Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn
(July 15, 1606–October 4, 1669)

Rembrandt was born in the Dutch Republic, now the Netherlands. He attended Latin school and studied at the University of Leiden, followed by a three year apprenticeship with history painter Jacob van Swanenburg, and six months in Amsterdam with painter Peter Lastman. In 1624/25, Rembrandt opened his first studio in Leiden with fellow artist Jan Lievens. Two years later, Rembrandt took on his first of many students. Within twenty years he had taught all of the most important Dutch painters who in turn passed on his knowledge to their own students. His influence is still widely felt today.

Researchers believe that Rembrandt completed around 300 paintings in his lifetime, and nearly as many prints. Some famous works believed to have been by Rembrandt have been found to be by followers or apprentices from his studio, further demonstrating the strength of his influence.

Dutch Statesman Constantijn Huygens discovered Rembrandt’s studio work and in 1629 introduced him to the royal court of The Hague. For the next seventeen years, Rembrandt painted portraits and other subjects for Prince Frederik Hendrik and other important members of the Dutch ruling class.

Though he made a good living early in his career, Rembrandt lived beyond his means and his personal life was marked by tragedy and hardship. By 1656, he had to auction off his collections of art and antiquities to avoid bankruptcy. By 1660, he was forced to also sell his house and his printing press. Through the financial support of friends, Rembrandt was able to continue his work.
Though most famously known as one of Europe’s greatest portrait painters, Rembrandt is also widely considered one of the finest printmakers of all time. His works are characterized by naturalness of subject and a dramatic balance of light and shadow or *chiaroscuro* - derived from the work of Italian Renaissance master Caravaggio.

**Rembrandt Etchings: States, Fakes and Restrikes** showcases 39 prints gifted to the UWM Art Collection by Emile H. Mathis II. It includes 24 restrikes and ten fakes made between the early 1700s and early 1900s. Most importantly, the show features five prints from Rembrandt’s lifetime, likely pulled by Rembrandt himself. The exhibition’s featured image - the first of three states, lifetime pull of *Self Portrait in Velvet Cap with Plume* - is on view, along with the late 20th century Millennium Edition restrike of the same image pulled from the original plate.

Arranged by subject, the prints are presented in chronological order based upon the date Rembrandt’s original plate was created, providing an overview of his printmaking career.
How Prints are Made

Rembrandt created each print by drawing the image onto a hand-forged copper plate, using the techniques of etching, engraving and drypoint. He re-worked many of his plates, altering the images and compositions, removing or adding figures, or enhancing the strength of line, shadow and texture when the plate became worn. Prints pulled from the plate at these different stages are called states. Over the centuries many artists have copied Rembrandt’s style or even made copies (fakes) of his prints. Since Rembrandt’s death in 1669, many new prints or restrikes have been pulled from his surviving plates.

Copper Plate Etching

- A polished plate of copper is coated with an acid-resistant ‘ground’
- An image is scratched into the ground by hand with metal tools
- The plate is soaked in an acid bath
- The acid eats into any part of the metal not protected by the ground
- The ground is removed from the plate with solvent (kerosene)
- The clean plate is rubbed with ink
- The excess ink is lightly wiped off the plate
- The plate is covered with paper and pulled through a printing press
- Under pressure, the ink transfers from the plate onto the paper
- The plate can be inked again to pull another print... or many
Authentication - Is this Rembrandt real?

Around 300 prints have been attributed to Rembrandt. That’s far fewer authentic prints that was once believed. Careful research and cataloguing have provided tools for curators, collectors, and art dealers to authenticate prints they believe might be by Rembrandt - to prove if they are states (different stages or versions of an authentic print), fakes (copies), or restrikes (prints pulled from Rembrandt’s printing plates after his death).

By comparing such things as size, paper, images, light and dark areas, beaviness of line and shading, and the presence or absence of certain details that may have been added or removed, it is possible to tell not only if a print was made by Rembrandt, but when it was made, which state or version it is, how many others exist, and where they might be now. All of these factors help determine the rarity and value of a print.

Subject Print:

Self Portrait in a Flat Cap and Embroidered Dress

Original printing date 1642

Catalog raisonné numbers:
H157 BB38-1 NU/B 156 B26

Read the entries below for this print from three authoritative catalog raisonnés and note qualitative differences in description.

Nowell-Usticke, using Bartsch’s numbers (NU/B), published 1967

REMBRANDT’S ETCHINGS

152. THREE HEADS OF WOMEN, ONE ASLEEP.

G., Du. 356; — B., R., S. 365.—Cl. 194.—W. 364.—Bi. 351.—M. 130.—Dn. 398.


2. Remarque in the upper right-hand corner: a slipped stroke across the plate below.


153. THREE HEADS OF WOMEN, ONE LIGHTLY ETCHED.

G., Du. 357; — B., R., S. 357.—Cl. 197.—W. 362.—Bi. 336.—M. 113.—Dn. 396.

[153 v. 103] Above the head.

1. With the upper head (portait of Soekker) only.
2. The other two heads added.

The central study, if not the two others, is certainly taken from Soekker.

154. STUDY OF SASKIA AS S. CATHERINE (THE ‘LITTLE JEWISH BRIDE’).

G., Du. 358 and 359; — B., R., S. 358.—Cl. 192.—W. 362.—Bi. 396.—M. 108.—Dn. 397.


155. SHEET WITH TWO STUDIES: A TREE, AND THE UPPER PART OF A HEAD OF REMBRANDT WEARING A VELVET CAP.

G., Du. 360 and 361; — B., R., S. 355.—Cl. 191.—W. 366.—Bi. 398.—M. 114.—Dn. 400.

[155 v. 87] The head about 1642; the tree possibly later.

Prof. W. Martin has noted that a similar head of Rembrandt occurs in the Night-Watch of 1648, and to the r. of the standard bearers.

156. REMBRANDT IN VELVET CAP AND PLUMES, WITH AN EMBROIDERED DRESS: BUST.


[156 v. 100] Signed and dated: Rembrandt f. 1650.


Rembrandt makes a unique first state of a falsified impression in Berlin.

157. REMBRANDT IN A FLAT CAP WITH A S LASH ABOUT HIS SHOULDER.

G., Du. 363 and 364; — B., Cl. W., D., R., S. 359.—M. 111.

[157 v. 89] Above 1633.

1. The signature Rembrandt f., and (Habicht) traces of a name, etched in the master’s hand.

Modern: B. Rembrandt re-engraved by another hand.

The style of execution would seem to place this etching about 1648, though as a portrait it might well be ten years later. There is a certain stiffness in the work, which may have caused Voenser’s doubt as to its authenticity.

Hind, published 1912 and 1923

REMBRANDT IN A FLAT CAP, AND EMBROIDERED DRESS.

B. 26

H. 157

BB 88.1

(Bartocchi) Rembrandt aux cheveux court et press (Soliety) Stichting met der flachen kappen.

C. 2 — A common, attractive small portrait.

Signed, Rembrandt I. and trace of date — very faint.

Plate in existence only.

1st. state. (R. 1—H.) There is a very faint signature s date in the Upper L. corner.
(e) Impression sharp & clear, a few horizontal scratchs on the background. Signature just visible.
50.00

(r) Impression sharp & clear, Signature almost invisible.
50.00

Collins, (d.). n. c.

(l) Impression rather light & clear. Signature no longer visible.
30.00

2nd. state. (R. 2—H.) Signature now plain, scratched in, double outline.
3rd. state. (R. 3—H.) Signature now plain, scratched in, in double outline.
Clear sharp impression.

P. F. B. II — III. Before short line at right angles to the top line of the diagonal L.R. shading at the left, 1 1/16 to left of cap.
225.00

Collins, (d.). n. c.

(i) B. III. The above short line quite plain. There is a diagonal L. Slipt stroke starting up from L. eyebrow. Signature clear.
150.00

Collins, (d.). n. c.

(f) Jean. The short line almost worn out. Signature weak. Shading to L. of nose much worn.
100.00

5th. state. Plate coarsely retouched: the worn spot to L. of nose, and upper R. forehead retouched. Split stroke still visible. Signature appears retouched.
50.00

(c) Bernard. Strong Impression.
30.00

(d) Rembrandt (inc.). No trace of slip stroke.

B. 26

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Biorklund and Barnard, published 1968

REMBRANDT IN FLAT CAP AND EMBROIDERED DRESS

H. 157 — B. 26 — H. 210

Date assessed: 1698.
1. Lightly signed: Rembrandt f. near upper L. corner.
This signature was often inserted in the taking of the plate and is practically invisible in many impressions.
2. The signature is strengthened, probably by another hand. The lines are doubled in many places.
3. Modern, Barnard, etc. (No mark in the first state of the Rembrandt.)

The signature may have been added in the same way and related to the present state. The last signature may have belonged to the first etching in 1632.

Date assessed: 1698.
5. A. A. Sucher.
7. Rembrandt makes a reversed copy.


The style of execution would seem to place this etching about 1648, though as a portrait it might well be ten years later. There is a certain stiffness in the work, which may have caused Voenser’s doubt as to its authenticity.

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