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INTERNATIONAL EDITION
THE ART NEWSPAPER

Rembrandt galore

As a major show opens in London today, another is announced for Oxford in four years' time

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Published online: 15 October 2014



Rembrandt, Self Portrait with Two Circles, around 1665-69 © English Heritage

As “Rembrandt: the Late Works” opens at London’s National Gallery today, *The Art Newspaper* can reveal that an exhibition on the young Rembrandt is due to be staged at the Ashmolean Museum in four years’ time. It will be organised by Christopher Brown, who retired as the Oxford museum’s director last month. The 2018 exhibition is being jointly organised with the Lakenhal Museum in Leiden, where Rembrandt was born. It will cover his first years as an artist in the city—where he set up a studio, aged 19, with Jan Lievens in 1625—and will also cover his time in Amsterdam between 1631 and 1634. Brown and his co-curator, the Lakenhal Museum’s Christiaan Vogelaar, want to show how Rembrandt developed almost month by month, strongly influenced by the Dutch city’s distinctive artistic environment. Brown says: “It’s pure chance that early Rembrandt will be presented after late Rembrandt, but it will provide a fascinating counterpoint to the National Gallery’s show.”

The London show, covering the years 1652 to 1669, will travel to the Rijksmuseum (12 February-17 May 2015). The curators in London and Amsterdam, Marjorie Wieseman and Gregor Weber respectively, have secured most of the key loans. But despite last-minute negotiations, one important loan failed to be agreed—the artist’s *Portrait of Jan Six*, 1654, which still belongs to the Six family in Amsterdam. However, it is possible that the work will be lent to the Rijksmuseum for the second leg of the exhibition next year.

Another private loan is the *Portrait of Catrina Hooghsaet*, 1657, which is at Penrhyn Castle in Wales and has been lent by the Douglas-Pennant family. The Rijksmuseum tried to buy the portrait in 2007, but was unable to raise the asking price of around £40m.

First visit for 85 years

At the National Gallery, one of the treats is the chance to see *The Jewish Bride*, 1665-69. It has left Amsterdam only once since 1833, having come to London’s Royal Academy of Arts in 1929. Despite all the research undertaken for the exhibition, it is still not known who Rembrandt used as his models for the loving couple. When the show travels to the Rijksmuseum, visitors will have a rare opportunity to see *The Jewish Bride* hanging next to the same-sized *Family Portrait*, around 1665, from the Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum in Braunschweig. This work was last lent in 1956 and is not on loan to the London show.

The National Gallery exhibition boasts five late self-portraits; the most important is the *Self-portrait with Two Circles*, 1665-69, from Kenwood House in north London. Although Rembrandt’s earlier self-portraits were made to publicise his rising status, Wieseman says that the later works focus on more personal concerns, “achieving a realistic and sympathetic rendering of old age, now extending its merciless reach across his own face and body, and reflecting upon his profession”.

Completed catalogue

The other major Rembrandt event of the season is the publication of the sixth and final volume of the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, the artist's catalogue raisonné, which was launched at the Rijksmuseum earlier this month. A doorstop of a book, with 748 large-format pages, it has an equally daunting cover price: £1,080 (with a reduced price of £4,500 for the full set). The final volume, *Rembrandt's Paintings Revisited: a Complete Survey*, by the Dutch scholar Ernst van de Wetering, provides a chronological survey of all of the 338 paintings that the author regards as being by the master.

This is the culmination of the Rembrandt Research Project, which began in 1968. Van de Wetering started work that year as a 30-year-old researcher, so the final volume was completed in his own "late" years. The story of Rembrandt scholarship during this period is fascinating. In the last decades of the 20th century, specialists whittled away at the several hundred paintings believed to be by the artist, attributing more and more works to his studio. By around 1990, it was thought that the project might end up with a body of work comprising around 250 paintings.

In 1993, however, four of the five members of the Rembrandt Research Project resigned, handing over to Van de Wetering. A spokesman for Springer, his publisher, says that Van de Wetering saw how the "overly zealous tendency to doubt the authenticity of Rembrandt's paintings got out of hand". In the final volume, the scholar "reattributes to the master a substantial number of unjustly rejected Rembrandts". As a result, Van de Wetering gives the total number as 336.

For anyone wanting their very own Rembrandt, *Portrait of a Man with Arms Akimbo*, 1658, is on sale at Frieze Masters this week. Recently owned by the US casino boss Steve Wynn, it is now being offered by the New York-based dealer Otto Naumann for \$48.5m.

"Rembrandt: the Late Works", National Gallery, London, until 18 January 2015