

Connoisseurship and Rembrandt's Paintings: New Directions in the Rembrandt Research Project, Part II

Author(s): Ernst Van De Wetering

Source: *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 150, No. 1259, Northern European Art (Feb., 2008), pp. 83-90

Published by: Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20072955>

Accessed: 24-04-2020 17:32 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/20072955?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Burlington Magazine Publications Ltd. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Burlington Magazine*

JSTOR

Connoisseurship and Rembrandt's paintings: new directions in the Rembrandt Research Project, part II

by ERNST VAN DE WETERING, *Rembrandt Research Project, Amsterdam*

IN HIS DISCUSSION in this Magazine of the Rembrandt Year in 2006, Christopher Brown devoted considerable attention to what he described as the 'almost certainly over-lively' state of Rembrandt studies.¹ He was also concerned that the changes within the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP) – the project which has, in Brown's words, 'to a significant degree [. . .] set the parameters of discussion' – may have contributed to this situation, either directly or indirectly. He continued: 'I was among those who believed that the "old" RRP [active 1968–93] had been unduly restrictive [with regard to the definition of the boundaries of Rembrandt's autograph *œuvre*] [. . .] but this rigour appears to have given way to an excessive inclusiveness'.²

Brown's remark on the new RRP's alleged 'inclusiveness' offers a welcome opportunity to clarify the approach that we have developed over the last fifteen years.³ This article is therefore not so much a reply to his critical remarks as an address to their background, in the course of which due attention will be paid to differences between the old and the new RRP (my reply to specific points made by Brown can be found in the Appendix below). However, although changes in the approach of the RRP may provide the context, and are obviously relevant, the core of what follows is a discussion of connoisseurship in general, in the sense of the recognition of the hand of a specific artist in a work of art.

The present article may be seen as the continuation of an article we published in THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE of March 1996 under the title 'New directions in the Rembrandt Research Project, part I: the 1642 self-portrait in the Royal Collection'.⁴ In that article it was shown how a painting that in 1982 had been dismissed as an eighteenth-century pastiche was reattributed to Rembrandt. A number of objective arguments played a role in this reattribution. Taken singly, none of these arguments could be considered decisive, but when taken together, they converged on the virtual certainty that the painting is an autograph (although in places overpainted) work. That article could be taken as a demonstration of how, in the attribution or de-attribution of paintings, one can

to a considerable extent circumvent traditional, mainly subjective connoisseurship.

Connoisseurship has long been an indispensable means of bringing order to the chaos of the attribution of works of art which, over the course of several centuries, have spread throughout the world. The essence of traditional connoisseurship is the ability, based on experience, to recognise the hand of a painter. Max Friedländer, the famous connoisseur of early Netherlandish paintings, wrote in his book *On art and connoisseurship*: 'The way in which an intuitive verdict is reached can, from the nature of things, only be described inadequately. A picture is shown to me. I glance at it, and declare it to be a work by Memling, without having proceeded to an examination of its full complexity of artistic form. This inner certainty can only be gained from the impression of the whole; never from an analysis of the visible forms'.⁵

There is a striking similarity between Friedländer's immediate attribution and the human ability to recognise another person. This latter human ability is truly remarkable. Indeed, brain scientists have established that a relatively large part of our cerebral capacity is devoted to the recognition of the physiognomy of other people.⁶ Nobody who has ever recognised a person from a distance, as Friedländer recognised a Memling, has any inclination to continue scrutinising the features, the posture etc. of the recognised person in order to ascertain what exactly led to that moment of recognition.

There is, however, an essential difference between recognising a person and recognising the maker of a painting. Someone who recognises another person has already seen that person and had dealings with him or her in the past. A connoisseur recognises in a particular painting the characteristics of the presumed author's work that he has previously seen in other paintings by that painter. The mental impulse seems just as strong as in the recognition of a person. Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann uses the term '*Gestalt*' to refer to that totality of characteristics, only semi-consciously observed in a work of art, that can lead one to an attribution of that work. Connoisseurship is thus not an exclusively art-historical

Part I of this sequence of two articles was published by E. van de Wetering and P. Broekhoff in THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE 138 (1996), pp.174–180. I would like to thank the members of the RRP team, and Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, Christoph von Imhoff, Anthonie Meijers from the Schruns/Tschagguns group, Otto Naumann, Carin van Nes, Catherine B. Scallen, Melcher de Wind and the translator Murray Pearson for their help in writing the present article.

¹ C. Brown: 'The Rembrandt Year', THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE 149 (2007), pp.104–08.

² *Ibid.*, p.105.

³ I have already detailed the changes from the old to the new RRP and the backgrounds of these changes in the preface to E. van de Wetering *et al.*: *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings IV: The Self-Portraits*, Dordrecht 2005; for the members and collaborators of the old and the new team, see pp.xx and xxi. This preface can also

be found on www.rembrandtresearchproject.org. The first three volumes were published as J. Bruyn *et al.*: *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, The Hague, Boston and London 1982–89; together with the fourth volume they are referred to throughout these notes as *Corpus*. Christopher White's review of the fourth volume, published in this Magazine, 148 (2006), pp.120–21, contains a brief summary of the changes mentioned here.

⁴ See also C. White: *The Dutch Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen*, Cambridge 1982, pp.111–12, no.168.

⁵ The first German edition was published in Zürich in 1939; the edition used here is M.J. Friedländer: *On art and connoisseurship*, transl. T. Borenius, Oxford 1946 (4th ed.), p.173.

⁶ See, for instance, C.A. Nelson: 'The development and neural bases of face recognition', *Infant and child development* 10 (2001), pp.3–18, with further literature.

'method' but is rather an attribute that can be seen as part of our natural cognitive repertory. In the animal kingdom in general, the need to be able to recognise immediately is of vital importance – corresponding to what Friedländer referred to in connoisseurship as an 'intuitive' process. Bob Haak, the founder of the original RRP, used to say, after we had spent hours studying a painting with growing confusion: 'I'll have a look in my Bredius to see what I noted on my first confrontation with this painting', thus implying that *that* had perhaps been the moment of truth.⁷ In other words, with paintings, connoisseurship is based on a belief in the recognisability of the handling of the visible paint surface by a specific artist.

In the case of paintings in the style of Rembrandt, it is clear that sceptical reservations about connoisseurship are not misplaced, if only from the enormous differences between the many surveys of Rembrandt's *œuvre* that appeared between 1905 (Bode) and 1992 (Slatkes). These two scholars accepted respectively 595 and 315 paintings as autograph Rembrandts. In 1986 Tümpel accepted only 285 paintings as genuine works by Rembrandt.⁸ All these lists were compiled on the basis of traditional connoisseurship. Thus, in the case of Rembrandt and the great cloud of Rembrandtesque works surrounding the core of his *œuvre*, experience has shown that intuitive connoisseurship is not infallible.

There are several reasons for this. To begin with, through all phases of Rembrandt's career the essential core of his *œuvre* cannot be demarcated with certainty. (Not so long ago, for example, the *Man with the golden helmet* in Berlin, now generally rejected, was taken to be a highpoint of his *œuvre*.) In short, it is unclear to what extent the core group of works to which the connoisseur intuitively refers is in fact 'contaminated' by mistaken attributions. Furthermore, a stream of pupils, whose work cannot be individually distinguished, passed through Rembrandt's workshop between 1628 and 1663. These young men, as a rule already trained as painters, were driven by the desire to make Rembrandt's technique and style as far as possible their own.

The 'recognition' of a Rembrandt is additionally complicated because, more than the majority of his colleagues, Rembrandt was a searching artist.⁹ From his early Leiden creations to his very last works, one encounters an artist for whom each work seems to have been a new adventure in which the various pictorial means, narrative and other possibilities were probed time and again. He had no routine, there was no smooth evolution of his style. A rigid reliance on familiar characteristics can therefore end up by dictating, as it were, how Rembrandt should or should not have painted. This sometimes seemed to happen with the old RRP, precisely because we had pretensions to a scientific approach to connoisseurial judgments.

Over the course of time since 1968, the team had come to the conclusion that scientific investigation could not be of decisive significance in isolating Rembrandt's autograph *œuvre* as had originally been thought. In retrospect, however, that turns out to have been a mistake. At the outset it was thought that many later imitations and forgeries had corrupted the Rembrandt *œuvre*, but subsequent scientific investigation demonstrated with a high degree of certainty that there were in fact hardly any later imitations among the many Rembrandtesque works we examined. After a thorough campaign of investigating panels (by dendrochronology), canvases (the weave density, etc.), grounds (taking paint cross-sections for analysis) and painting procedures (by X-radiographs and microscopy), it appeared that most of the questionable paintings could have originated from the same workshop. Although these data were not sufficiently specific to allow us to isolate Rembrandt's autograph *œuvre*, it was thanks to the intensive collecting of technical data that we acquired the kind of knowledge on which the new RRP could build.

During the earlier phase of doubting the value of scientific investigation, the original team's attention shifted towards connoisseurship. Connoisseurship was in fact the background of most of the team members, but with the scientific ambition of the project still in mind, the emphasis now fell on rationalising our judgments through detailed argument. As a result, there developed a tendency to force Rembrandt's style and its development into a rational mould, which sometimes led to the de-attribution of paintings that were subsequently decisively shown to be authentic.

In planning their project around 1967, the initiators of the RRP assumed that the authors of the (then) most recently published surveys of Rembrandt's *œuvre* – Bredius in 1935 and Bauch in 1966 – had been too generous in their attributions. As a reaction to this, the team members tended to be too 'restrictive'. More alarmingly, some of the old team members showed characteristics of what Friedländer termed a '*Nein-Sager*' – a 'No' man. It is worth repeating here Friedländer's somewhat charged passage on 'No' men and 'Yes' men (the '*Ja-Sager*'), the more so since 'No' men still operate today in the world of Rembrandt attributions: 'As the "No" man imagines that he stands above the "Yes" man – and probably also to others seems to stand higher – critics will always feel the impulse to attack genuine works in order to win the applause of the maliciously minded [*schadenfroh*]. The "Yes" men have done more harm, but have also been of greater usefulness, than the rigorous "No" men, who deserve no confidence if they never have proved their worth as "Yes" men'.¹⁰

Another curious aspect of the history of Rembrandt connoisseurship is the tendency to seek the safety of consensus, in

⁷ See M. Gladwell: *Blink: the power of thinking without thinking*, New York and Boston 2005.

⁸ 714 Rembrandts are listed in W. Valentiner: *Rembrandts Gemälde*, Stuttgart and Berlin 1909, and in *idem*: *Rembrandt: wiedergefundene Gemälde (1910–1920) in 120 Abbildungen*, Stuttgart 1921; 611 in A. Bredius: *Rembrandt paintings*, London 1935 (hereafter cited as Bredius); 562 in K. Bauch: *Rembrandt Gemälde*, Berlin 1966; and 420 in H. Gerson: *Rembrandt paintings*, Amsterdam 1968.

⁹ See also E. van de Wetering: 'Rembrandt as a searching artist', in *idem et al.*: exh.

cat. *Rembrandt. Quest of a Genius*, Amsterdam (Rembrandthuis) 2006, pp.79–123.

¹⁰ Friedländer, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.261.

¹¹ See *Corpus*, I, nos.A 22, C 22 and C 26; II, B 8, C 70 and C 71; III, C 108.

¹² See *Corpus*, IV, Corrigenda I A 22/Bredius 3; Corrigenda I C 22/Bredius 633.

¹³ *Corpus*, I, C 22; III, C 108.

¹⁴ See E. van de Wetering: 'Rembrandt's brushwork and illusion; an art-theoretical approach', in *idem*: *Rembrandt. The painter at work*, Amsterdam 1997, pp.155–90; see also *Corpus*, IV, pp.166–171; Van de Wetering, *op. cit.* (note 9); and *Corpus V*

the idea that the more people there are who think the same about a painting, the greater the chance that they are right – even if the arguments they rely on, taken together, are less than compelling. As Catherine Scallen observes in her book *Rembrandt, Reputation, and the Practice of Connoisseurship* (2004), from 1890 onward Bode, Bredius, Hofstede de Groot and Valentiner shielded each other's views until Bredius, from 1912 on, gradually broke out of this self-protective scholarship. Among present Rembrandt scholars, we can see the similar formation of small groups of connoisseurs seeking safety in unanimity.

In the old RRP it was thought that unanimity of judgment brought one closer to the truth. Initially working as a scientific assistant, I subsequently became increasingly involved in the actual work of the RRP, and eventually became convinced that with Rembrandt the problems of attribution were too complex to rely on the consensus of connoisseurs. For this reason, from the first volume of the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, in certain cases I had minority opinions recorded.¹¹ This usually happened when I was concerned that a possibly auto-graph work was being de-attributed. When Christopher Brown (in his article mentioned above; see note 1) now reproves us for 'excessive inclusiveness', he might reflect that in a number of these earlier cases we have since been proved right,¹² and in other cases our proposals have not been fiercely contested. Among these reattributed paintings are works whose style ostensibly deviated from what was assumed to be Rembrandt's style at the relevant stage of his career.¹³ These cases led to a more fundamental questioning of our present-day conception of 'style' and stylistic 'evolution' as such, and of the comprehension of these issues that was current in Rembrandt's own time.¹⁴ In the frame of the new RRP, such research proceeded on several fronts, and the results of that research contributed to the change of course within the project.¹⁵

Our much more widely conceived research into the use of canvases, grounds, painting technique, signatures and several other features played such a role that we no longer needed to rely solely on a connoisseurship based on the anticipation of how a Rembrandt should look.¹⁶ Friedländer gave a nice example of this almost compulsive anticipation of the appearance of an artist's work: 'If someone tells me that he owns a *Still Life* by Frans Hals, signed and dated 1650, I conjure up – without ever having seen a *Still Life* by Frans Hals – an idea which serves me as a standard as to whether I accept or reject the picture when it is shown to me'.¹⁷ We have learned to mistrust such a standard in the case of Rembrandt. One might say that the 'new RRP' is more open to an understanding that Rembrandt is predictable only up to a certain point. Indeed, during the course of our work, he has turned out to be a different artist from the one we previously imagined.

In the main, one does not even know approximately what the eye sees (or does not see) at it gazes at a painting. Nor can connoisseurs know what each other sees, even when they are in mutual agreement. This is so chiefly (if the reader will allow me this apparent truism) because we simultaneously see paint on a panel or canvas and the three-dimensional illusion that arises through the way in which this paint is organised. Because this illusion usually seems self-evident and convincing, we do not consciously assess the often extremely complex means the painter needs in order to bring about this visual illusion. It is my conviction that many connoisseurial errors arise from a certain blindness to the intricacy of the pictorial means needed to create the illusion of three-dimensionality on a flat surface.

Christopher Brown demonstrates this in his article when discussing the painting in Copenhagen, which I am convinced is the study for the Göteborg *Knight with a falcon*. Brown's categorical judgment of the painting is that it is, 'in fact, a mediocre copy'.¹⁸ Assuming that to be the case, one has to account for the fact that the head in the Göteborg *Knight with a falcon* is represented strictly frontally while the Copenhagen painting is not (Figs. 17 and 18). At first sight, the fact that there are minor differences between the two heads would not seem to be an obstacle to the idea that the Copenhagen head is a (free) copy. The head in the Copenhagen sketch is only slightly turned to the right and tilted to the left in comparison with the head in Göteborg. If one simply accepts the illusion the painter has tried to realise for what it is, that difference is negligible: after all, one sees the same head in two only slightly different versions, although the Copenhagen version is executed more cursorily. But for anyone who also sees a painting as paint organised on a surface, the difference is radical: the way in which the nose in the Copenhagen painting is placed in the face turned slightly to the right, and the way in which the forehead, the eye sockets and the mouth are rendered in subtle foreshortening is far more complex than in the corresponding passages in the Göteborg painting. The same holds for the root of the nose and the temple that are illuminated as the head turns. It is surely wrong to assume that a mediocre copyist would want to introduce all these complicated changes and would further be capable of executing them with no more than twenty or thirty amazingly telling brushstrokes. When analysis of the ground of the Copenhagen sketch showed it to be a quartz-type ground that is exclusively found in works on canvas by Rembrandt and his workshop associates, the conclusion was inescapable: the painting *must* have come from Rembrandt's workshop.¹⁹ This was confirmed by the fact that the canvas of the Copenhagen painting comes from the same bolt as that of the *Knight with a falcon*.²⁰ The turning and tilting of the head suggest working after a posing model much more than the rigidly frontal head

(forthcoming), Chapters I and V.

¹⁵ For a survey of these projects, see the Preface to *Corpus*, IV, pp. xiv–xvi (notes 25–45), also published on our website, www.rembrandtresearchproject.org.

¹⁶ See, for instance, *Corpus*, IV, Corrigenda II C 61/Bredius 84 (*Portrait of a young woman in a beret set with pearls*; private collection, the Netherlands); and *The mill* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington; see *Corpus*, III, pp. 49–50, and E. van de Wetering: 'The Mill', in C. Vogelaar and G. Weber: exh. cat. *Rembrandt's landscapes*, Kassel (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister) and Leiden (Stedelijk Museum

De Lakenhal) 2006, pp. 74–91.

¹⁷ Friedländer, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 176.

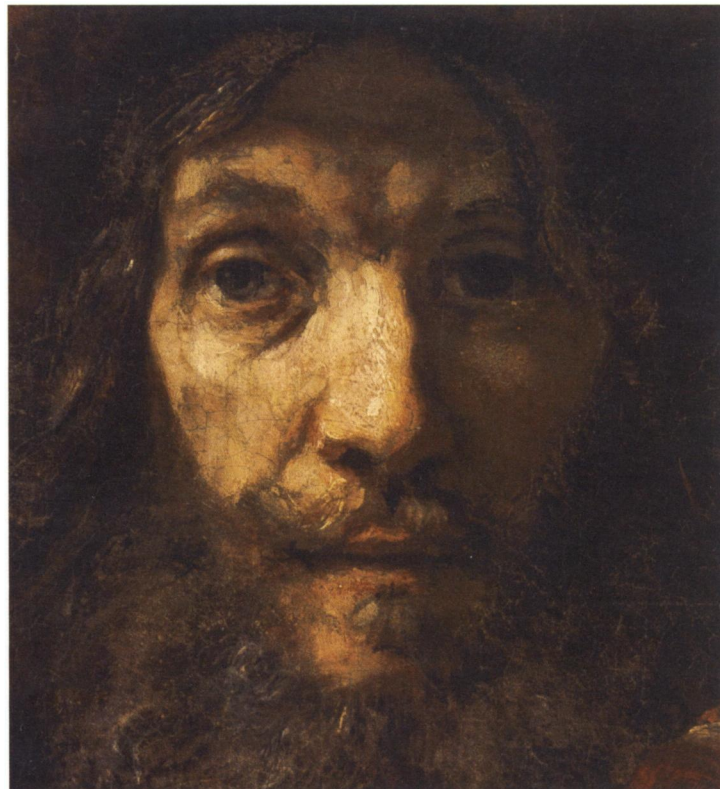
¹⁸ Brown, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 107.

¹⁹ See K. Groen: 'Grounds in Rembrandt's workshop and in paintings by his contemporaries', *Corpus*, IV, pp. 318–34 and 660–67.

²⁰ L. Bøgh Rønberg *et al.*: exh. cat. *Rembrandt? The master and his workshop*, Copenhagen (Statens Museum for Kunst) 2006, pp. 64 and 133.



17. Detail of *The crusader*, by Rembrandt van Rijn. 1659–61. Canvas, 68.5 by 55.5 cm. (Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen).



18. Detail of *Knight with a falcon*, by Rembrandt van Rijn. c.1661. Canvas, 98.5 by 79 cm. (Göteborgs Konstmuseum).

of the *Knight with a falcon*. (The blurred, feebly executed torso below the Copenhagen head, exerting a negative influence on the image as a whole, turned out to be a later addition.) Given that there are so far no reasons for doubting the authenticity of the Göteborg *Knight with a falcon*, the possibility that must obviously be entertained is that the Copenhagen version could have served as a preparatory oil-study.

The only conceivable alternative, therefore, to an attribution of the painting to Rembrandt would be that Rembrandt and one of his pupils painted the same model. But given the small difference in the sightlines, we can exclude the possibility that two painters could have sat next to each other while painting from the same model. Moreover, in style and quality the two faces betray the same hand that, for instance, also painted the *St Matthew and the angel* in the Louvre and other paintings from around 1660.

In recent years I have been engaged in a study of Rembrandt's oil-sketches for etchings,²¹ and of oil-studies with single figures as preparation for larger compositions.²² This latter category of his *œuvre* had almost entirely disappeared from view, since all the works, like the Copenhagen sketch (Fig. 17), had been relegated to the reservoir of partial copies after figures in history paintings. In our experience, taking the possible functions of paintings into account can be highly

useful. When one does so, Rembrandt's *œuvre* and the related 'cloud' of paintings by other painters fall into natural categories that may lead one to a more refined frame of reference for the investigation of the paintings concerned. It is therefore difficult to understand why Brown should reject this approach in the case of oil-studies as well as in the case of the 'satellites' to be discussed below.²³

Perhaps Brown's dismissive attitude on this point is an inevitable consequence of a specific aspect of traditional connoisseurship: almost all the connoisseur's judgments are discrete 'incidents' (as in the case of Friedländer in the Memling passage quoted above). In different cases, the painting to be evaluated is seen – usually briefly – in a museum or exhibition, in the hands of a restorer, at an auction, etc. In such conditions, each painting is a case in itself, judged against the virtual wall of paintings previously seen that one carries in one's memory. In such cases, there is no reference beyond the personal experience underlying the incidental judgment, neither concerning the historical or material circumstances of the work's genesis and history nor the possible function of the work concerned.

The decision of the new RRP not to deal with the mass of Rembrandtesque works strictly chronologically as in the first three volumes but rather to group them according to

²¹ E. van de Wetering: 'Remarks on Rembrandt's oil-sketches for etchings', in E. Hinterding, G. Luijten and M. Royalton-Kisch *et al.*: exh. cat. *Rembrandt, the printmaker*, Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) and London (British Museum) 2000–01, pp. 36–63.

²² E. van de Wetering: 'Rembrandt's oil studies: new light on an old problem', in *idem et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp. 179–207.

²³ Brown, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 107.

²⁴ For a summary of Volume IV, see www.rembrandtresearchproject.org.

²⁵ M. Franken: 'Learning by imitation: copying paintings in Rembrandt's workshop', in Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp. 153–77. See also E. van de Wetering "'Principaelen" and satellites: Pupils' production in Rembrandt's workshop', in Bøgh Rønberg *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 19), pp. 106–22; and *idem*: 'Gerard ter Borch en zijn atelier (een reisbrief)', *Kunstschrift* 3 (2005), pp. 16–27.

their different suggested functions, each of which usually involved similar pictorial challenges, has had a major influence on the results of our research. This approach has led to both de-attributions – the *Adoration of the shepherds* in the National Gallery, London, for example, a painting which Brown defends but which is found by the RRP to be a ‘satellite’ (see below) – and to reattributions, as in the case of the Copenhagen oil-study described above.

In the fourth volume of the *Corpus*, which appeared in 2005, we dealt with all the works that had until then been designated as self-portraits of equal importance, but which should in fact be subdivided into: studies in the mirror; ‘tronies’ with Rembrandt’s features; various kinds of unfinished and finished self-portraits of the type which, in the seventeenth century, were indicated as ‘portraits of the painter done by himself’; and free variants made by pupils after Rembrandt’s autograph self-portraits. In the process, we also looked in detail at the etched and drawn self-portraits that fall into these and yet other categories. We are convinced that this approach has produced far more new insights than if we had carried on with the chronological approach.²⁴

At present our research is devoted to the small-scale history paintings. In these investigations, the category of the so-called ‘satellites’ play an important role. These works, done by pupils, are either literally or more freely based on paintings by the master (the same phenomenon one finds with the drawings and etchings). In an article published in 2006, Michiel Franken, a member of the new RRP, differentiated representative examples of this group according to type.²⁵

Brown finds the phenomenon of the satellites ‘entirely unremarkable’. Our own experience, on the contrary, is that the distinction involved in this subdivision between prototypes and satellites is a powerful means of shedding light onto the great mass of Rembrandtesque paintings. A large number of the 611 paintings attributed to Rembrandt by Bredius, for example, seem to consist of such works by pupils based in various ways on Rembrandt’s prototypes. In this context, the analogy Brown draws with the portrait studio of Van Dyck is misguided. Despite the fact that seventeenth-century sources are quite clear on this point, Brown does not take into account the fact that Rembrandt was the head of a workshop where (apart from the traditional collaboration involved in the production of portraits) the organisation was such that the training of his pupils and their concomitant production of history and genre pieces, and ‘tronies’ (including the free variants after his self-portraits) in the style of the master, were inextricably interconnected. The enormous problems of attribution in Rembrandt’s case are very largely the consequence of this fusion of teaching and workshop production.²⁶

In separating Rembrandt’s prototypes from the large groups of satellites, analysis of the quality of the works plays an important role. A judgment of quality is, as a rule,

considered to be subjective and therefore of limited value in arguments concerning questions of attribution. Developing a more objective approach to the aspect of quality in painting calls for an analysis of how the various painterly procedures (in their very diverse forms) are used to create a convincing image. What is needed for such analyses is an eye for those qualitative differences in a painter’s use of the basic pictorial means – at the level of the rendering of form, anatomy, foreshortening, space, drapery, surface structure – that can to a significant degree be objectively identified. Close study of seventeenth-century written sources such as the texts by Karel van Mander, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Philips Angel, Gerard de Lairesse, etc., and the drawing examples by Crispijn van de Passe and others, provides an essential framework for the understanding of such, and many other, pictorial categories.

This may still look like traditional connoisseurship – but as demonstrated above, this form of analytical close-looking is more capable of being specific than the intuitive conclusions of the traditional connoisseur. However, such analyses are only useful and can only be convincing as long as colleagues and other readers of such analytical texts are willing to participate in the close-looking and follow the arguments presented. In Volume V, much attention will be devoted to qualitative analysis. Several examples have already been published.²⁷

As noted above, in the Rembrandt field traditional connoisseurship has led to an unseemly number of incorrect attributions and de-attributions. And it still happens. A lesson that ought to be drawn from this is that such opinions should not be introduced so hastily into the public domain, for this easily leads to major confusion. Indeed, at least partly as a result of this, a degree of apathy concerning the question of authenticity of works attributed to Rembrandt has become apparent over recent decades.

An example of inadequately thought-through judgments is given by the way in which Brown expresses his opinion of the *Girl in a picture frame* (Fig. 19) from the Royal Palace in Warsaw, a painting signed ‘Rembrandt’ and dated 1641 and first exhibited in the Rembrandt Year. This painting, together with the *Scholar at a desk* (Fig. 20) from the same year and considered as its pendant, belonged to the Lanckoronski collection, which has been inaccessible since the Second World War.²⁸ Brown’s commentary reads: ‘. . . for the time being, the question of attribution must remain open: certainly the *Young woman* powerfully reminded this viewer of the similarly posed *Girl in a picture frame* [actually a door] in the Art Institute of Chicago, which was persuasively shown to be by Samuel van Hoogstraten in the 1990–91 exhibition in Berlin, Amsterdam and London’.²⁹ This is by clear implication a negative verdict on the attribution of the painting to Rembrandt; indeed, the caption accompanying the reproduction of the painting in Brown’s article simply reads ‘circle of Rembrandt’.

²⁶ J. von Sandrart: *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste*, Nuremberg 1675, ed. A.R. Peltzer, Munich 1925, p.203; W.L. Strauss and M. van der Meulen: *The Rembrandt Documents*, New York 1979, pp.594–95.

²⁷ E. van de Wetering: ‘Rembrandt’s art: attempting an objective evaluation’, in *idem et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp.234–48, esp. pp.239–48.

²⁸ A. Ziemba: ‘Dwa obrazy z kolekcji Lanckoronskich: Rembrandt i Bol/Two

Paintings from the Lanckoronski Collection: Rembrandt and Bol’, *Ikonotheke (Bulletin of the Institute of History of Art, University of Warsaw)* 13 (1990), pp.11–24.

²⁹ Brown *op. cit.* (note 1), p.108. As to the doubts over the attribution of the Chicago painting to Hoogstraten, see C.B. Scallen: ‘Connoisseurships of Rembrandt’s paintings’, in M.R. Abbing, ed.: *Rembrandt 2006, Essays*, Leiden 2006, pp.63–73.

These paintings that recently resurfaced in Warsaw were first investigated by Polish researchers using a variety of techniques. Between 2004 and 2006 members of the RRP investigated the two paintings during three sessions, each taking several days. In the last stage of this investigation, the restorers of the Royal Castle in Warsaw removed thick layers of varnish, overpaintings and retouchings. The results of both the Polish and RRP investigations could not be published at that time because the restoration and the concomitant investigation were completed just before the opening of the Amsterdam Rembrandt exhibition in April 2006 in which the paintings were shown. On the basis of the RRP's examination, the two paintings were exhibited in Amsterdam and also in the Berlin Rembrandt exhibition of the same year as autograph works by Rembrandt.

During the Rembrandt symposium in Berlin in October 2006, a discussion arose over the *Girl in a picture frame*. This was only to be expected. There exist other similar genre-like *trompe l'œil* paintings with figures in openings parallel to the picture plane, but these are by pupils of Rembrandt such as Ferdinand Bol and possibly Samuel van Hoogstraten. During these discussions in Berlin, Walter Liedtke of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, attributed the Warsaw *Girl in a picture frame* (Fig.19) to Samuel van Hoogstraten, referring to a painting attributed to Van Hoogstraten in the Hermitage. Brown follows his example in his review of the Rembrandt Year.

For those who participated in the discussion in Berlin and for the readers of Brown's article, it was (and is), of course, difficult or impossible to recall clearly the works attributed to Van Hoogstraten referred to by the two connoisseurs. Even normal reproductions are of little help in such a situation. But anyone who does have a clear memory of the cited paintings is well aware that their dry modelling *peinture* is fundamentally different from that in the Warsaw *Girl*. Yet, because they de-attributed the painting from Rembrandt with such aplomb, the 'No' men have the advantage that Friedländer so elegantly attributes to them in the passage quoted earlier. Whereas the person who arrived at the conviction that the painting is indeed authentic is in the disadvantageous position of Friedländer's 'Yes' man, despite the fact that he reached that conclusion through a careful programme of painstaking research. Indicating that there are differences in style and execution between the Warsaw painting and the *Portrait of Agatha Bas* in the Royal Collection, a generally accepted *trompe l'œil* painting with a woman in a picture frame, seemed to be sufficient for Brown to reject the Warsaw *Girl* as a work by Rembrandt. As said before, as a result of our constant engagement with the entire *œuvre*, we are convinced that Rembrandt was not a painter of fixed habits.

How then, for the Warsaw *Girl in a picture frame*, can one trace a reliable path to a well-founded attribution? As so

often, in this case the humble facts concerning the support of the work provide a firm ground for further deliberations.³⁰ Brown cites from the catalogue the fact that both Warsaw paintings are painted on poplar panels. In this instance, this information is more significant than one might think. We know eight paintings by Rembrandt, all from the period around 1640, on poplar panels: six on beautiful, large panels made of a single plank, and two on smaller panels.³¹ Around 1639 Rembrandt must have acquired a batch of these panels which were, as far as is known, exceptional in Dutch workshops of the time. These are the only poplar panels to be found in Rembrandt's *œuvre*. He used them, sometimes with the collaboration of a workshop assistant (as in the case of Bredius 222 and Bredius 356), during the same period in which he was working on the *Night watch*. The *Girl in a picture frame* is dated 1641; Van Hoogstraten was born in 1627 and according to the sources could only have arrived in Rembrandt's workshop, at the very earliest, in 1642, but more probably in 1643. For this reason alone, he could not have been the author of the *Girl in a picture frame* painted two years earlier.

There might seem to be a possible escape route here for those who try to maintain the attribution of the painting to Van Hoogstraten. The x-radiograph shows that beneath the visible paint layer lies an unfinished portrait, abandoned at an early stage, of a woman in a millstone ruff. One could argue that the girl was painted (by Van Hoogstraten?) at the earliest in 1642/43 over this unfinished portrait and subsequently pre-dated. But that argument fails. The painting with the girl is closely connected with the *Scholar at a desk* (Fig.20) from 1641, not only because they are both painted on poplar panels but also for other reasons: apart from both being dated 1641 (and reliably signed), it is highly significant that, from the time they were painted, they must have remained together. It would seem to be more than an extraordinary coincidence that paintings which have such objective matters of fact in common should in 1769 be preserved as a pair of pendants in the collection of the comte de Kamcke under the titles '*La Juive fiancée*' and '*Le Père de la fiancée reglant sa dot*'.³² Moreover, Karin Groen's investigation of paint samples taken from the signature demonstrates that the inscription on the *Girl* cannot have been added at a much later date.

On objective grounds, therefore, it is virtually impossible to attribute the painting to Samuel van Hoogstraten. One hardly need add that neither in style nor quality is there any demonstrable similarity between the Warsaw *Girl in a picture frame* and the earliest dated works by Samuel van Hoogstraten from the years 1644–49, the period in which he still based himself on Rembrandt in a number of rather clumsy paintings.³³

The 'connoisseur's' judgment appears to be based on nothing more than outward, superficial similarities with a common type of painting in the style of Rembrandt: a figure

³⁰ *Corpus*, I, pp.12–17 and 683–85; II, pp.15–43; IV, pp.648–58; E. Hinterding: *Rembrandt as an etcher. The practice of production and distribution*, Ouderkerk aan den IJssel 2006.

³¹ *Portrait of Maria Trip* (Bredius 356; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), dated 1639; *Portrait of a bearded gentleman standing in an archway* (pendant of the previous work; Bredius 222;

private collection), unreliably signed 1641; *Man in oriental costume (King Uzziah?)* (Bredius 179; Devonshire collection, Chatsworth), c.1639; *Portrait of a man holding a hat* (Bauch 379; Armand Hammer Collection, Los Angeles), c.1640; *Scholar at a table* (Bredius 219; Royal Castle, Warsaw), 1641; *Girl in a picture frame* (Bredius 359; Royal Castle, Warsaw; the painting under discussion here), 1641; *Self-portrait* (Bredius 20;



19. *Girl in a picture frame*, by Rembrandt van Rijn. 1641. Panel, 105.7 by 76.4 cm. (Royal Castle, Warsaw).



20. *Scholar at a desk*, by Rembrandt van Rijn. 1641. Panel, 105.7 by 76.4 cm. (Royal Castle, Warsaw).

in a door or window frame parallel to the image plane. But that type must have been based on a prototype by Rembrandt, of that there can be little doubt. It is precisely in the period 1639–42 that Rembrandt was intensively engaged with *trompe l'œil* paintings with living figures in a setting parallel with the picture plane.³⁴ Pupils such as Ferdinand Bol, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Carel Fabritius, Christopher Paudiss, etc., continued for some time to follow in Rembrandt's *trompe l'œil* footsteps. If there is one of Rembrandt's pupils who could conceivably have painted the *Girl* it would have to be Ferdinand Bol who left Rembrandt's workshop around 1641.³⁵ Indeed, the Polish art historian Antoni Ziemia did cite Bol as a possible author of *Girl in a picture frame*,³⁶ but during our joint investigations after the cleaning of the Warsaw painting he distanced himself from that tentative attribution.

It is much more likely that the *Girl in a picture frame* was the prototype, or one of several, by Rembrandt for a short-lived genre within the Rembrandt school. Certain linked

characteristics suggest that this painting could be a prototype. It is exceptional within the genre in that it connects with a specific development in Rembrandt's pictorial thinking from the mid-1630s up to 1642: in contrast to comparable works by former pupils, the girl in this painting is expressly depicted in motion and appears to be moving forwards. While her left hand rests on the frame, the thumb of her right hand touches the shiny wood (and is reflected in it), while the other four fingers of that hand are suspended above the frame and seem about to grasp it; the shadow cast by the side of the frame on the hand enhances this effect. The material of the girl's right sleeve is shown to be in motion by a series of parallel long, curved scratches in the wet paint; her earring is swinging, as often occurs when Rembrandt renders a female figure in motion. The girl's body and shoulders are slightly turned to the left, which supports the impression that the figure is advancing her right hand towards the frame. This invention, which accords with

Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence), c.1639; *Saskia van Uylenburgh* (Bredius 96; National Gallery of Art, Washington), c.1640.

³² In 1769 Georg Friedrich Schmidt (1712–75) made elaborate prints after the two paintings, inscribed with these captions.

³³ W. Sumowski: *Gemälde der Rembrandt Schüler*, II, Landau 1983, nos.847, 849,

851, 823 and 824.

³⁴ *Corpus*, IV, pp.245–47.

³⁵ Sumowski, *op. cit.* (note 33), I, nos.122, 123, 126, 128, 134, 136, 138 and 162.

³⁶ See Ziemia, *op. cit.* (note 28).

Rembrandt's almost obsessive concern with the representation of movement precisely in the period around 1640, is unique.³⁷ It does not occur in the works with *trompe l'œil* figures by Rembrandt's former pupils that are related to this painting. Evidently the aspect of movement in the Warsaw painting was not so important that it was taken up in this short-lived pictorial tradition.

As we learn from Friedländer, the 'genuine' connoisseur needs usually no more than a single glance at a painting. But of all the attributions handed down by Friedländer employing this 'intuitive' method of recognition in his own specialist area (Early Netherlandish paintings), only some fifty per cent have stood the test of time. While Friedländer saw paintings as images in the sense of accumulations of 'forms' (in his words), modern researchers in this field, using research techniques like infrared reflectography and X-radiography, see these works rather as the result of creative

and technical processes. This is also the way the new RRP tries to investigate paintings.

The least that can be demanded of a Rembrandt connoisseur is that he should not attribute or de-attribute paintings merely because he associates them with other paintings as comparable *images* (for example, paintings with figures frontally placed in window, door or picture frame openings);³⁸ but that he should also try to understand them as the results of working and thinking processes. Otherwise he is simply another beholder with a little more art-historical baggage, a beholder who has merely assumed the authority of the 'connoisseur'.

³⁷ Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp.103–15.

³⁸ See also W. Liedtke: *Dutch paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 2007, no.149, figs.154 and 155.

Appendix

Apart from the two cases analysed in the present article, Christopher Brown commented in his article cited in note 1 above on further issues related to the RRP's work. Because such remarks often take on a stubborn life of their own in the art-historical literature, I deal with them here under reference to the relevant page number in Brown's article, referring where possible to the literature.

- p.105: 'profound effect [of the new RRP] on the market'. On inquiry, it turns out that this remark relates to the recently discovered *Woman in a white cap*, which was auctioned as a Rembrandt in 2005. For arguments in favour of the attribution of this study to Rembrandt, see Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp.178 and 186–96. Meanwhile a third copy of the painting has surfaced, again most probably a product of Rembrandt's studio, which suggests, as in the case of the Amsterdam *Study in the mirror* (*Corpus*, I, A 14) in preparation of the *Judas* painting (*Corpus*, I, A 15), that such studies by the master stayed in the studio for teaching purposes. As to the significant dendrochronological data, see Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.188.
- p.105: 'profound effect [of the new RRP] on the fashioning of exhibitions'. I advised on the choice of works to be shown in Amsterdam and in Berlin. I also designed the hanging in Amsterdam (in conjunction with the audio tour mentioned by Brown), but not in Berlin, where the hanging and labelling of works by Rembrandt and his pupils was rather confusing.
- p.105: The de-attribution of *The mill* in Washington was not a 'casualty' of the RRP; see the historiography in Van de Wetering, *op. cit.* (note 16).
- p.105: On the *Polish rider* (Frick Collection, New York). A summary of the results of our investigations of the *Polish rider* carried out over the years appeared in the *IFAR* (*International Foundation for Art Research Journal*, 4/2 (2001), pp.22–24). In that article it was argued that the *Polish rider* should be considered an unfinished painting by Rembrandt himself from the period around 1655: parts were probably completed by another hand and it was misleadingly reconstructed on the added bottom strip of the canvas by William Suhr. A detailed entry on the *Polish rider* will be published in due course in the forthcoming fifth volume of the *Corpus*.
- p.106: 'argument about the tilting of the canvas is less persuasive'. The 'tilting' of the canvas of *The mill* is deduced from the right edge of the X-radiograph which shows how the straight border of the radio-absorbent paint indicating sky and water on the original (somewhat wider) canvas is inclined to the right (just as the mill in the painting itself leans to the right; see Fig.37 in Brown's article and the reconstruction of the painting in Van de Wetering, *op. cit.* (note 16), figs.59a–d).
- p.107: *Head of an old man in a cap* (Alfred and Isabella Bader collection, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario) is most probably a study for the head of St Philip in the lost *Baptism of the Eunuch* of c.1630; see J.J. van Vliet's print after this painting (*Corpus*, I, p.37, fig.3).
- p.107: *Weeping woman* (Detroit Institute of Arts; Fig.38 in Brown's article): Josua Bruyn's attribution of this work to the young Samuel van Hoogstraten is untenable (J. Bruyn: Review of W. Sumowski: *Gemälde der Rembrandt Schüler*, III, in *Oud Holland* 102 (1988), pp.322–33, esp. pp.329–30; see also J. Bruyn:

'Rembrandt's workshop: function & production', in C. Brown, J. Kelch and P. van Thiel, eds.: exh. cat. *Rembrandt: The master and his workshop*, Berlin (Altes Museum), Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) and London (National Gallery) 1991–92, p.79). Moreover, the woman in the London *Woman taken in adultery* contains far too little visual information to enable any painter to produce (at four times the size) a free 'copy' after it. Close analysis of the execution of the work forces one to conclude that this sketch must have been painted after a model as a preparatory oil-sketch for the London painting; see also Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp.196–200; and *Corpus*, V (forthcoming), no.2.

p.107: As to the presumed parallels between the functional relationship between, on the one hand, the Copenhagen oil-study and the Göteborg *Knight with a falcon* and, on the other, the so-called small portrait of Margaretha de Geer and the three-quarter-length, strictly frontal portrait of the same woman, both in the National Gallery, London, see Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), p.207.

I address here Brown's remarks concerning some of the paintings shown in the Berlin exhibition on p.107. The numbers below refer to the relevant entries in the Berlin catalogue:

- nos.39 and 40: Brown's comment: 'not a pair, and not by Carel Fabritius, but circle of Rembrandt'. The two portraits (the woman in Toronto, the man in Cologne), both dated 1644, share a number of technical features which link them: they both have the same size (the man measures 125 by 102 cm.; the woman 124.5 by 100.3 cm.); the canvases from both paintings originate from the same bolt of linen, which is usual with pendant-pairs; both paintings show the same specific manner of painting which could be described as 'graphic' on the one hand, while on the other, the broader brushstrokes tend to have roundish shapes: we found the same characteristics in Fabritius's earliest portrait (*Portrait of Abraham de Potter*, 1649; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). For stylistic arguments to attribute the two paintings to Fabritius, see C. Brown, J. Kelch and P. van Thiel, eds.: exh. cat. *Rembrandt: The master and his workshop*, Berlin (Altes Museum), Amsterdam (Rijksmuseum) and London (National Gallery) 1991–92, no.76.
- no.42: 'copy'. See the above discussion of the Detroit *Weeping woman*.
- no.45: 'imitation'. See our discussion of this 'Portrait of Rembrandt' in Leipzig in *Corpus*, IV, no.4 (pp.378–84; see also pp.128–29 in the same volume).
- no.48: 'workshop at best'. In our opinion, a pupil of Rembrandt, elaborating on the basis of an underpainting by Rembrandt; see *Corpus*, V (forthcoming), Chapter IV.
- no.51: 'imitation'. In my opinion an oil-study after a posing model comparable to Benesch 709 and 710; Bartsch 193, 194 and 196.
- nos.69 and 78: 'imitation'. See Van de Wetering *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 9), esp. pp.182–86 and 196. I (re)attributed these paintings to Rembrandt because of their extraordinary pictorial qualities specified in my comments and, in the case of no.78, because of its functional relationship with Rembrandt's *Circumcision* in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (Bredius 596).