

“Rembrandt in America” opens at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts

June 24 through September 16, 2012



Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–69), *Portrait of a Girl Wearing a Gold-Trimmed Cloak* (detail), 1632, oil on panel, © Private Collection, New York

Exhibition features 30 autograph paintings by Rembrandt and contributes to the study of his work.

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“Rembrandt in America” brings together the largest number of authentic paintings by the famous Dutch master ever assembled in the United States. This groundbreaking exhibition, presented by U.S. Bank, opens June 24 at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA). Featuring rarely seen work from two dozen museums and a few extraordinary private collections, the exhibition traces the arc of Rembrandt’s career and influence as revealed in fifty paintings. Approximately thirty are bona fide works by the master. All were purchased as authentic Rembrandts for American collections, but modern scholarship has re-attributed some. Others are still debated and the exhibition presents them as open questions for public consideration. “Rembrandt in America” was organized and presented by the MIA, the North Carolina Museum of Art, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

One of the most important painters in the history of European art, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) is renowned for his uncanny ability to depict light and shadow, capture the emotions of his sitters, and intimately share historical and religious stories. Born in Leiden, in the Dutch Republic (now The Netherlands), Rembrandt spent most of his career in Amsterdam.

The paintings in the exhibition range in time from the artist's earliest days as a brash student, to the peak of his popularity as the most fashionable painter in Amsterdam, to his social and financial downfall, during which he created some of his masterpieces. In these paintings one can trace Rembrandt's astonishing artistic development and deepening understanding of humanity.

Rembrandt sometimes blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction by casting his family members in roles of historical and legendary figures. One of the exhibition highlights is the MIA's own *Lucretia*, in which the artist depicted his lover, Hendrickje Stoffels, as a woman who had been severely wronged. Rembrandt painted the picture quickly, slathering on colors with palette knives and brushes, pouring his heart out, just as his subject's lifeblood drained away.

"Rembrandt in America" contains several rarely seen paintings from private collections, including an exquisite portrait of a young woman with wispy red hair, a crisp blouse, and a coat embroidered in gold and silver. Reproduced on the cover of the exhibition catalogue, this masterful painting looks as fresh as it must have looked the day it was completed.

While he was a student, Rembrandt painted *The Singers* and *The Operation*, allegories for the senses of hearing and touch. Though these pictures are not considered masterpieces, they offer viewers the opportunity to search for the glimmering traits of emerging genius. They reveal the artist's interest in depicting emotion and thought, as well as the dramatic play of light and shadow that would become his hallmark. Here Rembrandt was attempting to manipulate paint in unconventional ways to produce convincing illusions of weathered skin or shiny metal.

The great masterpieces in the exhibition span Rembrandt's mature career. *Old Man with a Gold Chain*—appearing only in Minneapolis during the exhibition's tour—probably served as a demonstration of his remarkable talent when he made the move from his hometown to Amsterdam. The portrait of Amsterdam merchant, Marten Looten, shows the breathtaking realism that Rembrandt could offer his thriving middle-class patrons. In two paintings of Saint Bartholomew, Rembrandt employed different styles—one in which his subject embodies the bold willingness of the martyr; the other revealing the pensive mood of a man aware of his fate. A portrait of a young man with flowing hair, made late in Rembrandt's life, demonstrates the master's appreciation of beauty and promise of youth. It also exemplifies Rembrandt's undiminished ability to create illusions with the lightest touch of his brush.

Even well known pictures that have long been on public view will be seen as never before. For instance, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, recently cleaned the portraits of the Reverend Johannes Elison and his wife, Maria Bockenolle. This is the only pair of full-length Rembrandt portraits in America. For the first time in decades, viewers can see Rembrandt's mastery of black-in-black painting. The Mennonite couple wore clothing of modest color, but not of modest quality—note the intricately knotted buttons, close smocking, and voluminous cascades of fabric.

One of the most startling pictures in the exhibition is a calm and composed self-portrait from Rembrandt's later years. His care-worn face betrays his personal and financial losses; yet his dignity is intact. He unflinchingly recorded his features with a severely limited palette. Yet the picture has a powerful effect, and it is difficult to escape its gaze.

The exhibition's twenty paintings no longer thought to be by Rembrandt employ dazzling bravura brushwork and color, such as Jan Lievens's *Feast of Esther*. Long thought to be the work of Rembrandt, it is now understood to be the work of a precocious artist whose brilliance spurred Rembrandt to improve his own skills. Others are by Rembrandt's own pupils, such as Govaert Flinck and Carl Fabritius, fully trained painters who wanted to mature under the master's guidance.

The work of Rembrandt's students was often so good that connoisseurs—curators, collectors, dealers, academics, conservators, and auctioneers—are still in the process of solving the exceptionally complex puzzle of just who painted certain pictures. "Rembrandt in America" presents recent findings as well as current disagreements in the field. The exhibition provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring these paintings together for direct comparisons.

"Rembrandt in America" is accompanied by a 240-page catalogue authored by the MIA's own Tom Rassieur, Dennis P. Weller, and George Keyes. Published by Skira Rizzoli, the catalogue contains 150 color illustrations and is available in hardback and paperback.

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PRESS CONTACTS

MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

Anne-Marie Wagener, (612) 870-3280; awagener@artsmia.org

Tammy Pleshek, (612) 870-3171; tpleshek@artsmia.org

RESNICOW SCHROEDER ASSOCIATES

Alison Buchbinder, (212) 671-5165; abuchbinder@resnicowschroeder.com

Aga Sablinska, (212) 671-5177; asablinska@resnicowschroeder.com

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ABOUT THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), home to one of the finest encyclopedic art collections in the country, houses more than 80,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history. Highlights of the permanent collection include European masterworks by Rembrandt, Poussin, and van Gogh; modern and contemporary painting and sculpture by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Stella, and Close; as well as internationally significant collections of prints and drawings, decorative arts, Modernist design, photographs, textiles, and Asian, African, and Native American art. General admission is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. Museum hours: Sunday, 11 A.M.–5 P.M.; Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Thursday, 10 A.M.–9 P.M.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3000 or visit www.artsmia.org.