Authentication - Is this Rembrandt real?

Around 300 Prints have been attributed to Rembrandt. What’s far fewer authentic prints that was once believed. Careful research and cataloging 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, heaviness 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.

Rembrandt’s Etchings

158. Three Heads of Women, One Asleep.


[17*—07]. Signed and dated: Rembrandt f. 1507.

2. Deepened in the area that faded - a slipped stroke across the plate below. Moderately, renewed: Rembrandt - Barnard.

159. Three Heads of Women, One Lightly Etched.


[17*—011]. Abroad 1700.

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

The central subject, if not the other two, is certainly taken from Saskia.

164. Study of Saskia as St. Catherine (The Little Jewish Bride).


165. Sheet with Two Studies: A Tree, and the Upper Part of a Head of Rembrandt Wearing a Velvet Cap.


[17*—01]. 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, identical to the one of the standard edition.


[17*—103]. Signed and dated: Rembrandt f. 1599.

167. Rembrandt in a Flat Cap with a Shawl about his Shoulders.


[17*—76]. About 1633.

1. The signature Rembrandt f. and (slightly) traces of a date, etched in the master’s hand. (N. M. - The signature definitely seen, as the Rembrandt Museum impression, is apparently not discernible in all impressions before II.)
2. The signature Rembrandt re-created by another hand.

Moderately, renewed: Rembrandt - Barnard.

The style of execution would seem to place this etching about 1659, though as a portrait it might well be ten years later. There is a certain deploration in the work, which may have ceased Van der Meer’s doubt as to its authenticity.