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Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn

Seven Prints
1630-1654



catalogue 32

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Seven Prints
1630-1654

GILLIS GOLDMAN FINE ART

T +32 2 503 14 64 | W www.gillisgoldman.com | M noemie@gillisgoldman.com
1, rue aux laines | 1000 Brussels | Belgium

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The mystics are the only ones who have gained a glimpse into what is possible
Beatrice Hinkle, *The Psychology of the Artist* (1923)

Dear Friends,

In his 1956 book, *Voices of Silence*, André Malraux wrote, “Rembrandt has in effect invented a new method of picture making. He abandoned outline; replaced it with light. He put a field of expressive signs in place of illusions. He seems to have worked from inside.”

I have always liked this sentence by Malraux, though it does remind me of my inability to adequately express my feelings whenever I find myself in front of a Rembrandt print. Time and again, “beauty” is the only word that seems to come to mind – albeit beauty of a divine nature. Back in 1996, when I was a young trainee at the Cabinet Cantonal des Estampes, in Vevey, Switzerland, I was preparing a Rembrandt exhibition from their exceptional collection – a premiere for me. I remember that some nights I could not sleep, having spent an entire day with such artistic miracles. How was possible that an artist could capture such beauty – such universal humanity – and make it come to life on paper? I was certain Rembrandt had been touched by the divine and that his work was a manifestation of transcendence, though he was hardly a mystic. He and Van Eyck are the only two artists that trigger such a profound reaction in my soul.

Connoisseurship of Rembrandt etchings in particular is one of the longest established sub-disciplines of art history among collectors and historians. This can be traced to the fine provenance attached to many impressions of Rembrandt prints, along with the many *catalogues raisonnés* and essays about his oeuvre. This connoisseurship began even during the artist’s lifetime, and it remains a work in progress. This world apart is fascinating to me. Our catalogue may be more modest, but it offers seven fine Rembrandt prints that, while perhaps not entirely reflective of his oeuvre, remain great works that fortunate circumstances have placed in our hands – through no clear no plan, only a great desire.

Among this Rembrandt selection we most want to highlight the two self-portraits, *Self-Portrait in a Fur Cap: Bust*, and *A Self-Portrait Frowning: Bust*. These etchings are among the best self-portraits ever of the young Rembrandt, when he was twenty-four years old. Both were made in 1630, and both capture the artist’s extraordinary introspection. In just roughly six by six centimetres, Rembrandt was able to capture the essence of his profound concentration and dedication to what he was doing. From a graphical point of view, Rembrandt was literally scrawling on the plate. Hypnotizing.

As we are fond of saying, the diversity of our selected prints is at the heart of our adventure. We hope you will celebrate and cherish this collection as much as we enjoyed compiling it for you. Enjoy art and life.

Eric Gillis & Noémie Goldman

1 **Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn** 1606 Leiden – Amsterdam 1669

A Self-Portrait in a Fur Cap: Bust

Etching on laid paper, 1630	
Plate	63 × 52 mm
Reference	Bartsch 24; White and Boon 24, fourth (final) state; Nowell-Usticke 24, fourth state of five state; New Hollstein 72, sixth (final) state
Provenance	Unidentified, armorial stamp in purple verso; Fürsten zu Oettingen-Wallerstein (Lugt 2715a); probably acquired by Kraft Ernst von Oettingen-Wallerstein (1748-1802), Maihingen, Bavaria; then by descent; their sale, C. G. Boerner, Leipzig, 28 May 1935, lot 221 (<i>‘Sehr schön. Mit viel Rand’</i>). With Kunsthandel Helmut Rumbler, Frankfurt am Main (2012); Private collection, Europe
Condition	In fine condition

This self-portrait of 1630 differs from the others done in the same year because it does not illustrate a particular frame in of mind (unless it is surly) and because the light is coming from the left instead of from the right. Rembrandt wears a coat trimmed with fur, which he also wore in other likenesses. These types of coats were originally 16th century, but where sometimes worn as dressing gowns in the 17th century. We also know that the artists liked to wear them as protection against the winter cold. This present, very fine impression of the sixth, final state, is still printed with tiny touches burr around the right eye. Nowell-Usticke describes the plate as RR+, a rare, lightly bitten portrait.

Most of Rembrandt’s etched self-portraits date from the beginning of his artistic career in Leiden. These have often been assumed to simply be routine exercises of a young artist, trying to illustrate a variety of expressions, using the most convenient model, himself. But even in the earliest works, Rembrandt goes beyond routine exercise and captures the emotion underneath.

The present entry is taken from Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etching form the Frits Lugt Collection*, Fondation Custodia, Paris, 2008



2 **Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn** 1606 Leiden – Amsterdam 1669

A Self-Portrait Frowning: Bust

Etching on laid paper, 1630	
Plate	73 × 62 mm
Reference	Bartsch 10; White and Boon 10, third (final) state; Nowell-Usticke 10, second (final) state; New Hollstein 68, third (final) state
Provenance	Private collection, Belgium
Condition	In fine condition

This etching, which dates from 1630, is also one of the second group of self-portraits, in which Rembrandt rendered his own face showing different emotions. The present plate is one of the most finished of these studies, in a fine impression. Nowell-Usticke describes the plate as RR-, a very scarce portrait.

This time the artist looks angry, with a dark, piercing gaze under knitted brows and his mouth compressed into a thin line. The contrasts of light and shade contribute greatly to the effectiveness of the image – the illumination of the shoulder and the left side of Rembrandt’s face and the sharply delineated shadow of his nose under his right

eye create a dramatic effect in keeping with the emotion he expresses. It is one of the early examples in which the artist also devotes his attention to the rendition of materials. The zigzag hatching on the front of the bust is typical of the Leiden period and still nondescripts, but the fur coats that the artist wears is clearly recognisable on the shoulder and the collar.

The present entry is taken from Nancy Bialler and Adrian Eeles, *A Collection of Etchings by Rembrandt [...] formed by Joseph Ritman, Artemis & Sotheby’s, London, 1995*; and Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etching form the Frits Lugt Collection*, Fondation Custodia, Paris, 2008



3 **Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn** 1606 Leiden – Amsterdam 1669

A Grotesque Profile: Man with a High Cap

Etching on laid paper, ca. 1631	
Plate	39 × 25 mm
Reference	Bartsch 326; White and Boon 326, 3 rd state of four; New Hollstein 35, fifth state of six
Provenance	Alexander John Godby, London (Lugt 1119b); Colnaghi Ltd., London (stock # C. 5413); Private collection, USA
Condition	In fine condition

It is a superb impression of this scarce and early plate, classified “RR” in Nowell-Usticke, and printed with delicate plate tone. One of the most remarkable details of this print is the figure’s snub nose. Rembrandt is known to have made three other prints featuring a similar nose, i.e. the *Peasant with his hands behind his back* (1631, B. 135), the *Old Man seen from behind* (ca. 1630-31, B. 143), and the *Old Man with a snub nose* (ca. 1629, B. 399). It should be noted that a snub nose as deformed as here is not a caricature but the sign of the destruction of the nose septum due to a syphilitic infection, a lesion perfectly well represented by Rembrandt. The work from the first state is a consistent development of the shadow as a central theme. Some saw the additional hand of Van Vliet in this portrait, but it is not convincing, and any attempt fails because of the tiny scale of the subject and the rework over the five states.

The other remarkable point about this print is its tiny scale. Rembrandt made around twelve prints of the same size, tiny studies of heads (see B. 299, 300, 302, 317, 323,

327, 333, 334, 336, 360 and 399), all of the year 1630 or 1631, at the early stage of his career. To be able to put so many lines and hatchings in a small space is a tour de force for a young printmaker as Rembrandt was.

Rembrandt was fascinated by the scenes that surrounded him in the street, especially the beggars that were part of life in the cities of the northern Netherlands. He made more than twenty etchings of beggars, most during his years in Leiden. Callot’s series of *Beggars* (Lieure 473-503) published in 1620 must have been a model, but his graphic line had little influence on Rembrandt’s looser, more spontaneous style. Once Rembrandt was at work, he invented and studied from life quite independently. Also, while Callot’s retain a detached agony symbolic of a whole race of underprivileged and persecuted, the very humanity of Rembrandt’s beggars dulls the moral propaganda. They are an accepted part of the society, and not a race of nomads.



4 **Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn** 1606 Leiden – Amsterdam 1669

An Old Man with a Flowing Beard: Bust

Etching with burin on laid paper, 1631	
Plate	67 × 66 mm
Reference	Bartsch 315; White and Boon 315, second (final) state; Nowell-Usticke 315, only state; New Hollstein 83, second (final) state
Provenance	John Barnard (Lugt 1419); hi sale, London (Thomas Philipe, 16 th April 1794 and following days, lot 271 or 272; Joseph R. Ritman; Private collection, Belgium
Condition	In fine condition

The only recorded impression of this print in the first state, before the plate edges were evened out and the hatching completed, is in the British Museum. The present impression is finer in quality than the Museum’s second state, which is no surprise, coming as it does from John Barnard, one of the great connoisseurs of Rembrandt’s prints in the 18th century.

This old man with his flowing beard is a type that quite often appears in the Rembrandt’s œuvre of around 1631. The rendering of the head is closely akin to the red chalk drawing in the Musée du Louvre, which shows the same model in a mirror image, and the lighting is very similar. The image was not created in a single operation. Countless more heavily bitten lines can be seen over a previously-etched, light design in the man’s face, hair and on the right shoulder. The two known states do not document these steps, but do build on the procedure followed.

In the first state, the bust is complete, but the contrast between the initial design and the more heavily bitten addition is too strong. In the second state, Rembrandt consequently introduced myriad new lines and strokes in the hair, on the head around the left ear and in the beard. The shadow beside a model was also reinforced with cross-hatching.

Although this plate dates early in Rembrandt’s etching career, it already shows a mastery of the technique, especially in the sensitive treatment of the wrinkled face of the old man. Nowell-Usticke describes the plate as RR-, a very scarce small plate to find.

The present entry is taken from Nancy Bialler and Adrian Eeles, *A Collection of Etchings by Rembrandt [...] formed by Joseph Ritman, Artemis & Sotheby’s*, London, 1995; and Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etching form the Frits Lugt Collection*, Fondation Custodia, Paris, 2008



The Large Lion Hunt

Etching drypoint and engraving on laid paper, ca. 1641	
Plate	224 × 300 mm
Watermark	Cross of Lorraine, with the initial P below (Hinterding version B, text p. 100; plates p. 163)
Reference	Bartsch 114; Hind 181; White-Boon 114, 2 nd (final) state; Nowell-Usticke 114 2 nd (final) state; New Hollstein 187, 2 nd (final) state)
Provenance	Dominique Vivant-Denon (without the stamp); Baron J.G. Verstolk van Soelen (without the signature), his sale De Vries/Brondgeest/Roos, 25-26 October 1847, <i>Catalogue de la seconde partie</i> , lot 314 (<i>Chasse aux lions, belle épreuve (Collect. Denon)</i>); Heneage Finch, 5 th Earl of Aylesford (Lugt 58); Samuel Woodburn; Dr. August Sträter (Lugt 787), Sale of his collection, Gutekunst, Stuttgart, 10-14 May 1898, Lot 746 (<i>Die große Löwenjagd: Vorzüglicher Abdruck des zweiten Zustands mit der Überarbeitung an der Stirne des Pferdes rechts gegen den Rand. Aus den Sammlungen Verstolk und Aylesford</i> ; Werner Weisbach (Lugt 2659a), Sale of his collection, Gutekunst, Bern, 11 March 1954 (Lugt: <i>Le principal intérêt résidait dans la série de Rembrandt</i>); Dr. W. Cordes; Dr. Edgar F. Paltzer (Lugt 4262); Sotheby's London, 5 December 1996, lot 165; Private collection, Europe
Condition	In fair and untouched condition, with small areas of foxing throughout, an old fold is visible off the centre to the right running from the upper to the lower edge

Here is a superb impression of this extremely rare print. Nowell-Usticke rates it as RRR - A very rare sketch print. It shows nice burr on the few drypoint lines as well as a very nice plate tone. It is in untouched conditions with small margins all round, which is remarkable for such a large print. The watermark is a Cross of Lorrain, dated ca. 1647 by Erik Hinterding, and is visible on other impressions of the second state (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum in Braunschweig).

To render such a whirling spectacle on the plate in one swoop testifies of an immense audacity, self-confidence, and technical mastery. Rembrandt's prime aim was to suggest swift movements and to depict the lion-hunters' strength and fierce commitment. The plate is crisscrossed by movements: the hurried flight of the lion to the left and the stampede of hunters on horseback galloping to the right. At the centre, a horseman aims a spear at the lion that speeds away, while one of the hunters has just been thrown to the ground, lying perilously under his horse. Two archers are aiming at the lion chased by another hunter brandishing his sword. A lioness, already transfixed, lies on the ground. This is a fictitious scene rendered with an astonishing realism. In the background a palm tree contains Rembrandt signature and 1641.

Rembrandt had etched ten years earlier, two smaller lion hunts (B115 and 116). The present one reveals the enormous strides he has made since as a printmaker.

Rembrandt probably owned a cast of a small sculpture, such as those made by Adriaen de Vries, and used it as a model for the animal at the centre... Rembrandt might also have taken his inspiration from an etching depicting a lion hunt, by Antonio Tempesta. We know that Rembrandt collected much of the Italian's prints and used it more than once. The palm tree echoes Tempesta's etching, and Rembrandt paraphrases other elements too. For his Large Lion Hunt, he might also have borrowed the mounted figure, cut off at the left, from an engraving by Johannes Collaert after Johannes Stradanus, *Deer Hunt*, the king of printed hunting scene. Whatever these masters may have had to offer, they had none of the light tone and sketch-like qualities that give Rembrandt's etching such unique appeal.

The desirability of such an impression is furthermore indicated by the illustrious list of previous owners, among the best collectors of Rembrandt's etchings. Vertolk, Aylesford and Sträter all together made a dream for a collector.



6 **Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn** 1606 Leiden – Amsterdam 1669

The Triumph of Mordecai

Etching and drypoint on laid paper, ca. 1641	
Plate	173 × 214 mm
Watermark	With a partial watermark of the crown of a Fleur-de-Lis
Reference	Bartsch 40; Hind 172; White & Boon 40, only state; Nowell-Usticke 40, first state of two; New Hollstein 185, only state
Provenance	C.G. Boerner Neue Lagerliste 100, 1993, no. 43; Private collection, Europe
Condition	In very good condition

Usually seen in poor impressions, it is here an extremely fine impression with a very rich and effective, but harmoniously whipped burr, well balanced by means of a slight darkness on the faces of Ahasuerus and Esther on the balcony at right as well as in the lower right corner. With narrow and equal margins all round, on sturdy paper. It is also important to point out the very skilful use of the drypoint here, not only to emphasize a few lines, but to draw a large part of the print, a very innovative way and an important point in Rembrandt's development as an etcher, as indicated by Erik Hinterding.

Christopher White has observed that composition, arrangement of figures and the use of extreme contrasts of light and dark present similarities with the so well-known painting *the Night Watch* (Amsterdam Rijksmuseum) completed in 1642, where a large group of people are also portrayed in front of a gate, while the handling of the light is similar. It also anticipates *the Hundred Guilder Print* (Bartsch 74) where the figures on one side of the composition are etched entirely with lines while the characters on the other side are executed very tonally against a shadowy background.

In the Old Testament, Mordecai was a Jewish exile in Persia who had once foiled an attempt on the life of King

Ahasuerus. Years later the king was reminded that the man has never been rewarded for it. He summoned his highest councillor, Haman, to him and asked him to pay tribute to Mordecai by leading him in a triumphal procession through the town, seated on the king's horse and dresses in the king's clothes. Haman, who bore a deep hatred towards the Jews and had plans to wipe them out, could not refuse the order. However, Haman had already convinced the king to perpetrate the dreadful genocide of the Jews exiled in Persia: the date has already been set and instructions sent to the officials of the provinces of the empire. Mordecai knows this. So, behind this supposedly triumphal procession, a carnage is being prepared. This subject was not often portrayed in Dutch art, but Rembrandt could fall back on two illustrious examples for his etching: the engraving by Lucas van Leyde of 1515 and the painting by his own teacher Pieter Lastman of 1624. He borrowed the large number of figures from Lucas, in fact, even paraphrasing the old master in one case, the man under the balcony who respectfully takes off his cap.

The present entry is taken from Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999; and Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etching form the Frits Lugt Collection*, Fondation Custodia, Paris, 2008.



7 **Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn** 1606 Leiden – Amsterdam 1669

The Virgin and Child with the Cat and Snake

Etching on laid paper, 1654	
Plate	95 × 145 mm
Reference	Bartsch 63; Hind 275; White & Boon 63, first state of two; Nowell-Usticke 63, first state of two; New Hollstein 278, first state of two
Provenance	Dr. F.A. Lieberg (Lugt 1681); his sale, Galerie Kornfeld, Bern, June 21, 1979, lot 31; Private collection, Europe
Condition	In very good condition

A very fine early impression, still showing the vertical polishing scratches in the foreground and printing with subtle plate tone. In very good condition with exceptional wide margins all round, of circa three centimetres.

Mary with the snake is an allusion to Genesis 3, 15: “*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*”. In the Middle Ages this passage was associated with Mary as the new Eve, and in Rembrandt’s days the text was understood in the Protestant Church as a promise of Christ’s victory over Satan. The group of the Virgin with the child is partially borrowed from the Madonna engraving by Mantegna. Rembrandt has not only taken over the poses of the figures, but also studied and adapted the technique of Mantegna’s print.

This is reflected in the strict and simple hatching and creation of form. At the same time, however, Rembrandt weakens the sculptural character of Mantegna’s style. This and the addition of casual, everyday elements help to give the etching its strong sense of intimacy

Beside its religious theme and the biblical allusions, this print is a most touching expression of maternal love and protection, contemplated through the window by Joseph. 1654 is also the year of the birth of Cornelia, daughter of Rembrandt and his beloved Hendrickje Stoffels, the only child who will survive them.

The present entry is inspired from Jan Piet Filedt Kok, *Rembrandt etchings and drawings in the Rembrandt House*, Amsterdam, 1972; and Erik Hinterding, *Rembrandt Etching form the Frits Lugt Collection*, Fondation Custodia, Paris, 2008.



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Eric Gillis

Design

Tia Džamonja

Translation/Editing

Eric Gillis, Jean-Marie Gillis & Rhonda Sherwood

Scan

Jérôme Allard, Numérisart, Bruxelles

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GILLIS GOLDMAN FINE ART

T +32 2 503 14 64

W www.gillisgoldman.com

M noemie@gillisgoldman.com

1, rue aux laines

1000 Brussels | Belgium