REMBRANDT: TRUE TO LIFE

Artwork labels

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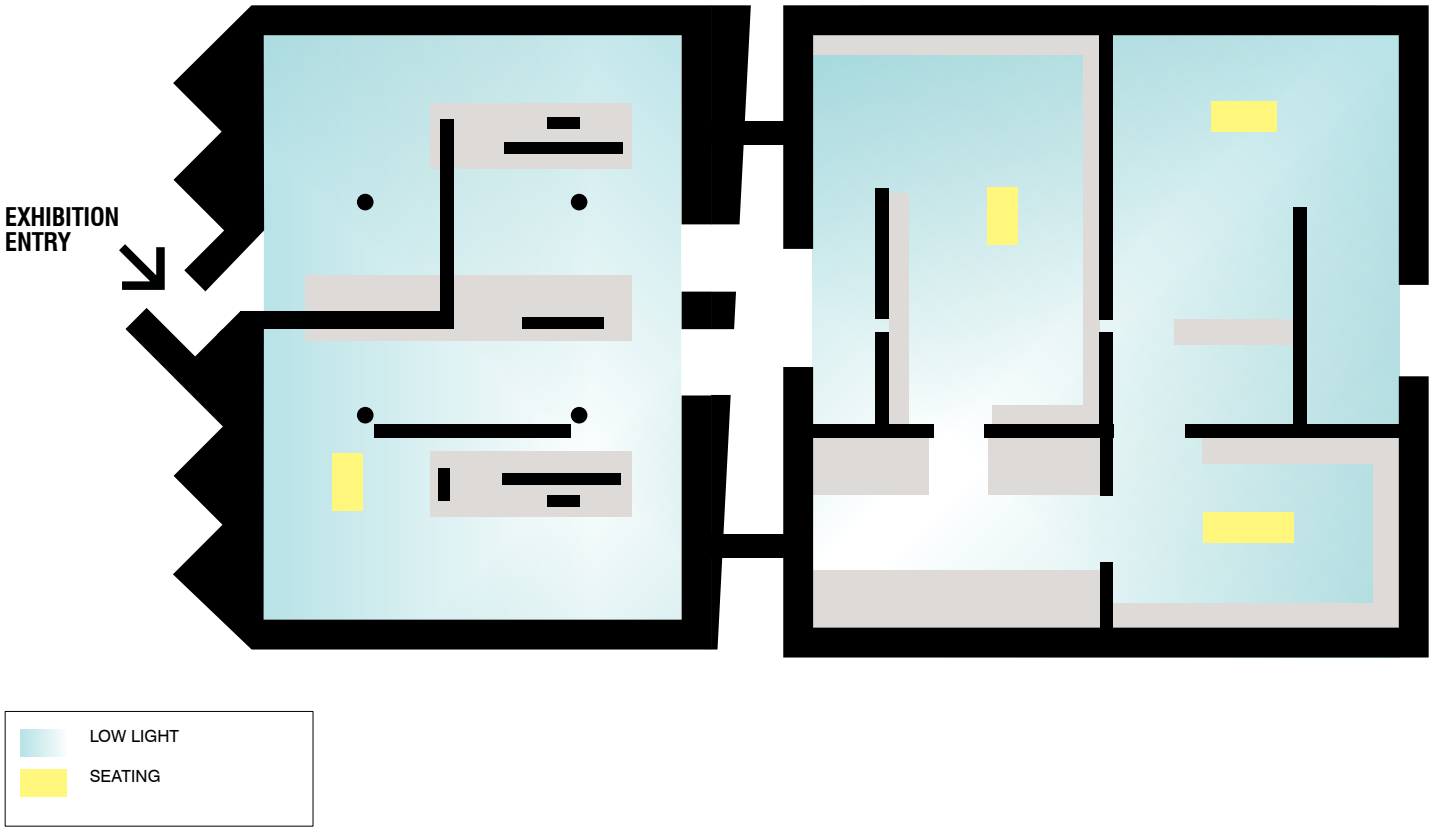
Exhibition Sensory Map

This map on the following page shows the locations of audio-visual content, sensory elements and seating and can help people with autism or disability prepare for their visit.

Visit **ngv.melbourne/access** for more resources and information about accessible facilities, events and services at NGV.


EXHIBITION
ENTRY
LOW LIGHT
SEATING

Music is used throughout. The exhibition follows a set path. If you need assistance exiting quickly, please see security team members. Gallery spaces are air conditioned and are between 20 and 24 degrees Celcius.

Visit **ngv.melbourne/access** for more resources and information about accessible facilities and services for your visit to NGV.

Room: Introduction

Room description: Large room with black walls and a column in the centre. Framed works displayed on walls around the perimeter.

Wall text:

Introduction

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–69) was an artist of extraordinary talent and vision – a brilliant observer, storyteller and innovator. While most seventeenth-century Dutch artists specialised in one particular genre, Rembrandt explored a wide range of subjects, including self-portraits and portraits, biblical motifs, landscapes, nudes and scenes of everyday life. All of these themes are explored in *Rembrandt: True to Life*, which follows the evolution of Rembrandt's work over four decades, from the dramatic Baroque style of his early years to the contemplative and introspective later works.

Rembrandt was the first artist to fully

explore the possibilities of etching, producing 314 prints over the course of his career. In this exhibition, more than 100 etchings reveal the inventive ways in which Rembrandt approached his subject matter – his unique re-imagining of biblical themes, his unorthodox style, and the development of psychological complexity in narrative scenes and portraits.

Rembrandt: True to Life showcases the National Gallery of Victoria's rich holdings of prints by Rembrandt, alongside key paintings from the NGV Collection and important loans from European and North American museums.

All works, unless otherwise noted, are by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn.

Self-portrait in a cap, wide-eyed and open-mouthed

1630

etching, 2nd state

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam RP-P-OB-697

Rembrandt made around eighty self-portraits over the course of his career – more than any artist before him. This early print, created when Rembrandt was twenty-four years old, is one of four small etchings made in 1630, in which the artist rehearses facial expressions as an actor would practise his repertoire. This was a standard exercise for artists learning to depict ‘the passions’, but no-one had previously made such studies in print, a medium intended for wide distribution.

Self-portrait wearing a soft cap: full-face, head only

c. 1634

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1961 1239-5

Wall text:

Early years in Leiden

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn was born in Leiden in 1606. His parents had a malt mill near the river Rhine (Rijn), and the family home was located opposite the mill. Rembrandt was one of ten children, seven of whom survived into adulthood. He was sent to a Latin school, where his subjects would have included rhetoric, history and Bible studies. From the age of around fifteen he studied drawing and painting with Jacob Isaacsz. van Swanenburg, before going to Amsterdam to be apprenticed to Pieter Lastman, a history painter who had travelled to Italy and was influenced by Venetian and Roman art.

After he returned to Leiden in 1625, Rembrandt set up a studio alongside fellow artist Jan Lievens. The secretary to the Prince of Orange in The Hague, Constantijn Huygens, came to visit both artists in their studio in 1628 and praised their extraordinary talent. Describing the figure of the repenting Judas in Rembrandt's painting *Judas returning the thirty pieces of silver,* Huygens wrote that, to his astonishment, 'a youth, a Dutchman, a beardless miller, could put so much in one human figure and depict it all. … All honor to thee, Rembrandt!'.

The artist’s mother: head and bust, three-quarters right

1628

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891 p.185.4-1

Rembrandt’s first dated etching depicts the artist’s mother. Neeltgen Willemsdr. van Zuytbroeck came from a well-to-do family who owned a bakery in Leiden. Even though Rembrandt had only been making etchings for three or four years when he made this portrait, he was already highly accomplished in rendering the effects of light and dark through varied types of hatching.

The artist's mother: head only, full face

1628

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3812-4

This small etching is an example of the way in which Rembrandt experimented with cross-hatching techniques to create the effect of light and shade. In the process of developing this print, Rembrandt first drew only the face of his mother. He printed several trial impressions, and then extended the portrait to a bust, adding the cap that casts a deep shadow over the face. He must have been dissatisfied with the result, because he cut the plate just below the chin in the second version of the print that is seen here.

The artist’s mother in a cloth head-dress, looking down: head only

1633

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1959

535-5

Tobit and Anna with the kid

1626

oil on canvas

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam SK-A-4717

This small painting is considered a turning point in Rembrandt's technical ability and innovation. The apocryphal Book of Tobit tells a story in which Anna returns home to her blind husband Tobit with a baby goat. The kid was a gift to her, but Tobit accuses Anna of stealing it, which startles her. Rembrandt chose to depict an unusual moment in the story, in which the despairing Tobit adopts the pose of a penitent, praying for death to come. The painting shows the influence of his teacher Pieter Lastman's principles of composition and the emphasis on the expression of emotions. The features of Anna bear a strong resemblance to those of the artist's mother.

The artist’s mother, with hand on chest: small bust

1631

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1960

1244-5

Bald-headed man in profile right: the artist's father (?)

1630

etching and drypoint, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4863-3

Bust of an old man with a flowing beard: the head bowed forward: left shoulder unshaded

1630

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4864-3

Old man seated

1631

red and black chalk

Teylers Museum, Haarlem O+ 050

Rembrandt made numerous studies of older men, paying particular attention to their expressive faces and flowing beards. These drawings served as reference material for his prints and paintings; in particular, for biblical and mythological figures. The seated man in this drawing resembles the scholarly ‘types’ in *Two old men disputing*.

Two old men disputing

1628

oil on wood panel

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1936

349-4

Rembrandt painted this work when he was around twenty-two years old, and it is indicative of the individuality and brilliance that distinguished him among the leading artists of Leiden. Compared with the earlier *Tobit and Anna with the kid*, Rembrandt reduced his colour range to create an intimate atmosphere. The strong shaft of light that cuts across the composition focuses attention on the expressive face and gesture of the figure in white, yet it is bright enough to illuminate the objects in the shadows. Here, Rembrandt shows his distinctive exploration of light and darkness, which transcends the

technique of his teacher Pieter Lastman. This work foreshadows Rembrandt's extraordinary achievements in painting.

Old beggar woman with a gourd

c. 1629

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4870-3

Beggar leaning on a stick, facing left

c. 1630

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3813-4

Rembrandt made several etchings depicting beggars while he was living in Leiden. The earliest of these generally portray single figures. Typologically and technically, they are greatly indebted to the etchings of his older contemporary Jacques Callot, whose prints Rembrandt collected. He was also familiar with Renaissance prints featuring beggars in scenes of everyday life, including those by his fellow townsman Lucas van Leyden. Rembrandt is known to have paid a very high price for van Leyden's print *The beggars* in 1642.

Sheet of studies: head of the artist, beggar couple, heads of an old man and old woman, etc.

1632

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4873-3

The presentation in the temple with the angel: small plate

1630

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3815-4

During the early years in Leiden, Rembrandt made more than 100 etchings, but only a few of these are of biblical motifs. *The presentation in the temple* is one of these prints and, although it is lightly etched and modest in scale, it shows Rembrandt's originality and innovation in the depiction of the story. The print depicts the kneeling Virgin Mary next to the aged Simeon holding the infant Jesus, whom he has recognised as the Redeemer. On the left, an angel alerts the prophetess Anna to the significance of the event. Rembrandt adds incidental figures to the scene –

the child on the left looks away from the sacred event, distracted by the beggar who walks out of the picture on the left.

Beggar seated on a bank

1630

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3814-4

Bearded man in a furred oriental cap and robe

1631

etching and engraving, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4869-3

Wall text:

Rembrandt the etcher

Printmaking was an integral part of Rembrandt's work, equal in importance to his painting and drawing. He started making prints as a young man in Leiden in the mid 1620s, and completed 314 etchings by the time of his death in Amsterdam in 1669. In the process, he redefined the possibilities of the medium, and established new creative and technical standards that have inspired generations of artists.

Although etching had been used since the early sixteenth century, very few artists utilised the inherent freedom it allowed, emulating instead the highly systematic linear vocabulary of traditional engraving.

In engraving the lines of the design are cut by hand into a copper plate with a sharp tool known as a burin, while in etching they are created by the chemical action of acid ‘biting’ into the plate. The artist first draws the design with a pointed needle onto a plate prepared with a protective wax ground. The plate is then immersed in acid, and the metal exposed by the strokes of the needle are etched by the acid to produce grooves that hold the ink when the plate is printed.

It was Rembrandt who, with his instinct for the inherent potential of diverse mediums, approached etching with unprecedented freedom, thereby establishing a new pictorial language for printmaking.

Wall text:

Rembrandt moves to Amsterdam

Between 1631 and 1632 Rembrandt relocated from Leiden to Amsterdam, a thriving metropolis and the centre of art production and trade. He moved into the house of the art dealer Hendrick Uylenburgh and worked as the head of his studio. Over the next three years, he received numerous portrait commissions, established his network and learnt about marketing art.

In Rembrandt's time, the great majority of commissions were either civic or private. Royal patronage was not extensive in the Netherlands, nor were commissions from the Church, because churches in the Protestant north did not require images of

saints and elaborate altarpieces. Many works that were produced at this time were made to be sold on the open market. Burghers of the Dutch Republic liked to decorate their houses with paintings and prints depicting biblical motifs, landscapes, scenes of everyday life and ‘tronies’ (character types).

Tronies were made as studies for figures in historical and biblical compositions, and as autonomous works. Rembrandt frequently dressed his sitters (and himself) in exotic or historicising dress with accessories including plumed berets, turbans and jewellery. Because tronies were not portraits of individuals, the artist had the freedom to invent a role for the sitter, and to study facial expressions and the effects of light and shade.

Self-portrait (?) with plumed cap and lowered sabre

1634

etching and engraving, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3816-4

Rembrandt took his own features as the starting point for this etching. He developed the portrait into a tronie by adding a beard and a wart to the left of the nose, as well as extravagant clothing. His interest in physiognomy and role-playing is a preoccupation throughout Rembrandt's work in painting, drawing and print.

The first oriental head

1635

etching and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3820-4

This and the work shown alongside are from a series of four etchings traditionally known as ‘the four oriental heads’. These are free copies made after tronie etchings by Rembrandt’s friend Jan Lievens. Rembrandt inscribed three of the plates as being ‘retouched by Rembrandt’. Because of this, they were long thought to have been made by a pupil and finished by Rembrandt, an interpretation that has now been dismissed. The attribution of Rembrandt’s paintings, drawings and, to a lesser extent, his etchings is a very complex aspect of the artist’s work, which has been part of Rembrandt scholarship since the eighteenth century.

The second oriental head

c. 1635

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3821-4

The Persian

1632

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4874-3

The triumph of Mordecai

c. 1641

etching and drypoint, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 29-4

In this elaborately staged scene, Rembrandt tells the Old Testament tale of revenge from the Book of Esther in which Mordecai triumphs over the scheming conspirator Haman. Mordecai, an exiled Israelite living in the Persian empire ruled by King Ahasuerus, exposed a plot on the king's life. The king asks his chief councillor, Haman, who planned to kill Mordecai and all other Jewish exiles, how he should honour a deserving subject. Haman, thinking that he was to receive a reward, suggests that the honour should be to carry royal insignia and ride the king's horse through the city. Rembrandt shows Mordecai riding in majesty, and

his humiliated enemy Haman leading the procession, while King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther look on from the balcony on the right.

Bearded man in a velvet cap with a jewel clasp

1637

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

18-4

Man in oriental clothing

1635

oil on panel

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam SK-A-3340

This elaborate tronie is a beautiful example of the genre that Rembrandt helped to popularise. The sitter is painted in an elaborate turban decorated with a gold chain, a clasp and a large pearl. In his posthumous biography of Rembrandt, Arnold Houbraken claimed that the artist would ‘spend as much as one or two days dressing up a turban in the way he thought it should be’. Rembrandt collected clothing and jewellery, artefacts and weaponry from Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, which he and his students would use as props for paintings and prints. There was an active trade network between Europe, Turkey and the Middle East, and south-east Asian

artefacts were imported through the Dutch East India Company.

Three oriental figures (Jacob and Laban?)

1641

etching and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

34-4

Old man in a turban (Study for an Elder)

c. 1638

pen and iron-gall ink on paper tinted with a pale yellow wash

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1936 357-4

This sketch, and the drawing displayed alongside, relate to the apocryphal Old Testament story of Susanna, who was spied upon by two Elders while bathing. This sketch is an early preparatory drawing for one of the Elders in Rembrandt's painting of the subject, in which the man leans forward and grasps Susanna's robe, his raised hand making a lewd gesture. The painting, now in Berlin's Gemäldegalerie, was completed in 1647, which means that it must have taken around ten years or more for Rembrandt to resolve the

complex composition. The iron gall ink in this drawing was originally dark grey, but oxidisation over time caused the browning and ‘bleeding effect’ of the lines.

Susanna and the Elders

c. 1650–55

pen and brown ink touched with white, later additions of grey wash

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam RP-T-1898-A-3689

After Rembrandt had made two oil paintings of Susanna in 1636 and 1647, he returned to the subject in the early 1650s. This drawing shows a similar arrangement of figures as in the 1647 Berlin painting, albeit in reverse, with the two men more prominent and actively talking to Susanna while she turns towards them, instead of looking out towards the viewer. Rembrandt continuously adjusted poses and gestures as he worked out how to convey the actions and motivations of characters most effectively. Here, the arm of the Elder on the left has been changed, and its former position is still discernible.

Various students of Rembrandt made drawings of Susanna and the Elders, which suggests that the motif was studied and debated in his workshop.

Room: Rembrandt and Saskia

Room description: Black walls and bluestone floor. Dividing walls and ankle-height plinths with under lighting. Seating located towards the back of the room and framed works displayed on walls around the perimeter.

Wall text:

Rembrandt and Saskia

In 1634 Rembrandt joined the Amsterdam painters' guild, which enabled him to set up his own workshop and sell paintings in his own right. That same year he married Saskia Uylenburgh, the young cousin of Hendrick Uylenburgh, whose painting studio he had been managing since his arrival in Amsterdam.

By the mid 1630s, Rembrandt was the most successful portrait painter in Amsterdam. His workshop attracted numerous apprentices, including Govert Flinck and Ferdinand Bol, who came to learn the fashionable new style and technique of the master. They paid up to

100 guilders a year, the highest tuition fee in Amsterdam.

While Rembrandt's career was flourishing, his private life was marked by grief. Saskia gave birth to four children, three of whom died in infancy. She died just before her thirtieth birthday in 1642, a few months after the birth of the couple's only surviving son, Titus. Rembrandt managed to finish his great painting *The night watch* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) a few months later, but did not accept major painting commissions after this for some years. Instead, he invested much time and energy in his large studio operation and turned his attention to exploring etching techniques.

Self-portrait with Saskia

1636

etching, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

14-4

Rembrandt was thirty years old when he made this self-portrait with Saskia two years after they married. He etched the figure of Saskia first, then added his own portrait in the foreground. This is one of only a few self-portraits in which Rembrandt shows himself in the act of drawing his reflection in a mirror.

St Catherine (‘The Little Jewish Bride’)

1638

etching and touches of drypoint,
only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1960 1243-5

Saskia became Rembrandt’s muse and model. He drew intimate portraits of her in domestic settings, and Saskia also provided Rembrandt with a female ‘type’ that he frequently used in his portrayal of women. She was cast in various mythological and biblical roles, including Flora and St Catherine.

The great Jewish bride

1635

etching, engraving and drypoint, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 11-4

In this etching Saskia is dressed in elaborate costume with long, flowing hair, seated in an imposing architectural setting and holding a scroll. Images such as these were not intended as portraits but as ‘tronies’, character studies that evoke biblical, mythological or literary figures without representing anyone in particular. The title of the etching goes back to the eighteenth century when the image was thought to depict a Jewish bride dressed to meet her husband, but it has also been interpreted as a portrayal of the Biblical Queen Esther, Minerva, or a sibyl.

Jan Cornelis Sylvius

1633

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1959 530-5

Jan Cornelis Sylvius, a preacher of the Reformed Church, was the husband of Saskia's older cousin Aeltje, and became Saskia's guardian when she was orphaned at the age of twelve. He officiated at Saskia and Rembrandt's betrothal and baptised two of their children, both of whom died when they were only a few months old. This is Rembrandt's earliest portrait etching, the first of two portraits of Sylvius, the second being a posthumous image.

Jan Cornelis Sylvius, preacher

1646

etching, engraving and drypoint with etched tone, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.185.8-1

This commemorative portrait of Jan Cornelis Sylvius was commissioned by Petrus Sylvius, Jan Cornelis's son, eight years after the preacher's death. Here, Sylvius is shown leaning forward beyond the circular frame as if addressing the audience, his rhetorical gesture suggestive of his life as a public orator. This trompe l'oeil (deception of the eye) effect adds an additional dimension, both literally and metaphorically, as Sylvius seems to be reaching out from the other side of the picture. The text below the image describes Sylvius's life and work.

Three heads of women, one lightly etched

c. 1637

etching, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1961 1002-5

Although these heads were modelled on Saskia, the etching was not intended as a portrait. It emulates an informal drawn sheet of studies in its combination of three heads in varying stages of completion. Such a ‘study sheet’ was commonly made by a workshop master as part of the instruction of students. A strong market developed for these prints among collectors, as is corroborated by the number of impressions Rembrandt printed of them in his lifetime.

Woman in North Holland dress, seen from the back (Geertje Dircks?)

c. 1640–45

pen and brush

Teylers Museum, Haarlem O+ 051

The woman in this drawing has been identified as Geertje Dircks, whom Rembrandt hired to take care of his baby son, Titus, after Saskia died. Rembrandt started a relationship with Geertje, which deteriorated after seven years. She claimed that Rembrandt had promised to marry her, and brought a suit against him before the Chamber of Marital Affairs to seek financial settlement. Rembrandt paid her an annual allowance, and subsequently Geertje was confined to a House of Correction in Gouda at Rembrandt's instigation. Her animosity towards Rembrandt was probably triggered by the arrival of another

domestic servant, Hendrickje Stoffels, who moved into the house in 1649 and soon became Rembrandt’s new lover.

Sheet of studies
recto: Two seated women, another standing with a child in her arms
verso: Young man in a turban and a sleeping woman
c. 1636
pen and iron-gall ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1936 356-4

Originally, this double-sided sheet was almost certainly a page in a sketchbook. One side shows three sketches of women, one of whom holds a child, the other depicts a man in a turban and a young woman sleeping. While the sleeping woman bears a certain resemblance to Rembrandt's depictions of Saskia, the other drawings are not of Saskia.

Wall text:

1639

In 1639, when Rembrandt was at the height of his success, he bought an imposing house on Sint Antoniesbreestraat for the vast sum of 13,000 guilders. The home he shared with Saskia also accommodated the artist's studio, a workshop for his apprentices, an art dealership where he sold his works and those of other artists, and a 'Cabinet of curiosities'. Rembrandt was a keen collector of prints and drawings. Art historical traditions were very important to him, and he borrowed figures, poses and compositions from works by his predecessors and contemporaries.

In his *Self-portrait leaning on a stone sill* from 1639, Rembrandt appears self-confidently flamboyant, with long hair and a manicured gentleman's moustache. He turns towards the viewer with his arm resting on a stone sill, a pose adopted from portraits by Titian, Raphael and Albrecht Dürer. The Renaissance costume takes him out of the context of his contemporaries and positions him in line with his artistic ancestors. In this way, he presents himself as a successful artist who is claiming his place not only in Amsterdam society, but in the history of art.

Self-portrait leaning on a stone sill

1639

etching and touches of drypoint with black chalk additions, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891 p.186.5-1

The NGV's print of Rembrandt's self-portrait is a fresh and early impression that captures every nuance of the artist's fine curls and the texture of his robe. This is one of six impressions on which the artist has drawn adjustments in chalk, most noticeably on the masonry and the balustrade in the right corner, to mark the alterations that he considered making on the plate.

Wall text:

Nudes

The study of the nude figure was an essential part of artistic training. Nudes were drawn from sculptures and, increasingly, also from life models. Rembrandt placed primary importance on working *naer het leven* (from life). He sketched from models and organised drawing classes for his students from the mid 1640s. His approach focused attention on capturing lifelike poses and gestures, light, colour and texture, rather than concentrating on clear outlines and perfect Classical proportions.

Rembrandt was familiar with art theoretical debates and publications, such as Karel van Mander's *Schilder-*

boek (*The Book on Painting*), published in 1604. He also owned a copy of Albrecht Dürer's *Treatise on Human Proportion* (1525) and studied Italian Renaissance art through his vast collection of prints and drawings – all of these references informed his images of nudes. As with his landscape etchings, which are combinations of various sketches made 'on the spot', Rembrandt's nudes are carefully constructed composites of art historical references, observations from life, memory and the imagination.

Diana at the bath

c. 1631

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by the National Gallery Society of Victoria, Governor,
in celebration of their 50th Anniversary Year, 1997 1997.324

In one of Rembrandt's earliest images of a nude, the artist challenges the conventional representation of mythological goddesses. Diana, goddess of the hunt, is not a distant classical beauty, but an unidealised figure drawn from life. Rembrandt's realism was posthumously criticised by several artists and writers, including the poet Andries Pels, who wrote in 1681: 'When he would paint a naked woman, he chose no Greek Venus as his model, but a washer-woman or peat-treader from a barn ... Flabby breasts, distorted hands, yes even the marks of corset-lacing on the

stomach and of the stockings round the legs, must all be followed, or nature was not satisfied’.

The artist drawing from the model

c. 1639

etching and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1923 1278.302-3

In this incomplete print, a nude woman holding a palm frond stands amid various studio props while the artist is sketching her. The image is an allegory of art – the bust on the right stands for the medium of sculpture, the easel symbolises painting and the sketching artist represents drawing. Because the half-finished image makes visible the stages of etching, the work also provides insight into the art of printmaking. The plate may have remained unfinished because Rembrandt was dissatisfied with it, but it is also possible that he decided to print it in this unfinished state because

he recognised the appeal to collectors and print connoisseurs, or because it was a useful tool in the instruction of students.

Nude man seated on the ground with one leg extended

1646

etching and engraving, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

42-4

Nude man seated before a curtain

1646

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1972 P6-1973

In the mid 1640s Rembrandt organised life-drawing sessions for his students. His *Nude man seated before a curtain* and *Nude man seated on the ground with one leg extended* were almost certainly drawn straight onto the copper plate in one of these sessions. Several surviving drawings by at least three students, including Samuel van Hoogstraten, show the same model from different angles. A comparison reveals that Rembrandt took his figure studies a step further than his students, adding a background that helped to define the contours of the body and suggesting

ways to develop a figure study into a pictorial composition by adding props, such as the curtain.

Woman bathing her feet at a brook

1658

etching and drypoint on buff Japanese paper, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3836-4

Woman sitting half-dressed beside a stove

1658

etching, engraving and drypoint, 6th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3835-4

Rembrandt refined this print through seven ‘states’, or versions, in a continuous process of adjustment. In earlier impressions, the model wore a cap, which has been erased to show her uncovered hair. Changes were also made to the background, the stove and the folds of the skirt. In contrast to the early nude *Diana at the bath*, in which the model is in the foreground of the image, Rembrandt’s late etchings draw the viewer into an atmospheric domestic space. Here, the quiet intimacy of the scene is enhanced by the gentle diffused

light and the suggestion of warmth emanating from the stove.

Woman with the arrow

1661

etching, drypoint and plate-tone, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, AC DBE, Founder Benefactor, 1998 1998.284

Rembrandt's last nude, and the second-last etching he ever made, is based on a model drawn from life. Two related drawings in the Rijksmuseum, now attributed to Johannes Raven, show the same woman drawn from different angles. In Raven's images, the model's raised arm is holding onto a rope or sling to help her maintain the pose. Rembrandt replaced the rope with an arrow, added an elegant headdress and changed the setting of the studio into a curtained bed. Because of the arrow, the figure is generally believed to depict Venus, and

the young male in the background on the left – likely a student sketching the model from the other side – is cast in the role of Cupid.

Self-portrait in a velvet cap with plume

1638

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

19-4

Wall text:

Landscape

Landscapes played an increasingly active role in the narrative of Rembrandt's paintings and etchings from the 1630s, and he started composing independent landscape images in the early 1640s. Only a few of these were executed as paintings, and almost thirty as etchings. The prints depict rustic cottages, farmsteads and riverbanks set against distant views of the city. Although many of the locations can be identified, these landscapes were not intended as topographical records. Rather, they are composed of separately observed motifs and views taken from different angles.

Rembrandt's ability to capture the

transitory qualities of light and air is unprecedented in the medium of etching – some landscapes convey the atmosphere of a warm summer's afternoon, while others represent the sun breaking through passing storm clouds. The landscapes are populated by small figures working in the fields, leisurely strolling in the countryside, or rowing in boats on the river. Included in this group of prints are images of Saint Jerome and Saint Francis depicted as hermits in Italianate landscapes. These were inspired by Venetian prints in Rembrandt's art collection.

Cottage with a white paling

1648

etching and drypoint, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3827-4

Landscape with cottage and haybarn

1641

etching with touches of drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Collection of James O Fairfax AC. Presented by Bridgestar Pty Ltd through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020

2020.472

This early landscape etching depicts a partly overgrown cottage with a thatched roof, and a barn that is used to shelter a wagon. On the left-hand side, in the far distance, Amsterdam appears with its distinctive three church towers (depicted in the print in reverse). On the right, nestled among the trees by the banks of the river Amstel, is a manor house identified as Kostverloren, which was demolished in the mid seventeenth century. This is an invented landscape in which Rembrandt brought together

various sites that he had sketched on different occasions.

The Omval

1645

etching, drypoint and etched tone, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3828-4

The Omval is a peninsula on the eastern shore of the river Amstel south-east of Amsterdam. In Rembrandt's time, this was a popular destination for leisure activities. The image has two distinct parts – the right side presents a view across the river towards houses and mills, and a man watching a boat that carries a group of well-dressed gentlemen. In the foreground on the left, under the old willow tree, a young man can be seen crowning his companion with a leafy garland.

The mill

1645–48

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 1942.9.62

Rembrandt’s largest landscape painting depicts a towering windmill against a dramatic moody sky. Storm clouds recede to the left, as sunlight filters through the clouds to illuminate the sails of the mill and the river below. Prior to its restoration in 1977–79, the painting was much darker in tone and mood, an aesthetic that greatly appealed to nineteenth-century connoisseurs who considered this an outstanding proto-Romantic work. The removal of its discoloured varnish revealed a much brighter palette and more dynamic composition, which has changed the interpretation of the work. Once considered a melancholic

autobiographical work related to Rembrandt's childhood, it now seems more likely that *The mill* is a study of atmospheric effects, not dissimilar to the motif depicted in the nearby etching *The three trees*.

The three trees

1643

etching, drypoint and engraving, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891 p.185.7-1

This is Rembrandt's largest and most evocative landscape etching. The sky, with its massed clouds, diagonal passages of rain and bursts of light, creates a sense of drama. The heroic presence of the three trees carries moral overtones, and an analogy has been drawn with the three crosses of Calvary, where Christ was crucified between the two thieves. Yet the landscape is also filled with details of human activity that continues undisturbed by the coming storm – a fisherman and his wife are at the water's edge, a cattle herder is working in the field, a pair of lovers are

concealed in the undergrowth at the right, and on the horizon behind the trees is a horse-drawn wagon, and a lone artist sits on the hill, looking into the distance.

Landscape with a cow drinking

c. 1650

etching and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3830-4

Panorama near Bloemendael showing the Saxenburg estate (‘The goldweigher’s field’)

1651

etching and drypoint and plate-tone, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.186.2-1

The goldweigher’s field presents a panoramic view over an expansive country estate, fields and meadows, to the distant city of Haarlem on the far-left horizon. The plate was first etched and then reworked in drypoint, adding accents that give visual rhythm to the sparse flat landscape, and create an impression of depth. The Saxenburg estate was the property of Christoffel Thijsz., to whom Rembrandt owed substantial mortgage payments. It has been speculated, although there is no

concrete evidence, that Rembrandt may have sought to appease his creditor with this magnificent print presenting a view of his estate.

Landscape with sportsman and dogs (‘Het jagertje’)

c. 1653

etching and drypoint on Japanese paper, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Collection of James O Fairfax AC. Presented by Bridgestar Pty Ltd through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program, 2020

2020.475

This etching is thought to be the last of Rembrandt’s landscape etchings. It was inspired by sixteenth-century Venetian landscape prints, which Rembrandt was studying at the time. The distant view of a mountain and Italianate buildings, including a square tower and domed structure, is combined with the flat Dutch landscape and vernacular architecture in the foreground. This print is very rare, being one of only eight known impressions of the first state, and one of three printed on Japanese paper. The

distinctive warm tone of the paper and its surface finish bring out the velvety ‘burr’ of the drypoint, which is particularly rich in the tree on the right.

View of the Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal in Amsterdam

c. 1647

black chalk

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam RP-T-1930-64

In around 1640 Rembrandt started to draw landscapes on his long walks in and around Amsterdam. Many of the locations can still be identified today. This view shows Nieuwezijds Voorburgwal in central Amsterdam, looking south towards the wooden bridge across the canal. In this small vivid sketch, Rembrandt captures the reflection of the buildings on the water and the trees on the right side of the canal bank. Such drawings were not made to be sold but served as reference material for his etchings.

Wall text:

Techniques and materials

Once a copper plate was etched (sometimes in several stages), a proof impression would show the artist where adjustments were needed. Rembrandt often made corrections by incising the plate directly with a burin (the traditional engraver's tool) or a drypoint needle. When incisions are made in drypoint, ridges of metal form along the edges of the grooves, and these hold ink that prints in a rich velvety black ('burr').

Rembrandt was the first artist to use drypoint as a technique in its own right, rather than merely as a corrective tool, and his innovative use of the technique achieved entirely new effects.

Rembrandt often made adjustments to take his plates through a number of ‘states’ or changes. He reworked the copper plate to add highlights and to emphasise particular elements of the image, and also used different types of paper, including oatmeal and Japanese papers, to vary the tone and surface quality of his prints. He did this to satisfy his own curiosity, and to create a diverse product, knowing that print connoisseurs would want to collect more than one impression of a particular etching.

Saint Jerome under the pollard willow

1648

etching and drypoint, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Collection of James O Fairfax AC. Presented by
Bridgestar Pty Ltd through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program, 2020 2020.471

This image started as a study of an old willow tree, battered by the elements and disfigured by the harvesting of branches. Rembrandt then added the figure of the saint seated at an improvised desk with his books and a skull, the symbols associated with the scholar. His other attributes, the cardinal's hat and the lion, are shown in close proximity. A few spontaneous linear marks indicate a landscape; the background is otherwise left blank. While this print might look unfinished, the fact that Rembrandt signed it means that he considered it complete. It is an act of

bravura to show that the artist decides when a work is finished, regardless of the viewer’s expectations.

Saint Jerome reading in an Italian landscape

c. 1653

etching and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1977 P157-1976

Saint Jerome reading in an Italian landscape

c. 1653

etching and drypoint, with touches of pen and brown ink on oatmeal paper, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Collection of James O Fairfax AC. Presented by Bridgestar Pty Ltd through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020 2020.476

Set in an Italianate landscape that is inspired by the prints of Titian and Domenico Campagnola, Saint Jerome is not depicted in the iconographic tradition of the hermit or the scholar, but as an old man wearing a sunhat, in peaceful repose, absorbed in his reading. Rembrandt has left the middle foreground of the plate unworked, the bare paper is suggestive of the bright light of the sun. The NGV has two impressions of this print, one on

conventional European paper (displayed alongside), and this rare impression printed on oatmeal paper, a thick, fibrous material that adds a subdued tone to the image.

St Francis beneath a tree, praying

1657

drypoint and etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
From the collection of James O. Fairfax AO,
Honorary Life Benefactor – Presented through
the NGV Foundation by Bridgestar Pty Ltd, 2003 2003.442

In this etching Rembrandt shows the Italian saint as he experiences his vision of Christ, just before he receives the stigmata. The outlines of Brother Leo, St Francis's companion during his retreat in the wilderness, can just be discerned to his right. This subject was a quintessentially Catholic one, rarely portrayed in Dutch art, and only treated once by Rembrandt. This plate is also unique in Rembrandt's oeuvre for reversing his usual procedure. Rather than using drypoint to supplement the etched image, here Rembrandt drew directly onto the plate with drypoint, and only later added the etched component.

Room: Biblical Prints

Room description: Black walls and carpet tiles. Entrance corridor opens into large room with seating in the centre. Waist-height display shelves along the perimeter walls with framed works displayed flat on benchtops and hung on walls.

Wall text:

Biblical prints

From the mid 1630s, Rembrandt focused his attention on ‘history painting’, which encompassed biblical, mythological and historical motifs. This was the most highly regarded artistic genre, because such paintings required artists to demonstrate their mastery of figures, landscape, architecture, perspective, light, colour, expressive gesture, mood and emotional impact.

Rembrandt’s aim was to convey the ‘most natural motion and emotion’, as he explained in a letter to the diplomat Constantijn Huygens in 1639. In his etchings Rembrandt was equally ambitious. On a small scale

and in a monochrome medium, he created dramatic narratives that express the emotions of each protagonist.

This room presents a wide range of subjects from the Old and New Testaments, which show Rembrandt's extraordinary skill as a storyteller. The selection presents the evolution of his printmaking, from Baroque drama to quiet contemplative images, with techniques ranging from light, linear compositions made in the manner of drawings, to densely worked surfaces that produce deep blacks. In his religious works, which include his largest and best known prints, Rembrandt took the process of etching further than any artist before him, creating images that rival paintings in their complexity and impact.

The raising of Lazarus: the larger plate

c. 1632

etching and engraving, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1961 1001-5

The story of the raising of Lazarus from the Gospel of John is one that Rembrandt depicted several times in print and painting. This early etching is typically Baroque in its striking composition, theatrical gestures and dramatic lighting. With his raised arm, Christ commands Lazarus to come back to life. The spectators, including Lazarus's sisters Mary Magdalen and Martha, are startled as he rises from the sarcophagus. The pictorial space positions the viewer in the cave-like tomb as a witness to the miracle. Rembrandt has etched a curved frame around the image, which

mirrors the shape of a series of religious paintings that he was completing at the time for Prince Frederick Hendrick.

The raising of Lazarus: small plate

1642

etching, with touches of drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.185.6-1

Compared with the Baroque composition of the earlier etching (displayed to the right), this image is a much more subdued representation of the story of Lazarus. It depicts Christ among the dead man's family and friends, who are looking at Lazarus as he emerges from the burial site with a puzzled expression on his face. The etching style is loose and sparse, with minimal description of the surrounding landscape.

Self-portrait in a flat cap and embroidered dress

c. 1642

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

20-4

Adam and Eve

1638

etching, 2nd state

Teylers Museum, Haarlem KG 03558

The subject of Adam and Eve has a long tradition in northern Renaissance art. It was a motif that artists used to demonstrate their ability to portray male and female nudes, landscape and the animals in Paradise. The subject of the print – the conflict between temptation and compliance – is conveyed through lifelike gestures: while Eve holds the apple to her mouth, Adam appears to intervene, his right hand pointing towards heaven to warn of God's judgement. Rembrandt's version is unprecedented in its realism, both in the depiction of the nudes, and in their gestures and emotions. The composition of the print was inspired by the work of Albrecht Dürer.

Albrecht Dürer
German 1471–1528
The harrowing of hell – Christ in limbo
1512
engraving

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1956 3435.14-4

In 1638 Rembrandt bought a large number of Albrecht Dürer's prints and pays homage to the great Renaissance printmaker by referencing his work in several etchings. In *Adam and Eve* (displayed to the left) Rembrandt borrows various elements from Dürer's *The harrowing of hell,* which shows Adam and Eve on the left. The curvature of the tree branch in Rembrandt's print mimics the stone arch in Dürer's image, and the winged serpent that watches from above is based on the dragon in

Dürer's engraving. Eve's high waist and protruding belly reflect the proportions of Rembrandt's earlier nudes, but also bear a resemblance to female figures in Dürer's *Four books on human proportion*, published in 1528, which Rembrandt had in his collection (a first edition of the book is displayed in the nearby 'Cabinet of curiosities').

The return of the prodigal son

1636

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 15-4

After claiming his inheritance from his father and squandering it all on pleasure and extravagance, the regretful son returns home destitute. Rembrandt pictures the meeting between father and son as an intense expression of remorse and forgiveness. He also adds motifs that illustrate other moments in the parable, including the woman looking out of the window to see who is at the door, and the servant coming down the steps with new clothes and shoes for the long-lost son.

The angel appearing to the shepherds

1634

etching, engraving and drypoint, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
From the collection of James Fairfax AO,
Honorary Life Benefactor – Presented through
the NGV Foundation by Bridgestar Pty Ltd, 2003 2003.441

This spectacular etching is Rembrandt's first large-scale nocturnal print and a striking example of his interest in Baroque drama. An angel appears in the sky to announce Christ's birth, accompanied by numerous cherubs in a circle of divine light. The sudden apparition causes panic on the ground, as the shepherds are woken from their slumber. The startled animals take flight, and one shepherd runs from the scene with arms outstretched. This is a tour de force in the medium of etching, with effects ranging from the ethereal light around the

heavenly messenger to deep dark blacks in the landscape.

The adoration of the shepherds: a night piece

c. 1657

etching, engraving and drypoint, 9th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria
with the assistance of Mr Robert Raynor, AM,
Honorary Life Benefactor, 1998 1998.322

The rest on the flight into Egypt: lightly etched

1645

etching and drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Collection of James O Fairfax AC. Presented by
Bridgestar Pty Ltd through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program, 2020 2020.473

The flight into Egypt: a night piece

1651

etching and drypoint, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 49-4

The Gospel of St Matthew tells the story of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. Herod, the King of Galilee, wanted to kill the child who, according to prophecy, was to become the King of the Jews, causing Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt with their infant Jesus. Rembrandt's 'night piece' is an exploration of the effects of a singular light source – the lantern held by Joseph to illuminate the path.

The adoration of the shepherds: with the lamp

c. 1654

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

55-4

During the 1650s, the decade in which Rembrandt made most of his nocturnal prints, he also created etchings that were conceived in light tonalities. They include these four images depicting the childhood of Christ. Rembrandt created his own graphic vocabulary fusing lessons learnt from his observation of fifteenth-century Italian engravings, with those of Baroque etchers, such as Federico Barocci. In this scene, the shepherds cluster tenderly around the newborn Jesus, while the Virgin pulls her robe open so they can see him clearly.

The circumcision in the stable

1654

etching, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

57-4

The flight into Egypt: crossing a brook

1654

etching, engraving and drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1923 1278.293-3

Christ returning from the temple with his parents

1654

etching and drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria
with the assistance of Miss Flora MacDonald Anderson
and Mrs Ethel Elizabeth Ogilvy Lumsden,
Founder Benefactors, 1987 P74-1987

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of the twelve-year-old Christ teaching in the temple while his parents search for him, unaware that he had stayed behind in Jerusalem. They find him in the temple disputing with the doctors and return home to Nazareth together. In this final episode of Rembrandt's childhood of Christ series, the drypoint accents lend a painterly effect to the Italianate landscape and figures.

The death of the Virgin

1639

etching and drypoint, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 23-4

The death of the Virgin is not described in the New Testament but is known from apocryphal writings. Rembrandt combines two moments from the story in his composition: the angel who appears to tell the Virgin that her last hour is approaching, and the subsequent gathering of the apostles, who are miraculously transported from every corner of the world to gather at her deathbed. Rembrandt has added further figures, who do not appear in the original story, including a priest on the far left and a doctor who is feeling the Virgin's pulse. The detail of a man looking through a curtain on the right emphasises the theatrical character of the composition.

Christ and the woman of Samaria among ruins

1634

etching and touches of drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3818-4

Christ and the woman of Samaria: an arched print

1657

etching and drypoint, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 65-4

The two prints displayed here show a story from the Gospel of John in which Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. He asks to drink from the well, saying: 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst'. While the monumentality and sculptural quality of the figures, the restrained gestures and simplified linear vocabulary, reveal the influence of Italian art, Rembrandt depicts the scene in an entirely original way. Jesus's humble pose and the dark veil around the woman's face, which suggest

that she has not yet recognised him as Christ, is unprecedented in the treatment of the subject.

Peter and John healing the cripple at the gate of the temple

1659

etching, engraving and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

67-4

Wall text:

The hundred guilder print

The hundred guilder print is one of Rembrandt's most complex, highly worked and acclaimed etchings.
It combines several episodes from chapter nineteen in the Gospel of St Matthew, bringing together a diverse group of people who gather around Christ, including the rich and the poor, the young and old. Several years in the making, the work is an unprecedented achievement in the medium of etching, both in composition and technique.

The diverse figures in the left foreground, and the group of Pharisees debating, are drawn in contour lines, whereas the sick men and women approaching Christ from

the right are rendered in soft dark tones, and the figures and animals on the far right recede into darkness under a looming stone building. Rembrandt achieves this effect through very fine cross-hatching, which rivals painting in its tonal range and nuances. This is the culmination of the artist's longstanding fascination with light and shade, which he explored in print and paint. The rich chiaroscuro effect is heightened by the warm tone of the Japanese paper. In 1649 an impression of the print was sold for the exorbitant sum of 100 guilders, the price of an expensive painting, giving the etching its nickname.

The hundred guilder print

c. 1648

etching, engraving and drypoint on Japanese paper, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.186.1-1

Christ preaching ('La petite Tombe')

c. 1657

etching and drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

50-4

Wall text:

Altered states

In many of his prints, particularly in the later works, Rembrandt made changes to the copper plate to produce different ‘states’. These changes typically include the addition of details and textures that would accentuate particular elements, or change the mood by darkening the image.

Rembrandt’s largest prints – *Christ presented to the people*: *oblong plate* and *Christ crucified between the two thieves: ‘The three crosses’* – were completely reworked. The prints were made entirely in drypoint, a technique in which the grooves that hold the ink are flattened relatively quickly and the image

deteriorates after around fifty prints. Rembrandt did not see the limited life span of these copper plates as a conclusion, but an opportunity for complete renewal: he erased large sections of the plates and added new elements that give the later states a completely different emphasis and mood.

In addition to changing states, Rembrandt often added ‘plate tone’ by selectively wiping the plate, leaving a thin film of ink that would add tone to the image. From the mid 1640s imported Chinese and Japanese papers were available in Amsterdam, and Rembrandt used these for his ‘deluxe’ impressions. He sometimes also printed on vellum (animal skin).

Christ presented to the people: oblong plate

1655

drypoint and plate-tone, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1940 1082-4

Christ presented to the people: oblong plate

1655

drypoint, plate-tone and pen and ink on Japanese paper, 7th state

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam RP-P-OB-611

After Christ had been scourged and crowned with thorns, Pontius Pilate presented him to the people with the words ‘Ecce Homo’, meaning ‘Behold the man’. The crowd was then asked to choose who to set free – Christ or the criminal Barabbas, seen here between Jesus and the turbaned Pilate. The event takes place on a raised podium in front of a grand civic building. Rembrandt frequently presented biblical stories in contemporary settings, and in this case borrowed the architectural elements and figure groupings from an engraving by the Dutch Renaissance artist Lucas van

Leyden. In this late state, he has erased the crowd in the foreground and added dark arches to the building. Having erased the crowd who decides Christ's fate, Rembrandt now positions the viewer in this role.

Christ crucified between the two thieves: ‘The three crosses’

1653

drypoint, 3rd state

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam RP-P-1962-39

Christ crucified between the two thieves: ‘The three crosses’

1653

drypoint and plate-tone, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1949 1971-4

This scene shows the crucified Christ between the two thieves, surrounded by his mother, apostles, Roman soldiers and mourning disciples. In the earlier state, a Centurion kneels in front of the cross as he recognises Christ as the son of God. This is one of the figures no longer visible in the fourth state, in which Rembrandt has reconfigured the scene, shifting the focus away from the spectators and participants in Christ’s death, to the suffering of Jesus. The heavy scoring of the plate with vertical drypoint lines adds dark veils of ink that direct attention to the dying Christ. They symbolically evoke

Christ’s anguish expressed in his cry: ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’

The descent from the cross by torchlight

1654

etching and drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 58-4

According to the Gospels, Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission from Pontius Pilate to take the body of Christ from the cross. He is seen in the foreground preparing the sheet to wrap the body. This is one of four etchings of episodes from the life of Christ, made in 1654, in which the symbolic language of darkness and light plays a central role. The single source of light is the torch that illuminates the action in the upper left and the stretcher in the foreground, heightening the emotional intensity of the scene.

The entombment

c. 1654

etching and drypoint, 4th of 4 states

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3831-4

After he was taken from the cross, Christ was brought to a rock-hewn sepulchre where he was entombed. This scene, like the adjacent *The descent from the cross*, is one of deep blacks achieved by the use of a fine web of deeply bitten, cross-hatched lines. Rembrandt worked this plate through four states, progressively darkening the tomb's interior, the diminishing light serving as a metaphor for the extinguishing of Christ's life.

Christ at Emmaus: the smaller plate

1634

etching and touches of drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3817-4

The story of the supper at Emmaus is told in the Gospel of Luke. Christ, having risen from the dead, meets two of his disciples travelling on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They do not recognise him until they all sit down to supper and Christ breaks the bread. This early depiction of the scene is characterised by the dramatic light that reveals Christ, and by the inclusion of anecdotal details such as the traveler's staff in the foreground.

Christ at Emmaus: the larger plate

1654

etching on thin oriental paper, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 60-4

Christ at Emmaus: the larger plate

1654

etching, touched with pen and brown ink and black chalk, brush and grey ink on Japanese paper, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.186.4-1

When he returned to the subject of the supper at Emmaus some twenty years after his first etching, Rembrandt depicted a slightly later moment in the story in which the disciples have fully recognised that their companion is the risen Christ. This print is inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper,* which Rembrandt had studied through an engraving in his collection. The simplified technique of open parallel hatching also shows the influence of Italian printmaking. This is a particularly fine impression on

Japanese paper, touched with pen and ink as well as chalk.

Self-portrait etching at a window

1648

etching and drypoint, 6th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3829-4

Joseph and Potiphar’s wife

1634

etching, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

6-4

The Old Testament story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife Jempsar is a scene of an attempted seduction. Rembrandt modelled his etching on a print by Antonio Tempesta, but transformed it into a much more animated scene. Whereas the Italian print shows Potiphar’s wife in a Classical pose with her arms outstretched towards her object of desire, Rembrandt depicts her entangled in a sheet, overtaken by lust, and completely unaware of her undignified pose. Joseph shields his eyes, and turns away towards the light, while Potiphar’s wife – surrounded by the darkness of the bedchamber – tries to

pull him towards her. The exaggerated gestures give Rembrandt's composition the appearance of a bawdy theatrical scenario.

Joseph telling his dreams

1638

etching, 3rd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 22-4

In his biblical prints Rembrandt drew on the ‘tronies’ and character studies from the 1630s. This small etching depicts the young Joseph addressing his father Jacob and other members of his family about his dream. The group reacts with astonishment to his revelation that he dreamed of ‘the sun and moon and eleven stars made obeisance to me’.

The blindness of Tobit: the larger plate

1651

etching and drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.186.3-1

On hearing the voice of his long-awaited son Tobias, Tobit rushes to the door to greet him, knocking over a spinning wheel on the way. Tobias's little dog has preceded his master and runs towards the blind man. Details such as the fish drying in the hearth reveal the impoverished life of the old man. The simple linear technique seen here is characteristic of Rembrandt's etching style of the 1650s with its regular parallel shading strokes, broken contours and dotted lines.

The angel departing from the family of Tobias

1641

etching and drypoint, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 35-4

The subject of this print comes from the apocryphal Book of Tobit, one of Rembrandt's favourite scriptural sources. During his long travels Tobias, son of Tobit, met the angel Raphael who gave him a fish. The entrails of this fish miraculously cured his father's blindness. When the miracle occurred, the angel Raphael revealed himself in the midst of a family gathering. The moment depicted here shows the angel returning to heaven, leaving Tobias's family on their knees in astonishment and gratitude.

Daniel in the lions' den

c. 1650

pen and brown ink, with brown wash and opaque white

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam RP-T-1930-17

This drawing depicts a story from the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament. Daniel was appointed to a high position at the court by the Babylonian King Darius, and his envious enemies devised a plot to have him thrown to the lions. Daniel only had God to turn to for help, and the lions did not harm him. This is a wonderful example of Rembrandt's skill of abbreviation – spontaneous lines indicate the building in which Daniel is incarcerated, the sensitive face of the kneeling youth expresses his faith in salvation, and the animals are drawn in energetic strokes of the pen, informed by the sketches of lions that Rembrandt had recently made from life.

Daniel's vision of the four beasts

1655
illustration for Menasseh Ben Israel's *Piedra Gloriosa de la estatua de Nebuchadnesar* (*The Illustrious Stone or Statue of Nebuchadnezzar*), published Amsterdam, 1655
etching, engraving and drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 61-4

This is one of four etchings made to illustrate Menasseh Ben Israel's *Piedra Gloriosa de la estatua de Nebuchadnesar*, a mystical tract on the coming of the Messiah. This particular subject comes from the Book of Daniel. Daniel's vision occurs in a dream in which four great beasts emerge from the sea – a lion with eagle's wings, a bear, a leopard with four

wings and four heads, and a fourth beast ‘dreadful and terrible and strong’.

Abraham and Isaac

1645

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 40-4

The subject comes from the Book of Genesis. As a test of his faith and obedience, God commanded Abraham to make a blood sacrifice of his only son Isaac. The scene depicted is the conversation between father and son on the way to the site of the sacrifice, when the unsuspecting Isaac asked his father where the sacrificial lamb was. Abraham is depicted turning to his son and answering: ‘God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering’, while pointing towards heaven.

Abraham’s sacrifice

1655

etching and drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 59-4

In this print, Rembrandt has chosen to depict the dramatic climax of the story at the sacrificial altar. Just as Abraham is about to plunge the knife to sacrifice his son, an angelic voice commands him to stop. The angel appears behind Abraham to intervene in the sacrifice of Isaac at the very last moment. In the landscape on the right, Abraham’s two servants and his donkey are waiting for the return of their master and his son, unaware of the unfolding drama.

Abraham entertaining the angels

1656

etching and drypoint, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3833-4

The Book of Genesis tells the story of Abraham meeting God and two angels, whom he invites to his home. He serves food and drink to the guests, while his wife Sara watches from the doorway of the house. Rembrandt drew on various sources for this image – the seated figures are based on an Indian Mughal watercolour, and Abraham's water jug is likely based on an artefact in Rembrandt's collection. The child in the background is copied from Raphael's *Galatea*, c. 1512, in the Villa Farnesina in Rome. Rembrandt knew the work through a reproductive print of the original Roman

fresco. Raphael's Renaissance cherub, who flies through the air holding a bow and arrow, is transformed here into Ismael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, leaning over a wall with a bow in his hand.

Room: Cabinet of Curiosities

Room description: Carpet tiles and glass display cases along front and back wall as you enter.

Wall text:

Rembrandt's 'Cabinet of curiosities'

As Rembrandt never travelled outside the Netherlands, he brought the world of art into his home. Pictorial traditions were of great importance to him, and through his collection of prints and drawings he could survey the work of the Old Masters. He constantly drew on his art collection as a starting point for his own compositions, and used it extensively in his teaching. As his student Samuel van Hoogstraten wrote, prints were the 'messengers and interpreters, telling us the content of works of art which are either far away or already old'.

Rembrandt's passion for collecting also extended to artefacts and natural objects

from various parts of Europe, Turkey, the Middle East and Asia, which were assembled in his ‘Kunst Caemer’, translated as ‘Art chamber’ or ‘Cabinet of curiosities’. The collection was a product of Rembrandt’s intellectual curiosity, but it was also a status symbol that presented him as a connoisseur who had the knowledge to appreciate these rare objects and the ability to acquire them.

A room in his house was dedicated to the display of objects, including animals, shells, corals, Japanese lacquerware, Chinese porcelain, Indian Mughal miniatures, helmets and weaponry, glassware, busts of Greek philosophers and Roman emperors, musical instruments and books. Some of these served as props or as inspiration for his portraits and biblical images. This re-

creation of Rembrandt's collection is based on a 1656 inventory of his possessions.

List of works

Rembrandt collected hundreds of prints and drawings, and spent great sums of money on works by his favourite artists such as Lucas van Leyden and Albrecht Dürer. His vast collection included works of all mediums and sizes by Dutch, Italian, German, Spanish and French artists. These works on paper were kept in albums, and smaller sheets were pasted into books, not dissimilar to the books displayed here.

Rembrandt also owned several art theoretical texts and treatises, including Dürer's *Treatise on Human Proportion* (1525), displayed on the top shelf, and Indian Mughal miniatures, which came to Amsterdam through the Dutch East India Company.

The shell

1650
etching, engraving and drypoint,
2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1973 P5-1973

This beautiful tonal image of a shell is the only still life among Rembrandt's etchings. The *conus marmoreus* is a species found in the East Indies, and Rembrandt would have purchased one or more of these shells from dealers or at auctions in Amsterdam. Archival documents show that he paid high prices for objects, such as rare shells. The NGV's print is one of only thirty-eight known impressions in public collections.

Unknown engraver
17th century
Shells and sea urchins
pages 36–37 in *Historiae Naturalis*, vol. 2, by Joannes Jonstonus, published by J. J. Schipper, Amsterdam, 1657
1657
engraving and letterpress text

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne RARESF 599 J64

Jan Jansson
Dutch 1588–1664
Map of the world
Map of the Netherlands
in *Novus atlas, sive theatrum orbis terrarum*, vols 1 & 2
published by Jan Jansson, Amsterdam, 1646
engraving and letterpress text

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne RARESEF 912 J26

Jan Jansson was a renowned geographer and publisher in the mid seventeenth century. These two volumes are from the 1646 edition of his ‘new atlas’, showing the world as it was mapped in Rembrandt’s time. The first volume is open on a double-page depicting a map of all the known continents – the southern expanse at the bottom of the print is described as ‘Terra Australis Incognita’. The second

volume shows a map of the northern Netherlands, including its two largest cities – the metropolis of Amsterdam, which had a population of nearly 200,000 at this time, and Leiden – Rembrandt's birthplace. While Rembrandt did not travel far from these two cities, and never went abroad, he had a keen interest in the wider world and non-European cultures.

Room: Bankruptcy

Room description: Blue walls and floor with seating in the centre. Ankle-height plinth with under lighting around the perimeter and framed works displayed on walls.

Wall text:

Bankruptcy

Rembrandt owed a great debt on the house he bought in 1639 and his many purchases contributed to growing financial problems in the early 1650s. His income had diminished significantly and painting commissions were more difficult to secure because of the increasing popularity of the ‘Flemish style’, characterised by clear outlines and bright colours. It was not just changing tastes, but also economic factors that affected Rembrandt’s professional fortunes. There was a general decline in the demand for artworks and other luxury goods due to the impact of the Anglo-Dutch War (1652–54).

In 1656, when he could not pay the debt he owed on his house, Rembrandt declared insolvency. He had to sell his assets and an inventory was drawn up of all his possessions, which revealed the size of his collection of art and curiosities. The subsequent sales did not raise sufficient funds to pay off the mortgage, and the house was finally sold in 1658. As a result of his bankruptcy, Rembrandt, his partner Hendrickje Stoffels, their daughter Cornelia, and the sixteen-year-old Titus had to move to a much smaller rental property. Hendrickje and Titus set up an art dealership with Rembrandt as their sole employee in order to keep his earnings out of the hands of creditors.

Self-portrait

1659

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC 1937.1.72

In this portrait, painted when Rembrandt was fifty-three, the artist depicts himself with disarming honesty. The dark background, coat and beret focus attention on his aging face. Rembrandt's expressive brushwork is particularly effective here – varied marks create texture in the pink, cream and white paint, which make the surface come to life. In some areas, the grey underpainting is exposed, drawing attention to the material reality of the painting and momentarily disrupting the illusion it creates. The painting presents Rembrandt's brilliant and unorthodox artistry, as well as his likeness.

Titus van Rijn (?), the artist's son, reading

c. 1656–57

oil on canvas

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna GG410

The identification of this sitter as Rembrandt's son is based on other portraits that are believed to depict Titus at various ages. It is an informal and affectionate portrayal, freely painted in broad brushstrokes, the soft light on the boy's face and hands adding to the sense of intimacy. Titus was the fourth and only surviving child from Rembrandt's marriage with Saskia. After his mother's death in 1642, Titus was cared for by Geertje Dircks, Rembrandt's second partner, and subsequently by Hendrickje Stoffels. It is likely that Titus helped his father in the studio, grinding pigments and preparing canvases, for

most of his younger years, and then managed Rembrandt's business. In 1668, at the age of twenty-six, Titus died from an unknown illness.

Portrait of Hendrickje Stoffels with velvet beret

c. 1654

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, Paris NV 1751

This portrait is thought to depict Rembrandt's third partner Hendrickje Stoffels. She is portrayed here in a fur-trimmed jacket, jewellery and ribbons in her hair – a fantasy costume, rather than a sign of her status. Hendrickje joined Rembrandt's household as a domestic servant in 1649, and they soon began a relationship which lasted until her death in 1663. They never married because a clause in Saskia's will stipulated that Rembrandt had to give up half of his estate in the event of a subsequent marriage. When Hendrickje fell pregnant in 1654, she was called before the council of the Reformed Church, accused

of living in sin with Rembrandt, and the circumstances of their relationship damaged the artist's reputation. The couple's daughter Cornelia was born later that year.

Abraham Francen, apothecary

c. 1657

etching, engraving and drypoint on Japanese paper, 4th state

Proposed acquisition with the support of David Tunick and donors to the Rembrandt Appeal, 2023

Abraham Francen was an apothecary and avid print collector. His first documented contact with Rembrandt was in 1653 when he was granted power of attorney to collect debts owed to the artist. He continued to act as witness for Rembrandt in financial and personal matters over the next decade. His wealthy brother Daniel lent Rembrandt 3150 guilders in the year of his insolvency, while Francen assisted both of Rembrandt's children and became the guardian of his daughter Cornelia after Rembrandt's death in 1669. In this intimate portrait, Francen is seated by a

window in his study. The light filtering through the window illuminates the print in his hands, the paintings on the wall, and the Chinese sculpture and skull on his desk. This rare impression on Japanese paper is a proposed acquisition for the NGV Collection.

Help the NGV acquire Rembrandt's *Abraham Francen, apothecary* c. 1657.

Donate today to acquire this significant and rare print by Rembrandt for the NGV Collection. Every donation counts and we thank you for your support.

The NGV warmly thanks all supporters who have made gifts to help secure this significant work, including leadership gifts from:
Barry Janes & Paul Cross
Neil Young KC

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Room: Portraits

Room description: Black walls and carpet tiles with seating in the centre. Framed works displayed on walls around the perimeter.

Wall text:

Portraits

Rembrandt established his reputation in Amsterdam as a portrait painter in the early 1630s when he worked in the studio of Hendrick Uylenburgh. While portraits were a lucrative source of income, they were not as highly regarded as narrative history paintings. The reason was that the artist was not considered to have much autonomy in rendering the likeness of his sitters. However, Rembrandt imbued his portraits with liveliness and psychological complexity. He conveys a sense of the sitter’s inner world, and often makes reference to their interests or profession in the chosen settings.

While the application of paint in

Rembrandt's late portraits are free and expressive, his etchings are more subtle in composition and technique. Etched portraits were usually commissioned to be given to the family, friends and business associates of the person portrayed. Rembrandt's clients came from various backgrounds and include several prominent preachers, city officials, artisans and doctors. They reflect the cultural pluralism of the city of Amsterdam in which communities of various religious affiliations could co-exist.

Jan Uytenbogaert, ‘The goldweigher’

1639

etching and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 26-4

Jan Uytenbogaert was the Receiver-General (chief tax collector) in Amsterdam, and one of the city’s most active and prominent print collectors. The portrait shows him weighing gold, while a kneeling servant takes away the bags whose weight has been recorded. In 1639 Uytenbogaert acted as intermediary between Rembrandt and Prince Frederick Hendrick to secure payment for a painting commission. Rembrandt urgently needed the funds to pay the first instalment on the large house he bought in 1639. This etching may have been made as a token of appreciation for Uytenbogaert’s assistance.

Young man in a velvet cap (Petrus Sylvius?)

1637

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891

p.185.5-1

Petrus Sylvius was the son of Jan Cornelis Sylvius, a pastor of the Reformed Church, whose portrait Rembrandt etched twice, in 1633 and 1646 (both portraits are displayed in the first room of the exhibition). The identity of the sitter is based on an inscription written by a seventeenth-century hand on the back of another impression of this etching. As Rembrandt did not give titles to his works, such sources are sometimes the only references for the identification of his subjects.

Cornelis Claesz. Anslo, preacher

1641

etching and drypoint on imitation oriental paper, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3824-4

Cornelis Claesz. Anslo was a wealthy cloth merchant and a Mennonite preacher famed for his oratory. The rhetorical hand gesture alludes to his preaching, which drew a taunting response from Joost van den Vondel, one of the leading poets in the Netherlands: ‘Ay Rembrandt, paint Cornelis’s voice; that part that is seen is the least part of him. The unseen can only be learned through the ears. He who will know Anslo must hear him’.

Ephraim Bonus, Jewish physician

1647

etching, engraving and drypoint, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1959 533-5

The subject of this portrait, Ephraim Bonus (or Bueno), was a distinguished physician and a respected member of Amsterdam's community of Portugese Jews. Rembrandt probably met him through the rabbinical scholar Menasseh Ben Israel, who established the first Jewish printing press in the Dutch Republic. This is the only etching in Rembrandt's oeuvre that was preceded by a preparatory oil sketch. He perfectly translated its tonal qualities into their pictorial equivalent in etching in a dense web of cross-hatched lines that describe the plain architectural background and suggest an introspective mood.

Lieven Willemsz. van Coppenol, writing-master: the larger plate

c. 1658

etching, engraving and drypoint on oriental paper, 7th of 9 states

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1959 534-5

Lieven Willemsz. van Coppenol was a master calligrapher. Bouts of mental illness forced him to relinquish his teaching post at the French School in Amsterdam and he subsequently devoted himself to calligraphy. Van Coppenol commissioned numerous portraits of himself and then asked prominent poets to write accompanying laudatory poems. Rembrandt executed two etched portraits of him – the smaller plate (exhibited alongside) shows the sitter with a child, alluding to his former teaching post, and this more formal work,

which is Rembrandt’s largest portrait print.

Lieven Willemsz. van Coppenol, writing master: the smaller plate

c. 1658

etching, engraving and drypoint, 6th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1960 1241-5

Portrait of a white-haired man

1667

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1951 2372-4

This painting is the second-last portrait Rembrandt made and, although advanced in age, his creative innovation is on full display. The subtle twist of the sitter's body and his slightly parted lips animate the figure and create the sense of a captured moment. There is great variation in the application of paint in the face and hair, and Rembrandt has also used the sharp end of his brush to gouge marks in the hair, to add texture. These layered textures almost appear chaotic when viewed close-up, but create an extraordinary visual effect when seen from a distance. Rembrandt's late painting style was out of fashion by the

mid seventeenth century, but became a very important influence on later artists, particularly on the Impressionist painters.

Jan Lutma, goldsmith

1656

etching, engraving and drypoint, 4th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

63-4

Jan Lutma, goldsmith

1656

etching, engraving and drypoint on oatmeal paper, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Collection of James O Fairfax AC. Presented by Bridgestar Pty Ltd through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020 2020.477

Jan Lutma was a renowned silver- and goldsmith in Amsterdam, depicted here in an ornate armchair in front of a window. Lutma was almost blind in old age, an ailment that accounts for his squinting eyes in this portrait, but he subsequently declared that his eyesight was restored. Various instruments are arranged on the table, including a drinking bowl known to have been made by Lutma. This rare print is an early impression of the second state printed on oatmeal paper, which gives the image a darker tone. Rembrandt made significant changes to the plate in

this state, including the addition of the window.

Wall text:

Everyday life

The depiction of scenes from everyday life – or ‘genre’ as the subject matter came to be called in the nineteenth century – is an important theme in the pictorial traditions of northern Europe, particularly in printmaking. From his earliest etchings made in Leiden, Rembrandt took an interest in the depiction of poor people, which were inspired as much by reality as by art historical precedents in the work of Lucas van Leyden, Pieter Breugel and Jacques Callot. In the mid 1630s, when he was living in Amsterdam, Rembrandt etched various genre scenes featuring strolling musicians and street vendors. The small size of the etching plate offered

a fitting format for studies of individual figures or intimate scenes of everyday life, many of which were likely made by drawing directly on the plate with the etching needle.

Rembrandt constantly observed women, men, children and animals, and was clearly fascinated by their interactions, as well as quiet moments spent in solitude. He made hundreds of sketches of everyday moments, many of these were listed in the 1656 inventory of Rembrandt's possessions. They were ordered into albums according to subjects, such as 'figure sketches', 'animals' and 'women and children', which suggests that Rembrandt used them as reference material for his compositions.

The pancake woman

1635

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

13-4

This lively image shows a street vendor surrounded by a group of children enjoying her fresh pancakes. A preparatory drawing of the subject shows the pancake woman surrounded by different figures, and Rembrandt has incorporated further references in the print. As is the case in so many of his prints, he borrowed figures from the work of other artists – the child in the foreground is copied from Raphael's *Galatea*, c. 1512, which he knew from a print made after the original fresco. Raphael's winged cherub is here recast as a small Dutch child holding a pancake away from a hungry dog.

The strolling musicians

c. 1635

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3822-4

Old woman sleeping

c. 1636

etching, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3819-4

Portrait of a boy

1641

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3825-4

The card player

1641

etching, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958

3826-4

The ringball player

1654

etching and etched tone, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

54-4

The Star of the Kings: a night piece

c. 1651

etching, with touches of drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 48-4

This is one of Rembrandt's noctural prints in which he experimented with the effects of subtle illumination. The subject is the Feast of the Epiphany (known in Dutch as the Feast of the Three Kings), when children would parade through the streets with a paper lantern in the shape of a star and sing carols.

The goldsmith

1655

etching and drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1958 3832-4

Monk in the cornfield

c. 1646

etching and drypoint, only state

Teylers Museum, Haarlem KG 03750

Monk in the cornfield is among the rarest of Rembrandt's etchings. The image is inspired by Heinrich Aldegrever's print *The monk and the nun*,1530. Aldegrever was one of the German Renaissance artists who were called the 'Little Masters', because they produced miniature satirical, and often erotic, prints, some of which were in Rembrandt's collection. Rembrandt's etching shows a monk with a milkmaid. Her milk jug is placed on the ground on the left and above it in the distance, a man wields a scythe to harvest the corn.

Two men discussing

c. 1640–50

chalk and pen

Teylers Museum, Haarlem

O+ 070

Jews in the Synagogue

1648

etching and drypoint, 5th state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 44-4

Amsterdam had a diverse Jewish community and Rembrandt had several Jewish clients. This etching appears to show both Sephardic (originally from the Iberian Peninsula) and Ashkenazi Jews (emigrants from Poland) in the interior of a synagogue. It is a historicised imaginative scene rather than a documentary peek at daily life in Amsterdam, because these groups would have likely spoken different languages and occupied different social circles. The two men on the left bear a close resemblance to the drawing *Two men discussing*.

A blind hurdy-gurdy player and family receiving alms

1648

etching and drypoint, 1st state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1891 p.185.9-1

In the arched doorway of his house, a wealthy man offers a coin to a woman with a snugly wrapped baby on her back. Accompanying her is a boy and an elderly man who appears to be blind. Although the almsgiver and the beggar family stand in close proximity, their worlds are sharply differentiated. The focal point of the composition is the act of donation, emphasised by the contrast of dark and light around the giving and the receiving hands. The tonal modelling of the figures and the subtle rendering of shadows is reminiscent of the pictorial qualities of *The hundred guilder print*,

which Rembrandt was working on at the same time.

A hurdy-gurdy player followed by children at the door of a house (‘The schoolmaster’)

1641

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933

37-4

Peasant family on the tramp

c. 1652

etching, 2nd state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1961

998-5

Sheet of studies with the head of the artist, a beggar man, woman and child

1651

etching and engraving, only state

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Everard Studley Miller Bequest, 1961 1245-5

Rembrandt made several etchings that look like drawn ‘study sheets’, in which the plate is rotated like a sheet of paper to accommodate several unrelated drawings. Here we can follow the artist observing, thinking and making representative decisions in the act of sketching. Although Rembrandt did not sell his drawings, he sold etchings that looked like spontaneous sketches, knowing that these would appeal to connoisseurs who were interested in the artistic process.

Wall text:

Rembrandt’s circle

In the 1640s Rembrandt invested much time and energy in his large studio operation. He mentored numerous artists, of whom around fifty are known by name, including Govert Flinck, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Ferdinand Bol, Carel Fabritius and Arent de Gelder. His apprentices included fully trained artists who were already practising independently and came to Rembrandt’s workshop to learn his new technique and style.

Many of the works produced in Rembrandt’s workshop were copies and variations of the master’s paintings. The most accomplished ones were offered to

buyers who could not afford a painting by Rembrandt, but wanted to own a work made in the fashionable style. If the artist was not established as a master in his own right, his works were sold under Rembrandt's name, sometimes even bearing his signature. This is one of the reasons why attribution of paintings by Rembrandt, his circle and his followers, is very complex.

This selection of works shows the influence of Rembrandt's art on his contemporaries, who no doubt also influenced him. While some of his students adopted a more Classical and colourful painting style after their apprenticeship, others, such as Arendt de Gelder, continued to work in the manner of their teacher.

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn and studio

Rembrandt

1660s

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 104-4

This portrait of Rembrandt was once believed to be a self-portrait, but the ‘Rembrandt Research Project’, established in 1968 to investigate Rembrandt’s painted oeuvre and determine attribution, asserted in 1985 that the work was not by Rembrandt. However, later analysis of the paint layers found that the work comes from Rembrandt’s studio, and was painted in the 1660s. The painting underwent extensive conservation at the NGV in 2022–23, and it now appears likely to be

an unfinished work that was painted by an unknown studio assistant with input from Rembrandt himself.

Arent de Gelder
Dutch 1645–1727
King Ahasuerus condemning Haman
c. 1680
oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1934 216-4

The subject of this painting is taken from the Old Testament's Book of Esther. Esther, the wife of Ahasuerus, King of Babylon, learnt of a plot to slaughter the entire Jewish population in the kingdom. The plan was instigated by Haman, a high-ranking adviser to the king. Esther petitioned Ahasuerus to spare the Jews, at the same time revealing her own, hitherto secret, Jewish identity. The painting shows the dramatic moment in which Esther unmasks Haman as the true enemy. De Gelder was one of Rembrandt's last students, and the

drama, costume, lighting and dark palette show the influence of his late work.

Arent de Gelder
(attributed to)
Dutch 1645–1727
Taking leave of Jonathan, or The reconciliation of David and Absalom
c. 1700
pen and brush and brown ink with coloured washes over traces of black chalk, touched with white bodycolour

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1936 354-4

Ferdinand Bol

Dutch 1616–80

Old man with flowing beard and velvet cap

1642

etching

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1933 4746-3

Jan Lievens

Dutch 1607–1674, worked in England and Flanders 1632–1644

Landscape with shepherd and cattle

c. 1650

pen and brown ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1936

355-4

Govaert Flinck

Dutch 1615–1660

Old man seated facing right, left hand pointing in a rhetorical gesture

c. 1638

pen and brown ink over traces of black chalk on blue paper; laid down

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1923 1278.784-3

End

Thank you for visiting!