

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
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The Rembrandt Research Project (2008)

SPEAKERS

Stephanie Dickey, Alfred Bader, Janet Brooke, David De Witt, members of the audience

KEYWORDS

The Bader Collection, Rembrandt van Rijn

TRANSCRIPT

[Music]

Stephanie Dickey: It's wonderful to see such a full house this afternoon. I'm Stephanie Dickey. I have the privilege of holding the Bader Chair in Northern Baroque Art here at Queen's University and I'm very pleased to welcome you this afternoon to what is sure to be a fascinating lecture by our favourite son, Dr. Alfred Bader. He was born in Vienna, Austria and came to Canada in 1940 in the wake of World War II. He received his degree in engineering chemistry from Queen's many years ago, followed by a doctorate in chemistry at Harvard and then founded a very significant chemical company. But his other love throughout his life has been the collecting of art and in particular art from the Netherlands, of which Queen's is already the recipient in the form of a number of wonderful paintings which are in our art collection in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre as a gift from Dr. Bader. He still has many wonderful things in his own collection and he's going to tell us something about that today with particular relevance to Rembrandt van Rijn, the great Dutch artist of the 17th century, by whom we are privileged to have two paintings here on campus which are both gifts from Dr. Bader. That makes the Etherington the only museum in Canada with two Rembrandt paintings. So that's a very special thing for us here in Kingston.

[Applause]

So without further ado, here is Dr. Alfred Bader.

[Applause]

Alfred Bader: It's a singular pleasure to be able to speak here today. I think that many of you are very wise to sit way in the back because you'll be able to fall asleep so much more easily. There are more seats in front, incidentally. What I'd like to discuss with you is the history of the Rembrandt Research Project and what wonderful opportunities this has provided for collectors like myself. Let's look at three years. Nineteen sixty-nine, 300 years since Rembrandt's death, a major exhibition of Rembrandt paintings at the Chicago Art Institute. I have the catalogue here. Then 2006, 400 years since Rembrandt's birth, wonderful exhibitions in Amsterdam and Berlin. Five of my paintings in those two exhibitions. And then 2069, what do we think that will be like? Let's go back to the beginning of the last century. The great expert on Rembrandt, Abraham Bredius, compiled a book

with 630 paintings saying I have included only those pictures whose authenticity seems to me beyond all doubt, 630. In 1968, the great scholar Horst Gerson cut that number to 420. And it became very obvious that these 630 or even the 420 of Gerson's couldn't possibly all be by Rembrandt. And a number of scholars, five of them, began the Rembrandt Research Project and they received funding in 1968 and then they travelled in varying pairs all over the world. They came to Milwaukee to look at my works and then divided the paintings into A, B, and C. As the great scholar at the Metropolitan, Walter Liedtke, said A for accepted. In the first three volumes, they looked at 276 paintings, 142 accepted, A. B, according to Liedtke, bothersome. Even with their scholarship, they couldn't decide were they Rembrandt or not. And C, 122, copies. And in this meeting in Chicago in 1969, the head of the Rembrandt Research Project, Professor Josua Bruyn, said most C paintings are much later. The fascination with Rembrandt's name seems to have made us forget the first and foremost demand to be made upon any painting attributed to Rembrandt, namely that it should date from the 17th century.

[Laughter]

And scientific examination will show that most of the C paintings are later. Professor Bruyn was completely mistaken. On the 122 C paintings, there's no doubt that 92 are from the same period. Well, these five scholars travelled all over the world and came out with volume one in 1982, paintings painted by Rembrandt in the late years, volume two in 86, Amsterdam 31 to 34, volume three to the Night Watch, 1642. And then in 1993, four of the five members resigned. And since then, just one man, Professor Ernst van de Wetering, has continued the Rembrandt Research Project. He's a very interesting guy. In many ways, a very charming guy. The last words I heard him say at the Rembrandt House, at the Rembrandt exhibition, looking at my wife, Isabel, he said, Isabel, why don't you marry me?

[Laughter]

Anyway, volume four came out in 2005, self-portraits. And they're no longer A, B, and C but Ernst's opinion. And I understand that volume five is supposed to come out late this year. I hope so. And then, will there be a volume six? Probably not. But Ernst has said he will come out with a book like Bredius, in which he says of each painting what his personal opinion is. And now allow me to show you a number of the paintings, some A, some C, some that have moved from C to A, some that have moved from A to C. If we could have the light out and the first slide on, a very famous, in its day, painting called Rembrandt in Berlin, The Man with the Golden Helmet. Undoubtedly not by Rembrandt. We don't know who painted it. A very beautiful painting. Unfortunately, Berlin is unlikely to wish to sell it, so I can't buy it for Queen's.

[Laughter]

But certainly not a Rembrandt. Next, a painting, Man in the High Room, in the National Gallery in London, a C painting from Rembrandt's immediate circle, so called in volume four. In volume -- first, they considered that it might actually be later. Next, if you had gone into the Chicago Art Institute in 1969 at the time of that great Rembrandt exhibition and you would have asked people, what is your favourite old master, Dutch old master at the Chicago Art Institute? And I think many would have

said, this girl at an open door. Certainly not by Rembrandt but by a Rembrandt student, perhaps Samuel van Hoogstraten. Nonetheless a very beautiful painting. Here one of my favourite Rembrandts. In the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, David saying goodbye to Jonathan. I was absolutely astounded when I looked into volume three of the corpus and saw that it has a C number, not by Rembrandt. And if you read the several pages describing it, the argument was made that Rembrandt didn't use such golden colours. And the suggestion was made that this painting is really by Ferdinand Bol. Well, if it really is by Bol, I've missed the boat. I don't like Bol all that much. I think this is a wonderful painting and I think that in time -- and I'll discuss it tomorrow evening at dinner with Professor Dickey, I think that in time this will again be considered a genuine Rembrandt. The Polish Rider, Professor Josua Bruyn, suggested this wasn't Rembrandt but one of Rembrandt's very able students, Willem Drost. A Queen's graduate, Jonathan Bikker, has written a wonderful book on Drost. The painting is not Drost. And Professor Ernst van de Wetering is now giving it back to Rembrandt with a fair amount of restoration by a very able conservator in New York some 80 years ago. Next, I remember this painting coming up at Sotheby's in London in 1992. An A picture, undoubtedly Rembrandt but the corpus said, not in good condition. Sotheby's had given it a very modest estimate, three million pounds. And I asked a good friend of mine, a conservator in Wisconsin, Charles Munch, to come to London with me and could -- and Sotheby's gave us an hour alone with a lot of light to examine it. And Charles said to me, Alfred, I think that with careful conservation, this could be very much improved. Before the sale, a great scholar and good friend, Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, said to me, Alfred, you know, whoever buys that painting makes a mistake, the condition is so bad. But I loved it and I bought it. And then, two weeks later, I got a call from the Rijksmuseum saying, Dr. Bader, would you like to sell us that painting? And I said, well, why didn't you bid at the sale? Well, we didn't have the money. Well, what about now? I'm not going to give it to you.

[Laughter]

I give paintings only to Queen's.

[Laughter]

[Applause]

And they said, no, no. But the religious community on which this minister, Mennonite minister was minister, has offered us a very large amount. Loan us the painting until December 1st and we will then tell you whether we will buy it or not. And, of course, I was in a quandary because my good friend, Charles Munch, had hoped to work on the painting. And if the Rijksmuseum bought it, they certainly wouldn't allow him to work on it. And so I wrote a contract saying, if you buy it, you must allow Charles Munch to be with you while Martin Bijl, your restorer, works on the painting. And so it was. They bought it. It was much improved, the wonderful face, certainly by Rembrandt. In the diary of the minister Wtenbogaert, he said today, the 13th of April, I was painted by Rembrandt. How much of the painting was painted by Rembrandt? The face, certainly. The body, the somewhat weaker hands, probably workshop. Signature doesn't look right. But nonetheless, it's a wonderful painting, the face entirely by Rembrandt. Two important questions come up. One, did workshop work with Rembrandt? The answer is almost certainly yes. Second question, are there any

paintings which were painted by students in Rembrandt's workshop and then signed by Rembrandt? The answer, I think, is yes. There is a very interesting painting at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Probably most of you have seen it, portrait of a woman. It has an honest Rembrandt signature. The corpus said the painting is by Carel Fabritius. I'm sorry, I can't see it. It doesn't look like Fabritius to me. And tomorrow evening I will ask Professor Dickey what she thinks. But it certainly isn't Rembrandt. Very fine painting with a genuine Rembrandt signature. Did Rembrandt have his blue Mondays? I certainly often do. You probably do. So did Rembrandt. I have stood in front of this painting in Paris a number of times saying to myself, ye gods, would I want to live with that painting? It's a self-portrait of Rembrandt but look at what it looks like. And the Rembrandt Research Project has shown beyond a doubt that this is Rembrandt on a blue Monday Next, look at this baby. Some three or four years ago, this painting came up at Sotheby's. Corpus said undoubtedly, Rembrandt. And the head of Old Masters of Sotheby's said to me, Dr. Bader, buy that painting and we will give you two years to pay for it. And I said I don't want it. I don't like that painting. Luckily for them, they didn't need me. The Prince of Liechtenstein years ago sold a perfectly good Rembrandt to the National Gallery in Ottawa and now Liechtenstein had no Rembrandt. And here was a genuine Rembrandt. But look at the -- look at those toes. Most babies have five toes. Have a good look. A Rembrandt student painted such a baby, which I actually prefer, with five toes, blue Mondays. Here a painting that belonged to Count Wachtmeister in Sweden. Year after year, I was offered the painting. Dr. Bader, would you like to buy this painting 15 million, 12 million, \$10 million? I said, no, it's a genuine Rembrandt but the fellow is so boring. Undoubtedly his mother loved him.

[Laughter]

I didn't want it. And then, one day, I got a phone call from a bank in Geneva saying Dr. Bader, this painting was given to us as security for a loan, \$3 million. If you pay us three million immediately, it's yours. And so I bought it. Three million, it's a selling potato. A perfectly genuine Rembrandt, which is now in the museum in Aachen in Germany that needs a genuine Rembrandt. Here an interesting painting known as the Beresteyn portrait at the Metropolitan Museum. I like the painting. The face is singularly beautiful. The Rembrandt Research Project gave it a C number, not by Rembrandt. And Professor Bruyn suggested that the painting is actually by a very mediocre Rembrandt student, Isaac de Jouderville. Well, I find that difficult to believe. Jouderville -- next slide, please. This is the woman to the Beresteyn pair. You will note that of the two paintings, both said to be by Jouderville, the man is much better than the woman. But this happens very often with Dutch portraits of husband and wife. Almost always, the husband is painted better. After all, he paid for it. This is the only known signed Jouderville. Not a very good artist. I don't for a minute believe that the Beresteyn portraits are by Jouderville, though I'm not at all certain that they're by Rembrandt. Now leave us continue. The 1969 catalogue in Chicago had this painting on the cover. And at first, the corpus said not by Rembrandt. Volume four, Ernst van de Wetering, has come to the conclusion it is a Rembrandt self-portrait but not at all in good condition. Carel Fabritius was a very able student. And he painted some absolutely magnificent paintings. Look at the next one, please. A Rembrandt student. If this wasn't signed and dated 16 --

Stephanie Dickey: Fifty-four.

Alfred Bader: -- 54, we wouldn't think of a Rembrandt student. Here you have the bridge between Rembrandt and Vermeer. Carel Fabritius was probably Rembrandt's ablest student. Sadly, he died in

a Delft powder explosion shortly after this painting was painted. A magnificent work. Next, did Rembrandt learn from his students? I think so. Here's an early work by Govert Flinck, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, dated 1634, a painting that will come to Queen's. Look at the Samaritan woman, the detail. And then look at Rembrandt's most famous print, the Hundred Guilder Print, done many years after 1634. And you will see, here you have the Samaritan woman in a print. Next, a painting belonging to Her Majesty the Queen, volume 1A, Rembrandt, perhaps a portrait of Rembrandt's mother. It was in King Charles I collection in 1639 as a Rembrandt. Is it Rembrandt? In volume three, the corpus had a change of mind. The painting is closer to Jan Lievens. Is it really Jan Lievens? I'm not at all certain. There's going to be a Lievens exhibition beginning later this year. I'm not certain that it's Lievens. I don't think it's Rembrandt but a very fine painting. Jan Lievens is worth considering. Here you have the Liechtenstein Rembrandt, sold to the National Gallery of Canada. Incidentally, I keep hearing time and again people saying Queen's has 1/3 of all the Rembrandts in Canada. Well, when I was a student in Vienna, I had a terrible teacher in mathematics. My math is absolutely impossible, but somehow two is not 1/3 of five. I think there are only five Rembrandts in Canada. Though possibly the National Gallery in Ottawa will disagree with me and tell me that they have two but I think they only have one. And again, Professor Dickey, I will keep you busy with questions tomorrow evening. Anyway, this big machine was sold by Liechtenstein to the National Gallery, undoubtedly Rembrandt, an A picture. And right next to it hung or maybe still hangs, a magnificent painting by Jan Lievens. Job in his misery. My favourite Lievens. Lievens was a painter who may have shared a studio with Rembrandt in Leiden in the 1620s. They learnt from each other. When Rembrandt went to Amsterdam, Lievens went to England and then to Antwerp and then came back to Amsterdam. I think he was a very great artist. There was an exhibition in Braunschweig in Germany. Jan Lievens, Ein Maler im Schatten Rembrandts, a painter in the shadow of Rembrandt. Well, my friends, I believe the shadow is only in our minds. Ask yourself, never mind the value, never mind the name, if you had to pick one of those two paintings, that big Liechtenstein machine or this painting by Lievens to live with, which would you pick? I would certainly pick this wonderful Lievens. And I'm happy to be able to tell you that eventually, Queen's will have 11 works by Lievens here. In fact, the great Lievens exhibition, beginning in Washington in October, will have four Bader Lievens, three of them coming from the Agnes here at Queen's and one from Milwaukee. Here a painting called Rembrandt's Mother by Lievens. In days past, 20, 30 years ago, I was able to buy paintings by Jan Lievens for a few thousand dollars. This magnificent painting came up at Sotheby's in New York some years ago. And as Isabel and I walked to the auction, I said to Isabel, Isabel, would you divorce me if I paid a million dollars for that painting? And luckily, she said, no, I wouldn't. And secondly, I didn't have to pay a million dollars. Today, [inaudible]. Last December, I bought a very fine Lievens. I don't think quite as good as this, with three other dealers in London. And we had to pay a hammer price of 1.9 million pounds. Lievens has become truly appreciated. A very beautiful Lievens that will be in the exhibition in Washington, here at Queen's. I bought that for next to nothing in Lucerne in Switzerland. One of the finest Lievens in the National Gallery of Scotland, in Edinburgh. Here, a beautiful still life by two artists. The books are by Lievens, the still life on the lower left by another artist. One of the paintings that got away. I was offered that painting by a dealer in Den Haag, Hans Jungling, in the 1950s, for \$75,000, which, sadly, I didn't have. And the Rijksmuseum bought it. A late Lievens, the Earl of Ancrum, in Scotland. Ein Maler im Schatten Rembrandts, only early Lievens are good? That simply is not correct. Look at my favourite Lievens in my collection. Jacob Junius, a painting of the late 1650s. What a sad old man. A millionaire and yet so sad. Jacob Junius, truly a masterpiece. The great opportunities that the

Rembrandt Research Project has given us. This painting came up at Christie's in London. And the Rembrandt Research Project had said, not by Rembrandt. I was convinced. Luckily, people looked carefully at the catalogue, not by Rembrandt. I was able to buy it for 55,000 pounds. It's a beautiful painting. And there's an engraving. Next slide, please. Van Vliet, Rembrandt. Only later was it found that the paper of that print is on very rare paper used by van Vliet and Rembrandt. And so now, scholars believe in volume four of the corpus says this is an A Rembrandt, now at Queen's University. The first, perhaps, Rembrandt I bought in Vienna in 1959. I find it a very beautiful small painting on copper. Two members of the Rembrandt Research Project came to my home in Milwaukee and said to me, Dr. Bader, undoubtedly a Rembrandt. The same hand, the same paint handling as a painting of the Flight into Egypt in Tours. And yet, when volume one of the corpus came out, both this and my painting had a C number, C5 and C18. But some years ago, there was a great exhibition in Kassel and in Amsterdam, The Mystery of the Young Rembrandt. And Ernst van de Wetering suggested that this is certainly by Rembrandt and mine might also be. In any case, a very beautiful painting. I first learnt about Rembrandt when I was a student at Harvard. There was a great scholar, Professor Jakob Rosenberg, who lectured on Rembrandt. I remember my professor of chemistry one Friday getting very angry at me. I was leaving the chemistry building just before noon, unusual for graduate students. We worked all day. And Professor Fieser said to me, Alfred, where are you going? And I said, Professor Fieser, Professor Jacob Rosenberg is giving a lecture at the Fogg Museum on Rembrandt. And he looked at me in mock disgust and said, Alfred, you haven't made up your mind yet whether you want to be a chemist or an art historian. Well, my friends, these many years later, I still haven't made up my mind. And there in Professor Rosenberg's book of 1948 are these two paintings he considered to be Rembrandts. Let's look at the first one in my collection, perhaps a Study for St. Matthew in the Louvre, perhaps Rembrandt. And the next one, a very beautiful painting, now in the collection of my son, Daniel, who is on the board of trustees of Queen's University. This painting has an interesting story. I loved it. It came up in the Erickson sale in New York, where there were three Rembrandts, this included. And this was estimated to be \$40,000 to \$60,000. And I'd saved enough. I flew to New York to buy it. But a collector in Birmingham in England had much more money than I did and bought it for \$180,000. And then the Rembrandt Research Project must have said, not Rembrandt. The collector died. His son put it up for sale, circle of Rembrandt. I bought it. And then Professor Ernst van de Wetering came to my house, had a very good look at it and said, Alfred, this is Rembrandt. And it was in the Berlin and Amsterdam exhibitions. Next, this came up in 2000 at Sotheby's New York, circle of Rembrandt, filthy dirty, very difficult to see. But what little I saw, I liked very much. And I hoped it would be Rembrandt. Estimated at \$40,000 to \$60,000. I was prepared to go to a million. It only brought a hammer price of \$125,000. And then I had it cleaned. And then the wood examined, 1661. And Ernst van de Wetering saying to me, this painting haunts me. We took it to Amsterdam and he said, can you come with me tomorrow to the Rijksmuseum? I want to compare it with a paint handling of a Rembrandt self-portrait, Rembrandt -- this incidentally -- forgive my discussing, a St. Paul at the Rijksmuseum. Paint handling very similar to the painting now at Queen's. And last, not least, a painting that was in the Rembrandt 1969 exhibition, frontispiece in colour. Rembrandt, perhaps a study of Hendrickje Stoffels. Probably not by Rembrandt but a very beautiful painting. And I was able to buy it, and in time, it will come to Queen's. You must know what enormous pleasure it has given Isabel and me, and gives us, to be able to help this wonderful university. Thank you.

[Applause]

Janet Brooke: Will you take some questions?

[Applause]

Is this microphone working? Can people hear me? Yes. I think it's working. Dr. Bader, thank you for a wonderfully compelling and fascinating lecture. I know that Dr. Bader has agreed to take a few questions if there are some from the floor. If so, I would ask you to use one of the two microphones that are up here in the corridors so that everyone can hear the questions. Anyone like to address a question to Dr. Bader? I see one here.

Audience member: I'm a student of Stephanie Dickey, I should say. You are obviously familiar with many of the authorities and I've read some rather snide articles by Gary Schwartz and Walter Liedtke. I'm wondering how much of this is in good spirit and how much is there an animus between the various scholars.

Alfred Bader: Well, there's a great animosity between Ernst van de Wetering and Gary Schwartz. It goes one way, I'm afraid. Next June, at the end of June, Queen's hopes to have a Rembrandt symposium at Herstmonceux Castle and inviting some 40 scholars, including Ernst van de Wetering, Walter Liedtke, Gary Schwartz, to come to the castle to spend some days discussing how do we further Rembrandt scholarship.

Audience member: Fascinating.

[Laughter]

Janet Brooke: Other questions, don't be shy. Here's one.

Audience member: I know nothing about Rembrandt but --

Alfred Bader: Wait a moment. As I get older, I hear very much worse. So I will come to you and listen carefully.

Audience member: First of all, I'm interested in DNA and I wondered whether any of Rembrandt's descendants are still available to donate their DNA and I wonder whether the Rembrandt project has got a tame biochemist who will study the paintings from that perspective to see whether there's any increased incidence of DNA from the real Rembrandt associated with his paintings. Is this completely foreign to them or are they thinking along these lines?

Alfred Bader: Well, you're asking the wrong person. Professor Dickey might be able to answer. I cannot answer. I doubt it. Professor Dickey, you think so?

Stephanie Dickey: Rembrandt's, I know his daughter Cornelia immigrated to the East Indies. Somewhere nice and warm and tropical. And I've always wanted to get a grant to go and see if we could find some of those ancestors and so far no luck. Who knows? Who knows?

Alfred Bader: Anyway, thank you very much indeed.

Janet Brooke: Thank you.

[Applause]

Thanks again, Alfred, for a wonderful lecture and I'd like to ask you to keep your seats for a moment because before we end this afternoon, I have one last and very pleasant task to undertake. I'd like to invite Dr. David de Witt, Bader Curator of European Art at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, to come forward for a presentation that I know is very dear to his heart and has been years in the making. Eight years ago, when David assumed his curatorial duties at the art centre, he began an intensive research project on The Bader Collection, both the old master paintings already generously donated by Alfred and Isabel Bader to us and the many works still in the Bader's home in Milwaukee that are promised -- or promised bequest to us that together carve an important place for Queen's and the art centre in the international arena of art historical scholarship. The Dutch and Flemish paintings alone in this collection number 200 works and you can thus imagine the scale and ambition of this research, which has been the focus of David's curatorial work these many years. This afternoon, it is my very great pleasure to announce the publication by the Agnes Etherington Art Centre of David's complete catalogue of the Dutch and Flemish paintings in the Bader collection. A scholarly undertaking of impressive depth and magnitude of which he and the art centre are rightly proud and to invite David de Witt to formally present the first copy of this imposing publication, fresh off the press as of last week, to our steadfast friends and great supporters, Dr. Alfred and Isabel Bader. David.

[Applause]

Janet Brooke: This is a wonderful work, I'm sure, with an enormous amount of research done by a man who has become a very good personal friend.

David De Witt: Alfred, this is the vehicle by which all of what you've done for Queen's will go out into the world. And it's great that we could present to you finally the first copy after a few years of tinkering away at it. Thank you, Alfred.

Janet Brooke: I've been asked to remind you that there are refreshments being served, I believe, just outside the door. Is that correct, Judith? And perhaps some of you would like to meet Dr. Bader and discuss his lecture with him directly and don't try and grab the book and run away and read it because he wants that copy to read himself. The book will be available in the next -- I would say the next week or two in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre's gallery shop, just so you know. It is barrelling its way down a highway as we speak. So anytime soon. Thank you again for attending, and I wish you a lovely evening. Thank you.