

Summary

The genesis of this volume and a survey of its contents

Having decided to adopt a thematic approach, as described in the above *Preface*, and to concentrate on the self-portraits exclusively, a complicated process of writing and continually altering and extending this volume began. In the course of that lengthy process, the third chapter titled 'Rembrandt's self-portraits: problems of authenticity and function', gradually came to assume the proportions of a book within a book.

It is hardly surprising that the examination of Rembrandt's self-portraits should become so complex. We were, after all, tackling one of the most intriguing problems in the history of art: why did Rembrandt place himself before the mirror so extraordinarily often in order to represent himself in numerous paintings and etchings as well as in a lesser number of drawings? And following on this question: why should problems of authenticity arise in such apparently personal works, and how are such problems to be resolved in the face of a virtual absence of any contemporary document concerning Rembrandt's self-portraits?

What follows is a summary of the results of our work. The reader will find the arguments that underpin our hypotheses and our discoveries in the volume itself: the relevant passages can easily be found using the references in the footnotes accompanying this summary. It is annotated in such a way that the user of this book will be able to find quickly the most important passages and reproductions in this volume.*

By using this summary, others who do not have immediate access to Volume IV of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* can familiarize themselves with the results of our research set out in that volume. An off-print or digital version of the following text will accordingly also be made available for purposes of informing the press and other interested parties. Therefore the notes also refer to the most commonly used surveys in which all the paintings, drawings and etchings dealt with by us are reproduced. These surveys are referred to here by the abbreviations Br., Ben. and B. together with the relevant numbers.

Br.: A. Bredius, *Rembrandt Paintings*, 1935/69

Ben.: O. Benesch, *The drawings of Rembrandt*, 1954/73

B.: A. Bartsch, *Catalogue raisonné*, 1797; this time honoured numbering system of the etchings is used for instance by Chr. White and K.G. Boon, *Rembrandt's etchings*, 1969; W. von Seidlitz, *Die Radierungen Rembrandts*, Leipzig 1922; G. Schwartz, *Rembrandt: all the etchings reproduced in true size*, 1977.

* Where paintings, etchings or drawings are mentioned in the notes accompanying this text, reference is provided not only to the figure numbers and catalogue numbers in the present and earlier volumes but also, for those whose access to the text is via off-prints, to the Bredius (Br.), Benesch (Ben.) and Bartsch (B.)-numbers.

1 Cat. nos. IV 1 - 29.

2 See pp. 89 - 132.

3 *Corpus* I nos. A 14 (see Br. 1), 19 (Br. 2), 20 (Br. 3), 21 (Br. 6), 22 (see Br. 3), 33 (Br. 12), 40 (Br. 16), B 5 (11), C 34 (Br. 5), 35 (Br. 4), 36 (Br. 7), 37 (Br. 9), 38 (Br. 10), 40 (Br. 14); II nos. A 58 (Br. 17), 71 (Br. 18), 72 (Br. 19), 96 (Br. 21), 97 (Br. 22), C 56 (Br. 23); III nos. A 139 (Br. 34), B 10 (Br. 29), C 92 (Br. 25), 93 (Br. 33), 94 (see Br. 33), 96 (Br. 27), 97 (Br. 32), 99 (Br. 26).

4 Chapter III, pp. 202-206 and 207-211, IV *Addenda* 1 and 2.

But first a brief account should be given of the background to the slow and laborious genesis of this volume.

The genesis of this volume

The initial question we had to cope with was the authenticity of the 30 or so painted self-portraits from the period 1642 to 1669.¹ This is why our methodical considerations were aimed at this group of paintings alone.² After all, the paintings bearing Rembrandt's effigy from before 1642 had already been dealt with in Volumes I – III of the *Corpus*.³ Yet the growing sense that our view of a number of these earlier self-portraits needed revision, as well as our altered opinions as to their authenticity, led inexorably to the realization that the paintings from this earlier period would simply have to be dealt with once again. A re-examination of all the painted self-portraits from before 1642 also offered the incidental advantage that two more self-portraits (from 1632 and 1634), newly attributed to Rembrandt by us, could be discussed in this context.⁴ As to the attribution problems with those paintings bearing Rembrandt's effigy from the period 1625-1642, several changes in our views should be noted. Two paintings previously accepted as works by Rembrandt are now disattributed.⁵ In two cases, paintings that had first been listed as copies were recognized as works by Rembrandt himself, whereas the corresponding works, initially accepted by us as authentic, were relegated to the category of copies.⁶ Two paintings, in the earlier volumes not accepted as authentic, are now reattributed to Rembrandt.⁷ In the case of two paintings that were partly overpainted at an early stage – one of which had originally been rejected by us altogether,⁸ the other questioned but not rejected⁹ – the initial versions of these paintings are now attributed to Rembrandt. One painting from the B-category in Vol. I (paintings whose origin from Rembrandt's hand can be neither positively accepted nor rejected) is now firmly accepted as an autograph Rembrandt.¹⁰ In the case of 16 of the 22 paintings dealt with in this volume from before *c.* 1642, our opinions remained unaltered.¹¹

During the course of working on the painted self-portraits to be catalogued in this volume, the need also arose to understand the *function and meaning* of these works. This question had barely been addressed in the previous volumes of *A Corpus*, but when one approaches Rembrandt's self-portraits as a phenomenon by itself it becomes an unavoidable issue. One has to realize that, until quite recently, the interpretation of Rembrandt's

5 IV *Corrigenda* I A 33 (Br. 12), II A 97 (Br. 22).

6 IV *Corrigenda* I A 21 (Br. 6) and I A 22 (see Br. 3).

7 IV *Corrigenda* III C 96 (Br. 27) and III C 97 (Br. 32).

8 II C 56 (Br. 23).

9 III B 10 (Br. 29).

10 I B 5 (Br. 11).

11 I A 14 (see Br. 1), 19 (Br. 2), 20 (Br. 3), 40 (Br. 16), C 34 (Br. 5), 36 (Br. 7); II A 58 (Br. 17), 71 (Br. 18), 72 (Br. 19), 96 (Br. 21); III A 111 (Br. 30), 139 (Br. 34), C 92 (Br. 25), 93 (Br. 33), 94 (see Br. 33), IV *Addendum* 1 (see Br. 157).

work in front of the mirror knew little constraint: every author felt free to follow his or her own imagination. To quote a number of examples: in 1906, in his book on Rembrandt, the Dutch art historian Frederik Schmidt-Degener wrote that

‘it was Rembrandt’s cult of his own personality that at first made him produce his self-portraits’.

Schmidt-Degener continued,

‘Rembrandt then became the grave man who expressed everything in his self-portraits, including his unhappiness and his loneliness; but he also expressed his self-confidence, pride and triumph as an artist.’¹²

Jakob Rosenberg, in his monograph on Rembrandt of 1948, spoke of the

‘ceaseless and unsparing observation which Rembrandt’s self-portraits reflect, showing a gradual change from outward description and characterization to the most penetrating self-analysis and self-contemplation ... Rembrandt seems to have felt that he had to know himself if he wished to penetrate the problem of man’s inner life.’¹³

In 1985 Pascal Bonafoux asserted with great confidence that

‘Self-portraiture with him [Rembrandt] was self-communing and prayer: it begins in 1625 and ends in 1669.’¹⁴

In Perry Chapman’s book published in 1990, the most ambitious monograph on Rembrandt’s self-portraits so far, the author suggested that Rembrandt’s self-portraits

‘represent in a truly modern sense an on-going quest for his own identity’

and that in his self-portraiture

‘he remained motivated by the impulse to self-investigation to the end of his life.’¹⁵

In one crucial respect there appears to have been little change between 1906 and 1990: Schmidt-Degener, Rosenberg, Bonafoux and Chapman all assume that Rembrandt’s many self-portraits – certainly those from his Amsterdam years (i.e. after 1632) – are highly personal creations ‘generated by internal pressure’, as Chapman put it. Implicit in all these views is the idea that Rembrandt’s sequential self-portraits were private, intimate works, an idea which is still widely held.

While we were working on this volume, an exhibition on Rembrandt’s self-portraits was held in London and The Hague (National Gallery, London 9 June-5 September 1999; Mauritshuis, The Hague 25 September 1999-9 January 2000). We were involved in the choice of the paintings exhibited and in the writing of the essays for the catalogue. Furthermore, we made available the draft catalogue texts for the present book and other information. The exhibition catalogue, however, should

not be considered a summary of the present book. Our ideas had already developed further by the time the exhibition opened. The exhibition itself moreover was an extremely valuable opportunity to study the works confronted with each other. This volume should therefore be considered as a next step in assessing the phenomenon of Rembrandt’s self-portraits.

Our involvement in this exhibition had forced us to confront the question of function and meaning as the most urgent of all the problems surrounding Rembrandt’s self-portraits. It became clear that our proposed answers – summarized below – to this latter question would have a bearing on the way we dealt with questions of authenticity.

However, addressing the question of function and meaning solely in relation to the painted self-portraits would make little sense without considering within the same context the issue of Rembrandt’s self-portraits in its entirety. The need to study the *etched* self-portraits as well became especially urgent as some etchings seemed to contradict our ideas about the different functions of Rembrandt’s painted self-portraits. Specifically, there were three etchings in which Rembrandt had included – either wholly or in part – renderings of his own face among a number of exercises and scribbles.¹⁶ This would appear at first sight to confirm the old idea that Rembrandt was driven by ‘internal pressure’ to an almost obsessive, private preoccupation with his own image and identity.

The hunt for the significance of these study sheets (in which Erik Hinterding also participated) eventually led to an entirely new – and we believe coherent – outlook on the 31 etchings, finished and unfinished, that had hitherto been considered as more or less equivalent self-portraits.¹⁷

The *drawn* self-portraits were also investigated for their authenticity and function. Several had already been dealt with in our catalogue entries because it had been suggested in the past – incorrectly, in our view – that they were preliminary studies for painted or etched self-portraits. A new vision of the various functions of the drawn self-portraits emerged.¹⁸

Slowly the volume had grown to assume the character of a monograph on Rembrandt’s self-portraits, but it could not develop into a classic monograph with claims to completeness. Many of our successive, supplementary revisions were added after the manuscript had largely been typeset, making such substantial re-organization of the kind one might have wished no longer possible. This was also true of the illustrations, as the reader will observe. We believe, however, that precisely because of this slow and often all-too-visible process of growth of our ideas, we developed an understanding of Rembrandt’s self-portraits which, in many respects, suggested that both the artist and the person should be seen with new eyes. In our view, the most important outcome of our work is

12 F. Schmidt-Degener, *Rembrandt. Een beschrijving van zijn leven en zijn werk*, Amsterdam 1906, p. 9.

13 J. Rosenberg, *Rembrandt. Life and work*, London 1964, p. 37.

14 P. Bonafoux, *Rembrandt, autoportrait*, Genève 1985, p. 8.

15 H.P. Chapman, *Rembrandt’s self-portraits. A study in seventeenth-century identity*, Princeton N.J. 1990, p. 131.

16 Chapter III, figs. 171 (B. 363 I), 175 (B. 372), 177 (B. 370).

17 See pp. 190-199.

18 See pp. 145-157.

to have provided another stimulus, following the groundbreaking studies by Raupp, Woods Marsden and Marschke,¹⁹ for the development of a new contextual framework within which the general phenomenon of the self-portrait can be further investigated.

Why so many self-portraits and for whom?

Current surveys of Rembrandt's self-portraits usually include some 90 works. The number varies because different authors hold different views on the authenticity of some of them. Separated according to the different media, Rembrandt's output of self-portraits was long thought to comprise *c.* 50 paintings, *c.* 30 etchings and 5 to 10 drawings. Among the painted and drawn self-portraits considerable differences of opinion exist as to their authenticity, although scarcely any disagreement has been registered where the etchings are concerned.

Around 10% of Rembrandt's painted and etched oeuvre thus appear to consist of works in which he represents himself. Only the drawn self-portraits constitute a relatively small percentage of works in that medium. In the majority of all self-portraits – paintings, etchings and drawings – Rembrandt must have studied himself closely in the mirror time and again and 'copied' this reflected image. This is evident from analysis of the ageing process visible in Rembrandt's face in these works. We thus have to imagine that Rembrandt spent a substantial part of his working life painting, etching and drawing before the mirror. As explained earlier, so long as the persistent assumption reigned – that he did so because of an 'internal pressure' – this led to the idea that Rembrandt must have been preoccupied with his 'self' in a manner unique for painters in the age in which he lived.

The alternative view presented here, developed on the basis of circumstantial evidence from various sources, is that Rembrandt's activities before the mirror should be seen in large measure in the context of a growing demand for 'portraits of Rembrandt done by himself' (contrefeitsel[s] van Rembrandt door hem selffs gedaen)²⁰ as self-portraits were referred to in the 17th century, the term 'self-portrait' only occurring much later. This market for self-portraits – or for portraits of artists otherwise produced – has to be seen in the context of a strongly developing interest in artists and their works in the 16th and 17th centuries on the part of a select and steadily growing community of 'art-lovers'. The interest of this group was increasingly focused on particular painters and on their specific style, whereas the actual subject matter of the painting was of secondary importance.²¹

Of course, there was also a great demand in Rembrandt's time for painted images in general, or prints of these images, that was primarily concerned with the subject matter. The 'art-lovers' directed their attention to exceptionally talented artists like Rembrandt. The situation in painting *then* might be compared with that of photography *now*. On the one hand images serving a great variety of purposes were mass produced, while on the other, well-known artists created interesting works for connoisseurs and collectors. In 17th-century art circles, the concept of 'name buyers' already existed (see note 21).

As a consequence of this growth of interest in the artists themselves and their resulting fame, a corresponding need developed for images of these famous figures (as was also the case with famous scholars, philosophers, nobility and military figures, etc.) Giorgio Vasari was the first to circulate portraits of artists on a large scale, by including them in the second (1568) edition of his *Vite*. These '*Lives*' of Italian artists were often preceded by their portraits printed from woodcuts made specifically for this purpose.

It becomes increasingly clear that Rembrandt, even as a young artist and subsequently throughout his life, must have enjoyed remarkable international fame. His activities as the creator of easily distributed and highly intriguing etchings must have made a significant contribution to that fame. The old story that Rembrandt died poor and forgotten belongs to the realm of myth and is increasingly recognized as such nowadays. Rather, it seems that Rembrandt's international fame among the 17th-century art-lovers continued to rise, and this, we believe, helps to explain the growing demand for his self-portraits. Among 17th-century Dutch artists, two others who were internationally famous among art-lovers in their own time, Gerard Dou and Frans van Mieris the Elder, also produced a relatively large number of self-portraits.²²

The inescapable question which then arises is why other, even more famous artists such as Rubens, did not produce self-portraits in equal or even greater numbers. Rubens, however, produced no more than seven painted self-portraits, after one of these an exceptionally elaborate engraving was made by Paul Pontius. The impressions from this plate must have served as substitutes for painted self-portraits.²³ Something of the sort was also true, for instance, in the case of the painter of seascapes, Ludolf Backhuysen (1630-1708), who was famous in his own time. Rubens and Backhuysen, however, can be considered as specialists in particular areas: Rubens as the painter of history pieces and allegories (whether produced singly or as part of ambitious cycles) and Back-

19 H.-J. Raupp, *Untersuchungen zu Künstlerbildnis und Künstlerdarstellung in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim 1984; J. Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance self-portraiture. The visual construction of identity and the social status of the artist*, New Haven 1998; S. Marschke, *Künstlerbildnisse und Selbstporträts. Studien zu ihren Funktionen von der Antike bis zur Renaissance*, Weimar 1998.

20 Amsterdam, Gemeentearchief, PA 234, inv. no. 309, dated 9 September 1685.

21 See E. van de Wetering, 'The multiple functions of Rembrandt's self-portraits', in exhib. cat. *Rembrandt by himself*, 1999/2000, pp. 8-37, esp. 25-27.

22 See pp. 137-143.

23 *Paul Pontius*. Engraving (1630) after Rubens' self-portrait of 1623 in the British Royal Collection, Windsor Castle (see H. Vlieghe, *Rubens portraits of identified sitters, painted in Antwerp*, CRLB XIX-II (cat. no. 135) New York 1987; N. Büttner, "'Herr, Pietro Paulo Rubens, Ritter". Anmerkungen zur Biographie', exhib. cat. *Peter Paul Rubens. Barocke Leidenschaften*, Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, 2004, pp. 13-27.

huyzen as a seascape painter.²⁴ Their fame was based on such specialized works. On the other hand, it could be said that the *raison d'être* of the works of Rembrandt, Gerard Dou (1613-1675) and Frans van Mieris (1635-1681) was the exceptional technique and the illusion achieved through that technique, quite apart from the subject matter.²⁵ Whoever bought a self-portrait from one of these painters (or in the case of Dou and Van Mieris, for instance, a genre piece into which they had inserted their own portrait) not only owned a work typical of the artist's style and technique, but also acquired a portrait of its famous author.

What is now required is a thorough investigation of the dissemination of (self-) portraits of 17th-century Dutch artists in relation both to the subject matter in their oeuvre and to the esteem in which these artists were held by art-lovers. With the appearance of Sandrart's *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* in 1675, which contains many portraits of European – including Dutch – artists and, as far as exclusively Dutch painters are concerned, Arnold Houbraken's *Groote schouburgh der Nederlantsche konstschilders en schilderessen* in 1718 – 21, the effigies of the painters of the Dutch Golden Age were as widely disseminated as Vasari had done for the Italian painters discussed in his *Lives*.

Other functions of Rembrandt's works before the mirror

Self-portraits were painted sporadically through the 15th and 16th centuries mainly as *memoriae*. As a rule, they originated out of a deep-rooted desire on the artist's part to be 'immortalized', and they often bear references to mortality.

The fact that in Rembrandt's self-portraits one has in the first place – in the words of Luigi Lanzi (1732-1810) – 'a depiction of the artist and at the same time a particular example of his style' does not mean, however, that all the works currently regarded as self-portraits of Rembrandt are also in fact 'portraits of Rembrandt by himself'. In this volume, it is argued with varying degrees of cogency, that such is the case only for 33 paintings, 4 etchings and 2 or 3 drawings.²⁶ This, of course, is considerably less than half of the number of works hitherto usually regarded as self-portraits of Rembrandt.

This is not to say, however, that some of the others were not also produced by Rembrandt in front of the mirror. In those cases it mostly was with other objectives in view. A group of 5 etchings from c.1630 have long been seen as studies of various facial expressions in which

Rembrandt used himself as a model.²⁷ The artist in front of the mirror is simply the most patient and compliant of all models. Apart from these five studies of facial expression another ten etchings of Rembrandt's face from his first years as an etcher have also been preserved,²⁸ most of which have survived as single impressions, or in very few only. Even in these very early etchings, while he was still mastering his graphic technique, Rembrandt was evidently his own patient model. These studies further provided an ideal opportunity to practise what would later preoccupy him most as an etcher: the representation of the human figure.

As a painter the young Rembrandt was also using his own face in his efforts to solve certain artistic problems. Thus, in his early Leiden years he painted several studies in oils²⁹. He also made a few drawn studies³⁰ before the mirror apparently with the aim of exploring and practising certain effects.

We suspect that Rembrandt also used himself as a model in the production of works that belong to that very loose category of paintings and etchings of half-figures, so popular in the 17th century, for which nowadays the term *tronies* has been reserved.³¹ *Tronies* were not regarded as (self-)portraits, even though models (or the mirror) might have been employed in their production. It was rather their dress and their age and attitude that lent to these figures their particular significance (of religious sentiment, of bravery, or mortality, a reference to distant lands, and so on; 'character studies' and religious types are also counted within the category of *tronies*). The young Rembrandt used himself as a model, we believe, for three or more painted³² and three etched *tronies*.³³ Sooner or later, of course, these became considered as self-portraits in the strict sense.

Paintings. Of the *painted* self-portraits done after Rembrandt's move to Amsterdam it may be assumed that virtually all of them were intended to be 'portraits of Rembrandt painted by himself', done for art-lovers who visited his studio. If so, they must have been produced on Rembrandt's own initiative and held in stock ready for sale. This would explain why X-radiographic investigations so often reveal that they were painted on previously used panels and canvases.³⁴ It would seem that in

24 See Chapter III, note 112.

25 Chapter III, figs. 70, 71, 87, 88.

26 See Chapter III, paintings: figs. 120 (Br. 2), 129 (Br. 11), 145 (Br. 16), 183 (Br. 17), 185 (IV *Addendum* 1, see Br. 157), 193 (Br. 18), 194 (Br. 19), 197 (IV *Addendum* 2), 198 (Br. 21), 203 (Br. 23, transformed into a *tronie*), 207 (Br. 30), 231 (Br. 27), 245 (Br. 29), 242 (Br. 34), 235 (Br. 32), 246 (Br. 37), 244 (Br. 36), 254 (Br. 38), 266 (Br. 42), 267 (Br. 43), 271 (Br. 49), 272 (Br. 50), 288 (Br. 48), 289 (Br. 51), 290 (Br. 58), 298 (Br. 53), 299 (Br. 54), 300 (Br. 59), 301 (Br. 61), 319 (Br. 52), 320 (Br. 55), 321 (Br. 60), 322 (Br. 62); etchings: figs. 149 (B. 7), 150 (B. 19), 151 (B. 21), 152 (B. 22); drawings: figs. 97 (Ben. 1177), 108 (Ben. 1176), 110 (Ben. 432, pupil's work?).

27 See Chapter III, figs. 126 (B. 316), 131 (B. 13), 132 (B. 10), 133 (B. 320), 134 (B. 174).

28 See Chapter III, figs. 96 (B. 338), 115 (B. 5), 116 (B. 9), 117 (B. 27), 118 (B. 12), and B. 1, 4, 15, 19, 24.

29 Chapter III, figs. 119 (see Br. 1), 123 (Br. 3).

30 Chapter III, figs. 91 (Ben. 437), 93 (Ben. 53), 95 (Ben. 54).

31 *Tronie* literally meant 'face' in seventeenth-century Holland. See D. Hirschfelder, 'Portrait or character head? The term *tronie* and its meaning in the seventeenth century', in exhib. cat. *The mystery of the young Rembrandt*, 2001/02, pp. 82-90; see also D. Hirschfelder, H.-J. Raupp, "'Tronies'" in de Italiaanse, Vlaamse en Nederlandse schilderkunst van de 16de en 17de eeuw.' Symposium. The Hague, Royal Library, in *Kunstchronik* 54 (2001), no. 5, pp. 197-202.

32 Chapter III, figs. 135 (see Br. 6), 137 (Br. 7), 138 (Br. 8).

33 Chapter III, figs. 90 (B. 17), 158 (B. 18), 159 (B. 20).

34 I A 20 (Br. 8), IV *Corrigenda* I A 21 (Br. 6), A 33 (Br. 12), II A 58 (Br. 17), III B 10 (Br. 29), C 96 (Br. 27), IV 1 (Br. 37), 5 (Br. 38), 9 (Br. 43), 10 version 2 (Br. 47), 11 (Br. 44), 12 (Br. 45).

the early Amsterdam years Rembrandt was somewhat over-optimistic in building up this stock: in later years two of these self-portraits were, we believe, transformed by workshop assistants into *tronies*, apparently to make them once more saleable. Two other early self-portraits were later repainted or altered to keep pace with Rembrandt's own ageing process. It would seem that any potential purchaser who wanted to acquire a self-portrait would have been able to see the self-portrait and its model side by side in Rembrandt's studio, and would naturally have expected a sufficiently accurate correspondence between the effigy and the man himself.³⁵

It is striking that, among the later self-portraits – that is, those produced from roughly 1652 onward – we increasingly find rather large paintings. At the same time, we discovered that after 1655 – precisely the period in which Rembrandt encountered financial difficulties – no self-portraits were painted on previously used supports (Rembrandt worked almost exclusively on canvases in this period). Consequently, because it was usual for the patron to pay for the support separately, we infer that Rembrandt painted more self-portraits on commission during this period.³⁶ At this time, Rembrandt's international fame was on the increase. There are also indications, supported by a number of documents, that collectors from the nobility (and being a member of the higher nobility necessarily implied being a collector) were adding Rembrandt self-portraits to their collections.³⁷

Etchings. Instead of the 31 etchings usually referred to as self-portraits³⁸ there are perhaps only four that were considered by Rembrandt himself as 'official' portraits of himself intended for wider dissemination. These originated in 1631, '36, '39 and '48.³⁹ Among the other 27, we believe we can point to seven or eight that were prematurely abandoned for various reasons – apparently as projects in self-portraiture that Rembrandt seems to have judged unsuccessful,⁴⁰ some of which immediately preceded the four successful etched self-portraits just mentioned.⁴¹ Among these aborted works are the three 'study sheets' mentioned above.⁴² In these three cases, after the intended self-portraits had miscarried (in two cases evidently through faults in the etching process)⁴³ the pieces of copper plate bearing the head were cut off and preserved to be used subsequently as a support for studies or for etching practice. Rembrandt's head (or sometimes only part of the head) is represented in quite some detail in these unfinished or aborted etchings, an observation

that may be explained by Rembrandt's habit of beginning his etched self-portraits with the head.⁴⁴

To summarize briefly, beside these four 'real' self-portraits and the seven or eight prematurely aborted efforts there remain the ten early studies in etching technique, mentioned above, the five studies in expression and two, possibly three, etched *tronies* bearing the artist's features.⁴⁵ This categorization has the virtue of bringing a certain order to the material, but to complicate the matter we should add that the etched *tronies* and some of the unfinished self-portraits were published in rather large editions and were apparently acquired by both contemporary and later art-lovers as real self-portraits because they bore Rembrandt's features. Rembrandt's tendency to leave works unfinished (two of the painted self-portraits also remained unfinished)⁴⁶ and the fact that his works were often characterized by fantastic, historicizing or orientalizing costume must also have contributed to the way in which the unfinished works and *tronies* bearing Rembrandt's facial features seem to have been quickly regarded as characteristic 'portraits of Rembrandt by himself'. The fact that the above rather cut-and-dried sub-divisions have nonetheless been employed may be seen as an attempt to clarify Rembrandt's *own* view of the functions of the 31 etchings that in our time have usually been indiscriminately labeled 'self-portraits'.

There is a tendency to consider the paintings as the most important self-portraits. However, it struck us that the four 'official' etched self-portraits all pre-dated the related categories of painted self-portraits⁴⁷ (in fashionable costume,⁴⁸ as double portrait with the artist's wife,⁴⁹ in historical costume possibly referring to major predecessors⁵⁰ and in working dress⁵¹).

Drawings. The functions of the drawn self-portraits are various. Only the most obvious and most frequently cited function should be excluded – that of a preliminary study for painted or etched self-portraits. Rembrandt's practice was to prepare his compositions 'in his head' and subsequently to work them out in a rather sketchy fashion directly on the support.⁵² This would also have been the case with his self-portraits, which as a rule, after all, have an extremely simple composition. As already stated, we suspect that several of the drawings served as studies of particular effects, for example the complicated effects of light.⁵³ In one case, a drawn portrait may well have been done for an *album amicorum*.⁵⁴ The most interesting category fits into an already established tradition, the practise of fellow artists painting or drawing each other, often

35 See Chapter III, pp. 139-143, figs. 73-84 (Br. -, 23, 29, 37).

36 See Chapter III, p. 97 notes 23, 24.

37 Chapter III *Appendix* nos. 1, 6, 12, 25.

38 The etched self-portraits counted here are those included in the exhib. cat. *Rembrandt by himself* 1999/2000.

39 Chapter III, figs. 149 (B. 7), 150 (B. 19), 151 (B. 21), 152 (B. 22).

40 Chapter III, pp. 190-199, figs. 167 (B. 8), 169 (B. 16), 171 (B. 363), 175 (B. 372), 177 (B. 370), 180 (B. 2), 181 (B. 26).

41 Chapter III, figs. 167/166 (B. 8), 169/168 (B. 16), 171/170 (B. 7), possibly preceding 173 (B. 7) and 177/176 (B. 370) preceding 152/178 (B. 22).

42 See note 16.

43 Chapter III, figs. 171 (B. 363), 175 (B. 372).

44 Chapter III, figs. 166 (B. 8 I), 172 (B. 7 I-IV).

45 See notes 28, 27 and 33.

46 Cat. nos. IV 16 and 26 (Br. 58 and 52).

47 Chapter III, pp. 184-190.

48 Chapter III, figs. 149 (B. 7) and 183 (Br. 17).

49 Chapter III, fig. 150 (B. 19) and *Appendix* no. 9.

50 Chapter III, figs. 151 (B. 21) and 242 (Br. 34).

51 Chapter III, figs. 152 (B. 22) and 266 (Br. 42).

52 Van de Wetering 1997, pp. 74-89.

53 See note 30.

54 Chapter III, fig. 97 (Ben. 1177).

with an eye to the practical utility that such exercises may have had with regard to other projects.⁵⁵ But such mutual exercises or studies could later have assumed another role – that of friendship portraits, or served as souvenirs of memorable times in the studio.⁵⁶ A specific example of this latter, in our view, is the famous drawing of the full length depiction of Rembrandt which bears the inscription in 17th-century handwriting: ‘Drawn by Rembrandt van Rijn after his own image / as he was attired in his studio’. Until now, this drawing has been thought to be an autograph self-portrait of Rembrandt. We believe there are sufficient indications to be able to conclude that we are in fact dealing with a composite copy based on two of Rembrandt’s self-portraits.⁵⁷

Non-autograph self-portraits

Rembrandt must have sometimes had his pupils copy his self-portraits, probably as exercises, in view of the common teaching practice, but also, as Samuel van Hoogstraten put it, ‘to make his [the master’s] art better known’.⁵⁸ Some of these copies were made after studies or ‘*tronies*’ Rembrandt had done using his own features.⁵⁹ It will be obvious that this practice of copying has given rise to problems of authenticity that have long troubled both purchasers and scholars. Several times in the last 40 years, copies have been mistaken for originals while the actual originals, assumed to be copies, led a bleak existence on the art market or hidden in some museum depot.⁶⁰ In other cases copies assumed the place of their prototypes when the latter disappeared.⁶¹

In the investigation of such problems, X-radiography and infra-red photography often play an important part. These techniques allow one to a certain extent to reconstruct the genesis of a painting and, in doing so, they may allow one to distinguish originals from copies. And yet it sometimes appeared that such reconstructions of a painting’s genesis were not consistent with considerations of style and quality. In these cases, where technical analyses seemed to exclude the possibility that the painting could be a copy, doubts nevertheless persisted as to the authenticity of the self-portrait in question. The further investigation of this conundrum led to one of the surprises resulting from the work on this volume; for it appears that pupils or assistants produced ‘self-portraits’ of Rembrandt.⁶²

In this context, it is important to point out that Rembrandt, as far as is known, did not take on beginners

as apprentices, but only youths or young men who already had a period of training with some other painter behind them, and whose aim was to learn to paint in Rembrandt’s style. This was achieved through copying works by Rembrandt and – possibly in a further stage – by producing free variants after his works. There can be little doubt that such paintings were sold in the trade. Up to now we have always thought this was mainly a question of copies (and partial copies) and variants of Rembrandt’s history pieces, but we are now certain that free variants after Rembrandt’s self-portraits were also produced by pupils (and in all likelihood sold by Rembrandt in the trade). This discovery is based on the fact that several paintings bearing Rembrandt’s effigy, which simply cannot be accepted as works by Rembrandt, nevertheless certainly originated in his studio. These studio products turned out to have been painted on canvases that had been prepared with a so-called quartz ground (a mixture of clay and ground sand in an oily binding medium). Karin Groen, an account of whose work is to be found in Chapter IV of this volume, has shown that canvases with a quartz ground did not occur in the Netherlands until they first appear in works by Rembrandt or in his style from 1640 on, beginning with the canvas for the *Nightwatch*. Roughly half such works painted between 1640 and 1669 have quartz grounds, whereas this type of ground has been found in the work of no other painter during the same period.⁶³ For this reason, we can say with virtual certainty of any 17th-century Rembrandtesque painting on canvas, even if an obviously non-autograph ‘self-portrait’, that if it was painted on a quartz ground it must have originated in Rembrandt’s studio. Consequently, we can now infer with similar confidence that several of the members of Rembrandt’s studio – most probably advanced pupils – were painting free variants after self-portraits of their master, works which subsequently circulated as autograph self-portraits of Rembrandt until well into the 20th century.⁶⁴ In turn, this discovery contributed to our conviction that Rembrandt painted his self-portraits not for himself but rather for a ‘market’ mainly consisting of art-lovers and collectors.⁶⁵

What we find especially surprising here is that some buyers were apparently prepared to purchase, or were enticed into acquiring, *non*-autograph ‘self-portraits’. In the first chapter of this volume, Jaap van der Veen has shown on the basis of abundant archival evidence that the desire of the buyer to acquire a work by the master himself rather than by one of his pupils or assistants – was becoming a factor of considerable importance in the 17th century. At the same time, however, these archival sources also show that there was confusion on this point. It would appear that the old workshop practice still existed whereby, as part of their training and as a matter of course, apprentices and assistants contributed to the production of the master; but that this tradition in-

55 Marschke, op. cit.¹⁹.

56 See note 55 and Chapter III, figs. 101 (Ben. 1171), 104-107, 108 (Ben. 1176), 109, 110 (Ben. 432).

57 Chapter III, pp. 151-154, figs. 101-103 (Ben. 1171, Br. 42, B. 22).

58 ‘zijn konst openbaer te maken’, S. van Hoogstraeten, *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderconst*, Rotterdam 1678, pp. 195-197.

59 See notes 29 and 32.

60 Chapter III, figs. 119 (prototype for Br. 1), 123 (Br. 3), 124 (copy after Br. 3), 135 (prototype for Br. 6), 136 (Br. 6).

61 Chapter III, figs. 137 (Br. 7), 29-31 (Br. 46, 47 and Br.-Gerson 47A).

62 See Chapter III, pp. [29-44], esp. 129 Table D and figs. 243, 253, 269, 268, 59, 60, 57 (Br. 35, 40, 44, 45, 56, 57, Bauch 337), and fig. 1 of cat. no. IV 23 (Br. –).

63 See Chapter IV and Table IV.

64 See note 62.

65 See Chapter III, pp. 132-144.

creasingly came into conflict with the new trend of 'buying names' i.e. acquiring the work of the master himself.

Variations in style and consequent problems over authenticity

If the self-portraits that we believe are autograph works are once again compared with each other, one cannot but be struck by how great the differences in style between them can be, even when such works originated in the same year.⁶⁶ It would seem – and this is true not only of the painted self-portraits but also of the etchings and drawings – as though each project was for Rembrandt himself a new challenge. Each of his works, and especially the self-portraits, gives the impression that Rembrandt was an exploratory, questing artist, someone who never resorted to ready-made solutions but each time re-thought the means and the possibilities available to him – not only in relation to technical and stylistic aspects, but also in the way he 'directs' his figures and in the representation of light, volume and texture. This exploratory attitude is still in evidence in the very last self-portraits. Perhaps this is the only way to account for the dizzying development – certainly neither a smooth nor a consistent trajectory – of Rembrandt's art.

The exceptionally broad range of the changing characteristics of his works (including the self-portraits) meant that resolving questions of authenticity was particularly difficult. For this reason, part of Chapter III is devoted to the search for the most objective criteria;⁶⁷ and although this quest can hardly be said to have led to directly applicable tests, in an indirect sense it yielded numerous insights that were useful in forming our opinions of the authenticity of particular paintings. In addition, our research into the genesis of each painting and the development of insights into later alterations, including mutilation, that some of Rembrandt's self-portraits have endured, provided a basis on which we could gradually build up our opinion as to the authenticity of the paintings. Wherever possible in these investigations we made use of various research methods: dendrochronology, canvas research, X-radiography and infrared photography, chemical analysis of the grounds and paint layers, microscopic investigation of the paint surface and cross sections of paint samples. As a result of the application of these methods we developed a certain degree of familiarity with each of these paintings. It sharpened our eye for characteristics of style and quality, which played varying roles in forming our opinions. These opinions on authenticity are as a rule put forward with considerable reservation; we constantly tried to weigh the value of different arguments as objectively as possible. The paintings our predecessors had removed from Rembrandt's oeuvre were also carefully re-investigated and, in a number of cases, their attribution to

Rembrandt restored.⁶⁸ By investigation of paintings that had long been generally rejected we succeeded in acquiring better insights into the activities of others in Rembrandt's studio.

Likeness and expression

Apart from the surprising differences in style among the self-portraits that we consider to be autograph works, we were equally struck by another phenomenon. Rembrandt apparently had difficulty in achieving a convincing likeness in his self-portraits. That he may have had problems in achieving a good likeness was already evident from two contemporary documents regarding his portraits of other sitters.⁶⁹

Remarkable differences in physiognomy exist among the various self-portraits that we consider to be autograph;⁷⁰ in particular there are major differences in the way the eyes are painted – larger or smaller, wider apart or closer together. The shape of the face, too, can vary – in some paintings the face is longer and narrower while in others it has a more rounded shape – and so, too, can the way the various facial features are characterized. And yet Rembrandt seems to have studied his features each time with equal thoroughness, as can be seen, for example, from the fact that particular asymmetric facial features (particularly the eyelids and furrows of the forehead) are almost always carefully represented. These asymmetric features occasionally played a part in the investigation of authenticity. Thanks to these asymmetries we knew, for example, that the 'self-portraits' painted by pupils were not portraits for which Rembrandt himself had posed, because had that been the case these asymmetric features would not be represented as mirror-imaged in the way that they inevitably are in a self-portrait that originated in front of the mirror or in a copy of a self-portrait. We think that Rembrandt himself posed for only one drawn portrait.⁷¹

A strong tendency (still) exists to read Rembrandt's states of mind and even his (assumed) thoughts into his self-portraits. This tendency has contributed to the persistent myth that Rembrandt – in the words of Schmidt-Degener quoted in the opening lines of this summary – 'confided everything in his (late) self-portraits, including his unhappiness and loneliness; but... also his self-confidence and his pride and triumph as an artist.' As is well known, the history of cinematography has taught us that one is capable of reading all sorts of emotions and thoughts in an immobile face, depending on the context in which it is seen. Schmidt-Degener's words provide abundant evidence that, in the case of Rembrandt, it is not so much a question of reading emotions but rather the projection of 'knowledge', in the case of Schmidt-Degener, of elements of the Rembrandt myth anno 1906, into Rembrandt's face shown in repose.

66 See Chapter III, pp. 109-117; compare for instance figs. 193 (Br. 18), 194 (Br. 19) or IV 19 (Br. 53) and IV 20 (Br. 54).

67 Chapter III, pp. 116-117.

68 See Chapter III, p. 110 Tables A and B.

69 See Strauss *Doc.*, 1633/1 and 1654/4.

70 See Chapter III, pp. 96, 211, 290.

71 See Chapter III, fig. 110 (Ben. 432).

Aspects of Rembrandt's theoretical ideas on art

It becomes increasingly clear that Rembrandt was not only preoccupied with his personal pictorial problems, but with problems which can be seen in a much wider context of art history and art theory. It was undoubtedly his ambition to belong to the illustrious group of great artists in the history of painting. This is already fairly evident from the fact that, in his works, he often appears to want to measure himself against such great 15th and 16th-century artists as Leonardo da Vinci and Titian, Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden, and against older contemporaries such as the Caravaggists and Rubens. In Chapter II, Marieke de Winkel demonstrates that Rembrandt, especially after 1640, referred to his great predecessors of the 15th and 16th centuries by means of his costuming. Moreover, in reference to the emancipation of the art of painting, he made 'statements' concerning its dignity, for instance by depicting himself in working clothes. Apparently he 'communicated' on these matters through the costuming in his self-portraits.⁷²

Contrary to strong doubts on this point in the past,⁷³ Rembrandt must also have developed his own theory of art. During the discussion of the painted self-portraits in this volume, several aspects of his theory are briefly referred to, particularly by reference to texts of his pupil, Samuel van Hoogstraten. In these texts from Van Hoogstraten's book on the art of painting (see note 58), one finds echoes of his teacher's ideas on the art of painting. Thus, Chapter III of this volume discusses Rembrandt's early application of different styles in relation to different subject matter, an art historical problem also known as the 'modus issue in painting'.⁷⁴ Another concern that must have engaged Rembrandt throughout his life is compositional unity (*eenwezigheid*), with its associated hierarchical treatment of light.⁷⁵ Rembrandt's affair with *chance*, an Aristotelian theme that must have been much discussed in the 17th century, is also dealt with.⁷⁶ Rembrandt's presumed theories concerning a sketchy manner of painting and his use of relief in the paint surface, especially in the skin, are demonstrated with examples taken from Rembrandt's painted self-portraits dealt with in this volume.⁷⁷

In conclusion

The case summarized above, *contra* Rembrandt's self-portraits constituting a kind of autobiographical search for his own identity(ies), can be taken to an extreme. One might then conclude that Rembrandt's self-portraits were in his own eyes no more than commodities produced for

a particular sector of the art market. Were then such masterpieces as the self-portraits from 1640 and '69 in London, the *Large Vienna self-portrait*, or those from the Frick collection, Paris or Kenwood,⁷⁸ merely intended to serve as commodities? Did these works say nothing about the way Rembrandt saw himself? To think so would surely be a mistake.

The history of art as conceived by Rembrandt and his contemporaries, from classical antiquity and from the Renaissance, was a history of great artists who were so admired that all cultivated Europeans – including kings and emperors – knew or were required to know their names. All the evidence indicates that Rembrandt saw himself in this great tradition and considered himself the equal of the great masters of the history of the art of painting. Many of Rembrandt's contemporaries must also have seen him so. When one places Rembrandt in this context, it is obvious that both the creation and the acquisition of his self-portraits must have been freighted with significance.

On the other hand, we know that Rembrandt must have regarded the world of art lovers and connoisseurs of his time with a certain scepticism. If the present author's interpretation of Rembrandt's drawing of *c.* 1644, the so-called 'Satire on Art Criticism', is correct, Rembrandt must have had mixed feelings about his public.⁷⁹ Is it possible that those self-portraits, produced by pupils or other members of his workshop, especially in the decades of the 1640s and '50s, should have been intended for indiscriminating 'naemkoopers' ('name-buyers') who were blind enough to see masterworks in the spurious and second-rate? If this were the case, one of the puzzles that our research has brought to light would be solved, viz. the puzzle of the non-autograph, free variants based on Rembrandt's self-portraits that were produced in Rembrandt's workshop.

Our aim in this volume has been to place those works that have usually been referred to as Rembrandt's self-portraits in a new and coherent context. We hope that we have managed to do this convincingly. We also hope that our revisions of the limits of Rembrandt's autograph oeuvre, and our attempts to situate those works whose attribution to Rembrandt we can no longer accept will meet with the reader's approval. Although readers may be shocked by several unexpected disattributions, some may well find that we have been considerably more restrained in our exclusion of certain works from Rembrandt's oeuvre than our more recent predecessors.⁸⁰ We hope, finally, that our suggested revisions will in the long run contribute to a solid foundation from which to explore further the phenomenon of Rembrandt's art.

72 See Chapter II; see also M. de Winkel, 'Costume in Rembrandt's Self-Portraits', in exhib. cat. *Rembrandt by himself*, 1999/2000; M. de Winkel, *Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings*, Amsterdam 2005.

73 J.A. Emmens *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst*, rev. edn. Amsterdam 1979.

74 See Chapter III, pp. 166-171.

75 See Chapter III, pp. 290-291.

76 See Chapter III, pp. 272-273.

77 See Chapter III, pp. 303-311.

78 See Chapter III, fig. 242 (Br. 34), IV 8 (Br. 42), IV 14 (Br. 50), IV 19 (Br. 53) and IV 26 (Br. 52).

79 Ben. IV no. A 35a; see E. van de Wetering, 'Rembrandt's "Satire on Art Criticism" reconsidered', in: *Shop Talk. Studies in Honor of Seymour Slive*, (eds. Cynthia P. Schneider, William W. Robinson, Alice I. Davies e.a.) Cambridge, Mass. 1995, pp. 264-270.

80 See Chapter III, p. 110 Table A and B.