difficulty of mounting the horse, creating an impression of movement with just a few swift and energetic strokes. On the verso of this sheet, Rembrandt drew *A Horseman with a Quiver*, suggesting that he quickly moved from dynamic study to a more composed image. The sketch *A Man Helping a Rider to Mount His Horse* also inspired the depiction of the rider in the painting *The Concord of the State* (1637–1645, Museum Boijmans, Rotterdam), showing how Rembrandt reused and adapted his graphic studies in other works.

Second stage (Expression of feelings)

The Sacrifice of Manoach

The Sacrifice of Manoah (circa 1637-40, Benesch, B 180; circa 1635,

Schatborn & Hinterding, D 54), {Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin}. This drawing is one of Rembrandt's most beautiful representations of an apparition and the ascent of an angel. It illustrates the biblical scene where Manoah and his wife, desperate from being childless, sacrifice a lamb. Suddenly, an angel appears in the flames to announce the birth of Samson, the future liberator of Israel from the Philistine yoke. This sketch belongs to the second stage of Rembrandt's working method, where he seeks to express the emotion and reaction of the characters after having analyzed and understood movement in a previous stage. Here, Rembrandt captures the ascent of the angel, as well as the backward movement of Manoah and his wife, demonstrating their surprise, astonishment, and fear. The focus is on the positioning of arms and hands, as well as the angel's legs, to intensify the sense of movement and lightness. Rembrandt does not dwell on the precision of details such as the characters' hands or the angel's feet, which has unjustly earned him criticism for his supposed inability to draw these body parts. However, this deliberate omission clearly shows that his goal here is to capture the essence and emotion of the scene rather than detailing every element. The freedom of the line and the unpredictable nature of the stroke perfectly convey the ephemeral and spiritual character of this apparition. Rembrandt pays particular attention to the expression on Manoah's face, while the expression of his wife is less marked, indicating where his interest lies in this study. This drawing embodies Rembrandt's way of balancing spontaneity and technical mastery to render the immediacy and emotional impact of a scene. This sketch served as a source of inspiration for other works by Rembrandt, notably the painting *The Angel Leaving Tobit and His Family* (1637) and the etching of the same name (1641), on page 27. The treatment of the angel in these works shows how Rembrandt progressively deepened and enriched his understanding of movement and expression, moving from preliminary study to completed work.

Three Soldiers Carousing with Women

Three Soldiers Carousing with Women (circa 1635, Benesch, B 100 verso, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 31), {Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin}. This drawing was created during the same period as *Peasant Couple Dancing*. It corresponds to the second stage of Rembrandt's working method. The artist has solved the problem of constructing couples and is now primarily interested in the expression of the characters. The soldier of the first couple tries to slip his hand between the woman's thighs, to which she reacts violently: she attempts to pull his hand away and is about to slap him. Rembrandt doubles the woman's right arm to suggest movement while emphasizing the expression on her face. In the case of the second couple, the artist depicts characters having fun and exchanging caresses.

Combination of Stages 1 & 2

Two Horses at the Relay Station

Two Horses at the Relay Station or the Farm (c. 1637, Benesch, B 461, c. 1629, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 460), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}. Two horses pulling a cart arrive to rest. The driver places a blanket over the horses while a woman offers one of them a piece of fruit. This study is particularly remarkable because it combines the two characteristic methods of the first and second stages of Rembrandt's study technique to depict a fleeting scene. First, Rembrandt executes the quasi-static part, or "freeze-frame," which allows him to structure his drawing. This initial stage includes the cart, the driver, the blanket, and the woman—represented in a very simple manner without any detail. In the background, he then draws the horse's head as it eats the fruit offered by the woman, corresponding to the study of movement from the first stage. To suggest movement, Rembrandt doubles and even triples the outline of the horse's head, showing the animal grabbing the fruit and beginning to chew it. This technique of redoubling to indicate movement, known as *repentir*, is also observed in the drawings *Country People Dancing* and *A Man Helping a Rider to Monut His Horse*. The technique of doubling to convey motion was already employed in the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods (for

example, in ancient Egyptian art). Finally, Rembrandt carefully details the expression of the horse's head in the foreground, as well as its neck and four legs, corresponding to the second stage of his study method. Once again, it is worth emphasizing Rembrandt's extraordinary memorization and analytical abilities, enabling him to capture a fleeting scene with such precision in just a few seconds.

Third stage (volume)

The Naughty Boy

The Naughty Boy (c. 1635, Benesch, B 401, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 238), {Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin}. This drawing corresponds to the third stage of Rembrandt's artistic evolution. The artist has resolved the challenges of

construction, movement, and character expression. He uses shadows and light to create a sense of volume. To emphasize the violent and fleeting nature of the scene, Rembrandt depicts the child's shoe coming loose from his foot and about to fall. Although he pays great attention to the movement of the two women and the child, as well as to the facial expressions of the women and the three children, he sketches the women's hands and especially their feet only very briefly. In doing so, Rembrandt focuses his efforts on the part of the drawing intended to capture the viewer's attention and convey the dramatic character of the scene.

The Soldier in the Brothel

The Soldier in the Brothel or *The Soldier in the Tavern* (c. 1642-43, Benesch, B 529), {private collection}. This drawing is commonly known as *The Prodigal Son in the Company of Loose Women* or *The Prodigal Son in the*

Tavern. However, the man is wearing a dagger at his belt, and his sword is placed along the armchair to the right of the drawing, making the identification as the Prodigal Son unlikely. This drawing represents the third stage of Rembrandt's method and appears as a miniature painting. The freedom of the lines and the simplicity of the setting are noticeable, as the artist's main interest lies in recreating the atmosphere and the expression of the characters enjoying themselves.

The Angel Leaving Tobit and His Family

The Angel Leaving Tobit and His Family (1641), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}. The archangel Raphael leaves Tobit and his family after healing Tobit's father's blindness. The family thanks the angel, who takes flight and disappears. In this highly accomplished etching, Rembrandt revisits the study of the angel from the drawing *The Sacrifice of Manoach*. This etching corresponds to the third stage of his artistic evolution and represents a variation of the 1637 painting titled *The Angel Leaving Tobit and His Family*. One of Rembrandt's unique traits is his ability to remain interested in the same subject for several years while offering very different representations. In this etching, he focuses on Tobit's family and the characters' expressions. It is worth noting that, for

Rembrandt, the small dog symbolizes the family's loyalty to the archangel Raphael, whereas in the Bible, the dog is considered a harmful and ill-reputed animal. This demonstrates that when depicting a biblical scene, Rembrandt imbues it with his own personality, always prioritizing his perspective over generally accepted conventions. Rembrandt depicts only the lower part of the angel in full flight, thus suggesting his rapid disappearance from the sight of both Tobit’s family and the viewer, witnesses to a fleeting scene. Even the donkey appears stunned by the angel’s ascent, enhancing the effect of surprise and astonishment.

Young woman lying down

Young woman lying down, probably Hendrickje Stoffels (c. 1655–56, Benesch, B 1103, c. 1654, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 441), {British Museum, London}. This drawing, made with brush and ink, is one of Rembrandt's masterpieces. It reveals what Rembrandt was capable of achieving once he had resolved the preliminary difficulties. One can almost trace the order of the brushstrokes according to the amount of ink left in the brush.

Keep the Construction as Open as Possible

Rembrandt's passion for freedom strongly influenced his way of drawing. One of the characteristics of his line is, indeed, the freedom of his stroke, which is sometimes unpredictable. To preserve this spontaneity, Rembrandt strives to keep the structure of his drawing as open as possible. The term "closing" the structure of a drawing refers to when the initial strokes constrain the development of the rest of the drawing. For example, one might sketch a head with an oval for a quick construction in the preliminary phase, but one should not begin with an oval if aiming to create a detailed portrait. Similarly, when drawing a scene with multiple figures, it is better to first position the figures before adding the background. To maintain the freedom of the stroke, it is essential to delay the introduction of constraints as much as possible during the development of the drawing. To illustrate this principle, we will present a preparatory study for the painting *Saint John the Baptist Preaching*. We will show how Rembrandt proceeds when focusing his attention on a particular character within a group.

Saint John the Baptist Preaching

Preliminary Study (c. 1637, Benesch, B139A), {Private Collection} for the painting *Saint John the Baptist Preaching*. At this stage of the work, Rembrandt draws the heads as ovals, as he is not yet aiming to depict details or create portraits. He first places the figures or groups of figures, then positions the elements of the background. This drawing represents the first stage of Rembrandt's study. At the bottom right of the sheet, he suggests the presence of a seated woman with a child on her lap, for whom he will later create several studies. We will present two of these studies on page 34.

When Rembrandt focuses his attention on a particular character within a group, it is very interesting to observe how he draws the group while avoiding closing the structure of his drawing. We will present the two drawings *Guided by an Angel, Lot and His Family Leave Sodom* and *Lot and His Daughters*, in which Rembrandt concentrates on the main characters, particularly on Lot. In both works, he skillfully emphasizes the main figures while allowing the surrounding elements to remain more loosely defined, creating a dynamic and open composition. This approach emphasizes the central characters without restricting the fluidity of the scene, adding a sense of movement and spontaneity to the drawings.

Guided by an Angel, Lot and His Family Leave Sodom

Guided by an Angel, Lot and His Family Leave Sodom (c. 1636, Benesch B 129), {Albertina, Vienna}. Guided by an angel, Lot, his wife, and his daughters leave Sodom, destined for destruction by God. The angel warns them not to look back; however, Lot's wife, defying this warning to glance behind, will be turned into a pillar of salt. Lot and his daughters will later take refuge in a cave (see the following drawing, *Lot and His Daughters*). To maintain the openness of his composition, Rembrandt begins by drawing Lot with great detail, using shadows to define the volumes. He then depicts the angel and Lot's wife, who surround and guide him, and finally sketches the two daughters following them in a more succinct manner. This drawing is an excellent example of a study sheet, revealing the three characteristic stages of Rembrandt's work. Another interesting point is the question of the drawing's attribution. On the verso of the sheet, there is a drawing likely made about ten years earlier by a student of Lastman. This led some experts to speculate that the drawing might not be by Rembrandt himself, but rather a copy made by Govert Flinck (?) or Jan Victors (?) in the years 1640–45. Legend has it that when Rembrandt picked up this sheet to draw, one of his students said, *"No, Master, don't use that sheet for drawing, or in three hundred years, experts might discredit your work!"* Rembrandt merely shrugged and drew on it anyway.

Lot and His Daughters

Lot and His Daughters (c. 1636, Benesch, B 128, c. 1638, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 57), {Klassik Stiftung, Weimar}. After leaving Sodom, destroyed by God, Lot and his daughters take refuge in a cave where wine, placed there by divine will, is found. The two daughters find themselves alone with their father, as their fiancés refused to follow them. Fearing that they will have no descendants in this isolated place, the eldest daughter decides to intoxicate her father to conceive a child and convinces her younger sister to do the same. From this incestuous relationship, two sons are born: Moab, founder of the kingdom of the Moabites, and Ben-Ammi, founder of the kingdom of the Ammonites. The drawing shows the eldest daughter (?) encouraging her father to drink by handing him the cup, while Lot, already intoxicated, begins to sway. To maintain the openness of his composition, Rembrandt starts by drawing Lot in a very accomplished way, except for his legs, which are sketched more succinctly. Then, he draws the expressive face and hand of the eldest daughter urging her father to keep drinking. Finally, he sketches the silhouette of the younger daughter and adds a few decorative elements. This drawing is a magnificent example of a study sheet, showcasing the three characteristic stages of Rembrandt's work. It was preceded by a more accomplished drawing, *Lot and His Daughters* (circa 1631), generally attributed to the school of Rembrandt but possibly by his own hand, and made popular by Jan van Vliet’s etching in 1631.

A Line Sometimes Completely Unpredictable

Finally, it should be noted that Rembrandt's drawing is also distinguished by a line with a completely unpredictable stroke, displaying remarkable virtuosity (see for example *The Sacrifice of Manoah* page 20). Through this technique, Rembrandt suggests what he wishes to represent without precisely outlining the contours. Rembrandt typically uses this technique at the end of a drawing's execution to preserve the freshness and vitality that emanate from it, avoiding any stiffness or rigidity. A striking example of this approach can be found in the *Portrait of Saskia* from 1633.

Portrait of Saskia

Portrait of Saskia (detail of the drawing dated 1633 and annotated by Rembrandt, Benesch B 427, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 629), {Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin}. Rembrandt created the portrait of Saskia on June 8, 1633, three days after their engagement. This drawing, executed with a silverpoint on parchment, begins with the depiction of Saskia's face, hat, and left hand, followed by her right hand. It is interesting to note that the right hand lacks the finesse of the other and resembles more of a man's hand. It could, in

fact, be Rembrandt's own hand, offering a flower to his beloved fiancée. Next, he completes the two sleeves and the shoulder of Saskia's garment with lines that are entirely unpredictable. This virtuoso stroke suggests the shoulder and sleeves without explicitly outlining their contours, resulting in a far more elegant effect than if the sleeves had been drawn conventionally. This way of drawing without closing the construction is characteristic of the happy period of Rembrandt's life, where spontaneity and freedom of line reflect his state of mind.

To capture the observer's attention

For Rembrandt, the important thing is not merely to draw the whole scene, but to focus on the part of the drawing that interests him and allows him to express what he wants. This is the part that should capture the observer's attention (see, for example: *Three Soldiers Carousing with Women*, *Horses at the Relay Station, The Naughty Boy*, Guided *by an Angel, Lot Leaving Sodom with His Family*, *Portrait of Saskia*). This way of approaching the subject can also be found in certain paintings executed after 1650. It is worth noting that, in the treatment of a subject in a drawing or print, the theme becomes secondary to the life he breathes into his works (for example: *Omval*). To complete our discussion, we will also present the painting *A Woman Bathing in a Stream* and Rembrandt's *studies of a seated woman*, as well as the lithograph *The Mother and her Child* by Käthe Kollwitz and the print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* by Katsushika Hokusai.

In the painting *A Woman Bathing in a Stream* (1654), {National Gallery, London}, Rembrandt focuses on the face of the woman entering the water, thus expressing the pleasure she feels at the thought of bathing. He also pays particular attention to the small ripples created by the woman's legs in the stream, suggesting the movement of her entry into the water. The face and the ripples on the water are the only parts of the painting treated with great delicacy and meticulous finishing. In contrast, the dress is painted with remarkable virtuosity, using broad brushstrokes and a heavy application of paint. The woman's right hand, lifting the dress, is sketched in a succinct manner, yet this simplification does not seem jarring unless one focuses on the details. This way of painting was completely misunderstood by Rembrandt's contemporaries, who criticized him for producing unfinished works.

Studies of a Seated Woman

Studies of a Seated Woman (c. 1633, Benesch B179; c. 1639, Schatborn & Hinterding D343), *Musée du Louvre, Paris*—used in the painting *Saint John the Baptist Preaching*. When Rembrandt sketches the seated woman at the bottom of the sheet, he does not outline her face with an oval, as he is focusing on studying her expression. In contrast, for the seated woman at the top, he does use an oval for the face, as he is not interested in detailing her features or exploring her expression. Since Rembrandt aims for a continuous, fluid line—rather than composing his drawings from separate, disconnected strokes—he often struggles with rendering hands accurately. In the study of the woman at the bottom, he concentrates on her facial expression and left hand. While the hand is not drawn with great precision, it effectively conveys that the woman is a poor beggar, reaching out for money or food. In the upper study, Rembrandt focuses more precisely on the representation of two children, drawing them with greater clarity than in the lower study. These two seated woman studies were later followed by a third, distinct study. Notably, all three differ from the final painted version.

The Mother and her Child

The Mother and her Child (1916, lithograph) by Käthe Kollwitz is a poignant and emotive work, characteristic of the artist's expressionist style. Known for her social and humanistic works, Kollwitz often explores themes such as suffering, love, and class struggle. In this lithograph, she meticulously depicts the faces of the mother and child, as well as the child's two hands. She highlights the intensity of maternal love through the profound and sensitive expressions on their faces. The gazes of both figures—the mother and the child—are the focal point of the piece. It is through these gazes that the artist conveys the emotions and the intimate bond that unites them. The mother gazes

at her child with immeasurable love and palpable tenderness, while the child appears both dependent and confident, feeling secure in the maternal embrace. The lack of precise detail in the depiction of the mother's hands reinforces the idea that technique is not the core of the work, but rather the pure expression of feelings. This deliberate inaccuracy can be seen as a simplification intended to allow the viewer to focus on raw emotion without distraction. The representation of the mother and child, devoid of ornamentation or embellishment, gives the work a sincerity and universality that transcends technique, directly touching the viewer's soul.

The Great Wave of Kanagawa

The Great Wave off Kanagawa, a woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai (1831), is part of the famous series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (*Fugaku Sanjūrokkei*). Similar to how Rembrandt's etching *Omval* renders the subject secondary, Mount Fuji becomes less prominent here; what truly interests Hokusai is, above all, the fishermen's way of life. He depicts a massive crashing wave off the coast of Kanagawa Bay, with Mount Fuji appearing in the background. It is noteworthy that, although Mount Fuji is a sacred symbol of

Japan, Hokusai focuses on the fishermen, whose fragile boats struggle against the vastness of the sea and the power of the wave. This approach reflects a form of humanism, where the harsh living conditions of the fishermen—belonging to modest social classes—are elevated to the same level as Mount Fuji, sacred yet distant. By portraying the fishermen's battle against the forces of nature, Hokusai elevates these common figures to an almost mythological status, granting them remarkable dignity through the power of his depiction. Through its dynamic movement and depth, Hokusai's composition is a masterpiece of Japanese art from the Edo period. The great wave, with its vibrant energy and abstract form, has become one of the most recognizable images of Japanese art and woodblock printing.

To illustrate everything we have just discussed, we present *Study for the Lamentation of Jacob.*

Study for the Lamentation of Jacob

Study for the Lamentation of Jacob (c. 1635, Benesch, B 95, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 40), {Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin}. This drawing perfectly embodies Rembrandt's artistic approach and illustrates the principles previously discussed. Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, is depicted in a posture of intense lamentation, pleading with a specter that appears in his distress. Convinced that it is a vision of God, Jacob is, in reality, confronted by the specter of his twin brother, Esau. A vision of God would have caused his death. Jacob is known as the father of Joseph, who was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of attempting to seduce her. In this study, we find Rembrandt's exceptional mastery of line: a freedom of execution that preserves the freshness of the drawing while maintaining remarkable emotional power. The contours remain open, allowing shapes to be suggested rather than fixed, reinforcing the impression of movement and spontaneity. The line work is both dynamic and subtle, enabling emotions to emerge almost instinctively. This virtuosity contributes to the humanity that emanates from the work, bearing witness to Rembrandt's profound artistic depth.

The evolution of Rembrandt's line

As previously mentioned, the use of a line with a completely unpredictable stroke is characteristic of the happy period of Rembrandt's life. His style evolved considerably toward the end of his life, particularly after 1655. After his move in 1660, when his press had been seized, Rembrandt produced very few etchings. It is also possible that his output of drawings decreased, especially since very few drawings from this period have survived. This stylistic evolution became more pronounced after the death of Hendrickje Stoffels in 1663. To illustrate this evolution in Rembrandt's line, we will present the drawing *Diana and Actaeon*.

Diana and Actaeon

Diana and Actaeon (c. 1662-65, Benesch – B 1210, c. 1656, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 161), {Kupferstichkabinett, Dresden}, is probably one of the last known drawings by Rembrandt. In his later years, he revisited this theme, creating a free adaptation of an engraving by Antonio Tempesta (1555-1630). Although the drawing retains a great deal of freedom in execution, it has been greatly simplified: curves are often replaced by straight lines, and the stroke becomes stiffer, more angular, and rudimentary. Rembrandt more frequently used reed or bamboo, which allowed him to achieve a line that was both vigorous and highly nuanced. One can notice the extraordinary efficiency with which he represents the heads and faces of Diana and her attendants. After the death of Hendrickje Stoffels and all the hardships he had endured, Rembrandt, now beyond the pain, sought to avoid any unnecessary embellishment, prioritizing simplicity and the essential. The unpredictable strokes, so characteristic of his earlier periods, disappear from his late drawings. This stylistic evolution may have been amplified by health or vision problems, and it is also evident in his paintings. However, this style confused his admirers, who considered his works unfinished and were no longer eager to purchase them. Yet, Rembrandt, detached from the opinions of potential buyers, continued his personal artistic quest.

Rembrandt's perception and representation of volume

As we mentioned earlier, Rembrandt never drew the scenes he studied in the same way twice. The final version of the scene he wished to represent was always different from the preparatory studies he had made. This working method allowed him to approach the subject or scene in three dimensions, thereby strengthening his spatial understanding of the motif. Arnold Houbraken (1660–1719) reports in this regard: *"It often happened that he would sketch a face in ten different ways before reproducing it on the canvas."* As a draftsman, etcher, and painter, Rembrandt always sought to convey the volume of the scene depicted, in a way that gave the viewer the impression of observing not a static image projected in two dimensions, but a living, natural scene, and therefore more human. Early on, he understood that one of the ways to resolve this issue was through the use of chiaroscuro and, more broadly, the play of shadows and light. This is already clearly visible in the painting *The Parable of the Rich Fool* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), created in 1627, three years after he set up his studio in Leiden. To accentuate the sense of volume in his paintings, Rembrandt frequently depicted backgrounds in a blurred manner, thus enhancing the illusion of depth.

The portrait of Jan Cornelis Sylvius is the most extraordinary example of Rembrandt's exploration in etching, aiming to give the viewer an impression of volume, life, and naturalness.

Portrait of Jan Cornelis Sylvius

Portrait of Jan Cornelis Sylvius, Rembrandt (1646) {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}. To enhance the impression of volume, Rembrandt imposes a precise viewing angle on the spectator by drawing the perspective of the mat's bevel. This positioning places the viewer slightly below and to the right of Jan Cornelis. The light, meanwhile, also comes from the right but from a source positioned higher than the model. To reinforce the effect of relief, Rembrandt makes the right hand, the book, and Jan Cornelis's head literally emerge from the plane of the image by casting their shadows onto the mat. This technique gives the portrait a striking sense of life and humanity. Rembrandt transcends mere anecdote to create a work that goes beyond a simple projection on paper.

The catalogues of Rembrandt's drawings
(*An example of a problem of attribution*)

The two most comprehensive catalogs of Rembrandt's drawings are Otto Benesch's catalog, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, (1973), in six volumes, and the catalog by Peter Schatborn and Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt: All the Drawings and Etchings*, (2019). There are also many other, more partial catalogs, which we will not list here.

As previously mentioned, most of the drawings by Rembrandt or his circle of students were generally neither dated nor signed, making their dating and attribution extremely difficult to establish with certainty.

The Benesch catalog (1973) provides a description, a history, and the reasons for attributing each drawing to Rembrandt. The Schatborn and Hinterding catalog (2019) is a revision and update of the Benesch catalog (1976), using the criteria explained in Schatborn & van Sloten (2014). The latter is intended for a broad audience and does not include descriptions, histories, or explanations of the reasons for attributing each drawing to Rembrandt.

The main issue with the Schatborn (1985) and Schatborn & Hinterding (2019) catalogs, based on the criteria from Schatborn & van Sloten (2014), is that they do not take into account two fundamental characteristics of Rembrandt's drawing technique. The first characteristic concerns the way Rembrandt approaches a subject: when he discovers a subject, he begins by studying its proportions and movement. If the subject moves slowly, he creates a "freeze-frame" (for example, *Beggar Couple with a Dog*, page 17). However, if the subject moves quickly, he opts for an overlay of images that depict motion (for example, *Dancing Peasant Couple*, page 18; *A Man Helping a Rider Mount His Horse*, page 19; *Three Soldiers Carousing with Women*, page 23; *Two Horses at the Relay or the Farm*, page 24; The Horse Eating a Fruit from the Woman's Hand). The second overlooked characteristic is that Rembrandt never drew the same subject in the same way twice. In other words, he never copied a drawing or an etching, allowing him to maintain great spontaneity and freshness of line in his drawings, etchings, and paintings.

It is very interesting to observe how these two shortcomings can influence conclusions and deductions, taking as an example the drawing *A Man Helping a Rider Mount His Horse*. This drawing combines both methods from the first

step: it features a "freeze-frame" for the almost static part, with the horse and the man assisting the rider, and an overlay of images depicting the rider's movement as he swings his leg over the saddle to mount the horse (see page 19). On the reverse side, Rembrandt drew a rider with a quiver, suggesting that immediately after completing this study, he turned the sheet and drew a rider wearing a feathered hat on his horse. This sketch would later be used by Rembrandt in the etching *The Baptism of the Eunuch* (1641).

Rider with a Quiver

The Baptism of the Eunuch

Rider with a Quiver (reversed drawing) – Rider (etching)

To preserve the freshness and spontaneity of the line, Rembrandt etched a variant of the sketch *A Rider with a Quiver* without reversing the drawing. This

is a typical working method of Rembrandt.

Regarding the drawing *A Man Helping a Rider Mount His Horse*, Schatborn (1985, page 46) does not write, « *Rembrandt created a beautiful study of the movement of a rider mounting a horse »*, but instead concludes that « *Rembrandt tried to draw a rider mounting a horse, but he does not seem to have found a solution... »* It is interesting to analyze the consequences of this initial misunderstanding. Indeed, Schatborn deduces that « *This shows that Rembrandt did not draw from a model but worked from memory... »* To explain the drawing of the rider on the reverse side of the sheet, he asserts: « *The drawing on the reverse is not by Rembrandt but was added by a dealer to make the sketch of the rider mounting his horse more attractive for sale! »* Therefore, Schatborn (1985) does not attribute the drawing *A Rider with a Quiver* to Rembrandt, and this sketch is not included in the catalog of Rembrandt's drawings by Schatborn and Hinterding (2019). Legend has it that after finishing these sketches, Rembrandt went to a tavern with one of his students. The student, after examining the sketches, said to Rembrandt: « *Master, you should explain your sketches and your working method, for one day an expert might write »: « Rembrandt tried to draw a rider mounting a horse, but he does not seem to have found a solution... »* Rembrandt’s response has not reached us, but it is easy to imagine. Indeed, Rembrandt and his circle of students had little regard for art critics, who, without practicing drawing, engraving, or painting themselves, believed they were connected to a higher truth (see the drawing *Satire of the Art Critic*, page 46).

These examples help to understand the difficulty of attributing drawings to Rembrandt or his students, as well as the potential fragility of experts' conclusions. They also demonstrate that having drawing skills is not without value when it comes to fully grasping Rembrandt's drawings and method, especially in distinguishing a movement study from a finished drawing.

Satire of the Art Critic

Satire of the Art Critic (c. 1644, Benesch – A35a, c. 1638, Schatborn & Hinterding, D 318), {Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York}. This work is a caricature of an art critic, drawn by Rembrandt or one of his pupils. An ironic twist in the history of attributions: Benesch (1973) attributes this drawing to a pupil of Rembrandt, while Schatborn & Hinterding (2019) attribute it directly to Rembrandt.

References for this section :

- Benesch O., 1973, *The Drawings of Rembrandt (six volumes)*, Phaidon
- Schatborn P., 1985, *Catalogue of the Dutch and Flemish Drawings in the Rijksprentenkabinet, Volume 4*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, page 46
- Schatborn P. & van Sloten L., 2014, *Old drawings, new names*, Uitgeverij de Weideblik, Varik and the Rembrandt House Museum
- Schatborn P. & Hinterding E., 2019, *Rembrandt, tous les dessins et toutes les eaux fortes*, Taschen

A little bonus to finish

We will end our little tour dedicated to Rembrandt's drawing technique with a small etching that is probably the most charming and most successful of the scenes expressing feelings.

The Sleeping Shepherd

Detail of the etching *The Sleeping Shepherd* (1644), {Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam}. This is a small etching measuring 5.5 x 7.5 cm. Although it may seem simple at first glance, it expresses emotions and feelings with exceptional simplicity, effectiveness, and virtuosity. It depicts a young boy (a soldier) eager to embrace his sweetheart, while she, more shy, wants to make sure the shepherd doesn't see them. The shepherd, for his part, pretends to sleep so as not to disturb the lovers. Even the cow, observing the scene, seems to playfully and kindly enjoy the actions of these three characters.

Notes