

# REMBRANDT'S LATE PUPILS

STUDYING UNDER A GENIUS

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Rembrandt avec l'habit dans lequel  
il avoit accoutumé de peindre.

# FOREWORD

By the end of his long career Rembrandt van Rijn had produced a truly impressive oeuvre. Hundreds of paintings, some three hundred etchings in various states and numerous drawings have survived. Rembrandt was a working artist, but he was also an influential teacher—one of the few seventeenth-century artists literally to create a ‘school’. He started to take pupils from the very outset and continued until shortly before his death. We do not know precisely how many pupils Rembrandt took under his wing. The painter and art theoretician Joachim von Sandrart, who knew him, wrote with some exaggeration in his *Teutsche Academie* that Rembrandt’s house in Sint-Antoniesbreestraat—the present-day Rembrandt House Museum—was filled with ‘countless’ pupils. Rembrandt’s fame as a teacher has never been forgotten. In the early eighteenth century Arnold Houbraken reported in his three-volume work on painters of the preceding decades that Rembrandt had had ‘a host of pupils’.

Research has established that there are fifty artists whom we can say for certain studied with Rembrandt. The focus in the literature and in exhibitions has almost always been on the pupils who were with him in the second half of the sixteen-thirties and the sixteen-forties. In this book, however, we examine the pupils who studied with Rembrandt from around 1650. Fourteen pupils from this period are discussed in three chapters. Who were they? And what did they learn in in Rembrandt’s workshop? *Rembrandt’s Late Pupils: Studying under a Genius* is published as a catalogue to the exhibition of the same name in the Rembrandt House. There is a list of the objects in the exhibition at the back of the book. This is one of a series of exhibitions that the museum hopes to stage in the coming years, exploring diverse aspects of the teaching of art in the Early Modern Era and establishing connections with present-day art training.

Willem Drost  
*Portrait of  
Rembrandt in his  
Painter’s Smock*,  
c. 1652  
pen and brown  
ink, on brown  
paper, 20.3 x  
13.4 cm  
Amsterdam,  
The Rembrandt  
House Museum



# 1

## REMBRANDT'S LATE PUPILS

JAAP VAN DER VEEN

In 1641, as part of a chapter about famous artists from the town in the second, greatly enlarged edition of his *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden*, the Leiden burgomaster Jan Jansz Orlers published a lengthy biography of Rembrandt. As a contemporary, Orlers was extremely well informed and was able to provide all sorts of interesting details about Rembrandt's origins and training. He knew the names of his parents, his date of birth and a good deal about his schooling. He also admired the range of Rembrandt's talent for drawing and painting. Orlers recounts how Rembrandt's parents took him out of school and apprenticed him to the painter Jacob Isaacs van Swanenburg to learn the fundamentals of art. Van Swanenburg took Rembrandt under his wing for three years. Rembrandt progressed so well under his guidance that his parents thought it advisable to send him to the Amsterdam history painter Pieter Lastman to continue his training 'so that he might be taught and instructed further and

better by the same'. A period of six months was deemed to be sufficient.<sup>1</sup> Orlers does not tell us the year it happened, but this final phase in Rembrandt's training can be dated to around 1625.

Back in Leiden, Rembrandt developed into the most renowned painter of his day. His work was so successful among the wealthy, art-loving citizens of Amsterdam that in the early sixteen-thirties he decided to settle in the city permanently. Orlers's account leaves no doubt as to the importance Rembrandt's art training had been to him. Rembrandt had immense talent, but his development as an artist would not have happened anywhere nearly as quickly without his thorough grounding in the studios of Van Swanenburg and Lastman. As soon as he set up his studio, Rembrandt started to take pupils of his own. Orlers writes about Gerrit Dou, whose parents apprenticed their then fifteen-year-old son to Rembrandt.<sup>2</sup> At that moment the artist himself was only twenty-one.



# 2

# RULES

# FOR MAKING ART

LEONORE VAN SLOTEN

To assist us in comprehending the methods of seventeenth-century painters, we have their surviving works and we also have contemporary art treatises.<sup>1</sup> Most of these books were written by men who were themselves professional painters and had first-hand experience of current workshop practice. In the treatises the artists discussed the subjects that occupied them. Information about working materials and paint recipes was accompanied by instructions that an artist should follow to achieve a successful composition. The foundational text of Dutch art theory is *Den grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst* (*The Foundations of the Noble and Free Art of Painting*), the first part of the *Schilder-Boeck* (*Book of Painting*) by the painter Karel van Mander, which was published in 1604. This didactic poem sets out the essential principles of art.<sup>2</sup> Countless artists and art lovers were familiar with the contents of the work. *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der Schilderkonst: anders de Zichtbaere Werelt*

(*Introduction to the Academy of Painting, or the Visible World*) by Samuel van Hoogstraten, published in 1678, is a follow-up to Van Mander's 'Foundations'. It is an important publication, not least because the author had been one of Rembrandt's pupils. Van Hoogstraten refers to his period of training there, and several times cites his erstwhile master when discussing the principles of painting.

The young painters who went to Rembrandt had previously learned the basics of the trade with another teacher, or even more than one. They were advanced students who wanted to hone their skills with Rembrandt and master his style. Rembrandt's attraction as a teacher lay in his reputation, his masterly way of conveying stories and his ability to impart his knowledge. Rembrandt took his teaching task extremely seriously and could be harsh on occasion. Van Hoogstraten experienced this in person. He writes frankly of how he 'sometimes, brought down by the

2.1  
Rembrandt,  
*The Artist in his Studio*, c. 1628,  
panel, 24.8 x  
31.7 cm, Boston,  
Museum of  
Fine Arts, Zoe  
Oliver Sherman  
Collection given  
in memory of  
Lillie Oliver Poor  
(detail)





# 3

## STUDYING UNDER A GENIUS

DAVID DE WITT

Like other prominent artists of his day, Rembrandt taught his pupils how to master his drawing and painting manner and shared his knowledge and his ideas about art with them. This approach shored up his reputation as a teacher during the last two decades of his life, when his style had fallen out of fashion, his social position had been eroded and his finances were in bad shape. From books written by his former pupil, Samuel van Hoogstraten, and by Arnold Houbraken—who gathered information from many painters including Van Hoogstraten, his teacher—we know a good deal about Rembrandt as an educator. Recent research into Rembrandt's work has added considerable insight into his pupils and the works they created in his workshop and as artists in their own right, soon after they left him. One result is that many paintings and drawings originally credited to Rembrandt have now been attributed to his pupils. Further study of the works of art and of contemporary sources

reveals that Rembrandt, whose influence on the artistic fashion of his time counted for less and less, was nevertheless able to continue in his role as a teacher of advanced artistic ideas in the sixteen-fifties thanks to Samuel van Hoogstraten, who referred many of his own pupils to Rembrandt's workshop.

### TO REMBRANDT FOR FINISHING: WILLEM DROST

Around 1652 Rembrandt said farewell to Willem Drost, one of the most talented pupils he ever had. Drost had probably been a pupil of his for four years and during that time had concentrated on ambitious history paintings. He was one of the few to try his hand at etching. An etched self-portrait of 1652 probably marks his first step as an artist in his own right (fig. 1.3).<sup>1</sup> Drost began to sign his paintings in 1653. One of his earliest important works portrays Mary Magdalen, who meets the resurrected Jesus by the tomb,

3.1  
Rembrandt,  
*Portrait of a  
Man with Arms  
Akimbo*, 1658,  
canvas, 107.4 x  
87 cm, New York,  
Otto Naumann  
Fine Art Ltd