

[ Background Conversations ]

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>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Could it be the case that Rembrandt was registered as a student for a number of years but didn't attend university but he did that because of the privileges? You know exemption from the civic guard for example and taxes.

>> Dr. Mart van Duijn: Yeah, it's very well possible because these exemptions were also -- the students also had this acceptance when they rematriculated. So the price for studying was 5 Stivers at that time but it gave the same rights as the first matriculation. So it is in fact possible that Rembrandt didn't do any studying at all.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: And we know for sure that he didn't graduate, he never got a degree because there are records of that, aren't there?

>> Dr. Jef Schaeps: No.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: No.

>> Dr. Jef Schaeps: No, nothing about that. There was no graduation in the 17th century students were enrolled in the university for a few years and if they wanted then they could do a PhD and write a dissertation. But they could also just quit after three years and take a job somewhere. And there are no papers which record graduation or anything like that so.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Other questions?

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>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: Jonathan, I thought of a question that came up when you were giving your talk which I found absolutely fascinating. I can't remember the specific painting you were talking about but you were describing the texture of Rembrandt's paint in a certain area of clothing or something. And you said you thought he might have used an etching needle to get that particular texture. And that's something I've never thought about and I wonder if you could say more about your thoughts about that or if you've seen that similar texture in other paintings as well?

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah, actually no within the Jewish Bride yeah, the lines are just so thin and fine that I can't imagine what kind of tool he used. But also and that seems to be one of the things that distinguishes the scratching that Jan Lievens uses and the scratching that Rembrandt uses. The scratching that Rembrandt uses that in his early works that seems to me to be always done with the butt-end of a brush. But in paintings by Lievens where he uses scratching that's very, very fine and delicate lines that are scratched. And I wonder if those but I would need a printing expert to. So please take a good look at paintings by Rembrandt and Lievens and maybe you could tell me at some point whether you think it's viable that he was using an etching needle.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Another possibility is a reed pen which is something he used to draw with.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah and actually made an etching with a reed pen, one of his early self-portrait etchings. It only exists in two impressions because it was actually a disaster. But you see the

double lines of the reed pen and there are also in the landscape painting the landscape with stone bridge in the Rijksmuseum a painting he used a reed pen actually to make scratchings in that painting. Melanie Gifford discovered that.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Oh very interesting.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: And you will be able to see some evidence of this scratching technique in some of the paintings that are here in our exhibition. Turning the brush right around and using the back end of it to scratch into the paint instead of laying the paint down, it's a radical thing to. Although there were artists in the 16th century who did it too so.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Rembrandt was not the first. I only know that because I raised this at a conference in Haarlem and there were people there who slapped me on the wrist and said no he wasn't the first person to do it. And but I don't remember who they said it was so we'll find out, we'll find out.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah, but I've seen it oddly enough in Avercamp, Hendrick Avercamp landscapes.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Okay.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: There's some scratching in the foliage and these are paintings from around 1610 or so.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Okay.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: But I don't know of any artists who use it as much as.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Not as much no.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: As Lievens and Rembrandt.

>> Dr. Arthur der Weduwen: If I may Stephanie, I think in general you shouldn't believe everything you hear in Haarlem because they also claimed for centuries they invented the printing press so.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: I sense a little.

>> Dr. Arthur der Weduwen: [inaudible] Amsterdamer, don't believe everything.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Okay. Well let's open it up to the floor, who has a question for one of our speakers? Yes ma'am.

>> About the printing key, did he number his prints and if not, do you have any idea of how many prints he was making from one painting?

>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: The practice of numbering print editions is really a development of the later 19th century. So none of the printmakers at this time were actually numbering impressions of prints. So what we know about the number of impressions that Rembrandt was able to make from his plates for example comes from surmise about the printmaking technique that was used, in other words how the plate would wear. A deeply etched plate would be able to produce more impressions for example than a dry point plate which involves direct scratching into the surface of the plate and is a very fugitive, the lines of the dry point are very fugitive. And then of course the other metric we have is how many impressions survive from a given plate. So but it's difficult to say for certain how many he

initially printed but you can make some inferences for example to some extent, and I didn't talk at all about Japanese paper for example, but that was a support that Rembrandt used starting in the later 1640's. He often when he considered that a plate was finished, he would often pull an edition on Japanese paper because this was a luxury support and the plate wore very well printing onto Japanese paper instead of European paper. So we think in those instances he was maybe printing 20, 30 impressions or something like that at the outset from a plate. And you know you gauge the remaining number of those that survive and you can use that as a metric. But it's really it's really difficult to say for sure.

>> An estimate, what would be an estimate?

>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: An estimate of a Rembrandt edition that he was printing from his plate would probably be somewhere in the, you know, the 30 to 40, 50 range something like that.

>> What would be the cost, like how much would he sell prints for compared to an original painting?

>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: She's asking how much the individual impressions would sell for. Again that's a highly variable thing and there's actually not a whole lot of information available about that specifically. However the different types of paper, the different supports that Rembrandt used to make his prints came with different values associated with them. So impressions on Japanese paper would command more of a premium than those on European paper. Impressions on vellum or calfskin for example even more than Japanese paper probably. But we can't say you know aside -- well this is something that Stephanie could speak to probably better than I or Jonathan.

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And I was just going to mention yeah, there is the Hundred Guilder Print that I mentioned where there are two separate documentary instances where impressions of that print sold actually for 100 guilders which is how it gets this sobriquet. But aside from that not much is known about what individual impressions of Rembrandt prints sold for in the market.

>> So he didn't number his prints but they were numbering in books, they were.

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I'm afraid they were not

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They weren't? Because I was looking at the one book I thought [inaudible] editions.

>> Dr. Arthur der Weduwen: Yeah, so that's what we've reconstructed of different editions but we don't know the actual print run of those editions. So information of print runs is only incidental generally from archival information where you have payments to particular publishers or they are writing in correspondence to colleagues to say you know oh I've just printed 2,000 copies of Habermann. And so you can reconstruct across various genres what general print runs are like

and for printed books in this period it tends to be anywhere between about 500 and 2,000 copies per edition. So when you see those 66 editions of Habermann that may be about 66,000 copies or between you know 30,000 and 70,000 so.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Prints would never have been produced in that large an edition. But the idea was it was a relatively new technology at that time. Modern printmakers limit the number in order to control the price.

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But in those days the whole point was to get as many as you possibly could. And the one thing that maybe wasn't entirely clear is that over a hundred of Rembrandt's copperplates still exist and people continued to print them right up until the 20th century. So this is why this is such a puzzle for collectors. You can buy a Rembrandt print on eBay for \$2,000 but you're probably getting something that was printed in the 19th century. So it started out as a Rembrandt and it still is a Rembrandt but it's a Rembrandt that was made by someone else long ago. And that's why this watermark and paper research is fascinating because if the paper dates to 1645 then it was printed by Rembrandt himself. So it's a fascinating thing. Pierre.

>> Stephanie you mentioned and two of your panellists also a fact that interested me which was the closure of Leiden University library to students. Could people say a little bit more about that because that seemed to be potentially a rather interesting sidelight on all this?

>> Dr. Arthur der Weduwen: Absolutely and at one of the -- with the establishment of the universities, most universities in this period have a library. But the problem is that you know today we are so ingrained that university libraries are indeed for students they're really not meant for students all over Europe. There's only a couple of exceptions where access is really generous. A lot of this has to do with the fact that the sort of books that students will use they're expected to buy them themselves, they will be relatively cheap textbooks. The other issue that's consistently cited is the issue of theft that you know who do you allow in. Leiden actually starts out with a very generous policy where many different keys to the room are created and handed out to professors who then hand them out to their favourite students and the like. And this very quickly devolves into chaos and two years later they say all right we're changing the locks; we're going to have one key and the librarian is the only one who has that key. So even if you were a particularly prodigious student and one of your professors really liked you, you could probably say you know will you let me have a go in the library and that sometimes happened. But in general these were resources meant for professors for really substantial heavy expensive works that they wouldn't be expected to buy themselves. In one other Dutch university in Franeker in the north of the country they had a wonderful university collection and 20 years after it was established, they sold off all the books in formats which were not folios. And with that money they bought more folios because that was the idea. Again if we provide these expensive books for our professors, they will have libraries themselves. In

many towns professorial libraries were much bigger than the university library.

>> But surely the Thysian Library, the Bibliotheca Thysiana in Leiden itself must have been an exception to that rule.

>> Dr. Arthur der Weduwen: Absolutely.

>> Because of the donors will specifying that anybody could use it.

>> Dr. Arthur der Weduwen: Yes and Thysius was really an exception to this rule in early modern Europe in that moment. There were several others like him but they were not the norm. I mean Thysius is also unusual because he specifically left so much money for the creation of this library whereas most other collectors were very happy to have their collection sold off or anyway if they were dead, they didn't have much of a choice. And they often said I would love my collection to be a beautiful public library and then the heirs would look at the amount of money they can make and thought.

>> The irony is that I tried to get into that library and the irony is I wasn't able to get into it. So tell me that's unjust.

>> Dr. Jef Schaeps: Well one thing you should not forget about the library it was not just a library of printed books but there were also quite a lot of manuscripts. So the bookcase we saw which was the bequest of Scaliger contained mostly manuscripts. And of course they were even more prone to being stolen, I think.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: And very rare so you want to keep them very.

>> Dr. Jef Schaeps: Yes, absolutely.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Carefully. The Thysius library which was just mentioned is a remarkable place in Leiden which is the private library of one individual which was begun in the 1650's.

>> Dr. Jef Schaeps: Fifties, I think it is open 54.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: When he was a student at Leiden, I think. He also had prints, he only had one print by Rembrandt, I think, if that oddly enough but it still exists. This whole library intact the way it was in the 17th century in the same building on the same shelves, it's a fascinating thing. And yes Pierre you can't always get in there but I know someone who knows someone so the next time you go to Leiden let me know. Other questions?

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>> Do we know whether Rembrandt or his contemporaries ever cancelled their plates or was that a practice that was common or no?

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: That's another thing that only 19th-century printmakers started to do to cancel it so that, I mean if you wanted to stop printing it in those days you would probably just rub it out and reuse it for another print, you wouldn't bother to cancel it and yet somehow keep it intact. That's an odd phenomenon that comes along later.

>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: Or you could turn it over and use the other side.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Use the other side yeah.

>> I have a question about the wire project which looked amazing. You

mentioned a couple of different techniques that people had used to look at their paper. Is there a particular technique that shows you the most about the structure of the paper and the lines that are there?

>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: Yeah, absolutely. The low-energy x-ray or the beta radiography these are you know radiographic techniques that use a low amount of radiation to penetrate paper and they're able to therefore photograph the paper characteristics, watermarks and chain lines quite adequately without any interference from the ink on the surface of the paper. The drawbacks to those techniques is that they are expensive, they require equipment that's usually anchored down at a particular institution and can't travel around. And of course they involve radiography so they're regulated by the government. But those are still the best. Other techniques are being developed now using infrared techniques and actually using a combination of transmitted light, an invisible light, and an algorithm that cancels out the ink on the surface of the paper. Those are still under development at the moment but that's a promising avenue for going forward because that would be non-invasive, relatively inexpensive, and portable.

>> Thank you.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Other questions? Yes ma'am.

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>> Thank you. This is open to the entire panel. In Jonathan Bikker's talk we talked about how Rembrandt almost stole the technique from Jan Lievens of scratching into the paint. And I was just wondering do you guys have any other opinions on how Jan Lievens influenced Rembrandt as an artist or vice versa?

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: That's for you Jonathan.

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[ Laughter ]

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>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah, that's a big question. Lievens he was nine when he started his apprenticeship, he was one year older or younger than Rembrandt so he had a big head start on Rembrandt. He also -- we know that they both had as second teachers Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam. Lievens studied with him according to Orlers, the Leiden burgomaster who wrote in 1641. He said that Lievens studied with Lastman for two years and Rembrandt for only half a year. And yeah, we know that Lievens had a very big influence on Rembrandt but then at a certain point they seemed to be at the same level and Rembrandt actually starts taking the lead, and I think Lievens becomes the follower. But you might have.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: No that's your opinion and that's a fine opinion. It's probably the most -- well yeah, I mean it's an odd phenomenon that we remember and we all remember Rembrandt today and Lievens is known only to the specialists. But he was ahead of the game at first. And Dr. Bader was particularly fond of Lievens, we have over a dozen works by him in this collection, more than anywhere

else probably, maybe even -- I don't know how many are in the Rijksmuseum, probably we have more than you do.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: We have 11.

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We have 11.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: You have 11.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Okay so pretty close.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: How many do you have?

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: It's either 12 or 14, I meant to count but I forget but it's quite remarkable.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: We'll buy more.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Good idea, good idea. Yeah, but it's a fascinating case of two very talented, very ambitious young people who were looking over each other's shoulder. And I'm sure that the competitive presence of the other one helped both of them to excel. And you can see evidence of that in our show, we've got work by both of them there you can.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Do you have an opinion on?

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: And also in printmaking, in printmaking they were both at the same time learning together.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Do you have an opinion on the theory that they shared a studio in Leiden?

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: For a long time people thought that they did but it seems less likely to me nowadays just because Lievens worked on a different scale.

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>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: And he must have gotten started sooner than Rembrandt, he must have even had his own studio before Rembrandt settled in and started his. So but they certainly were using the same models and the same props and maybe the same -- I don't know about Lievens' watermarks whether they were using the same printer or not that's also a possibility. Because Van Vliet made prints after Lievens, as well as after Rembrandt. But if they weren't physically sharing the same studio they were definitely back and forth all the time, sharing ideas and physical attributes so.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: What might prove it would be if you could figure out that the actual chemical composition of the paint was exactly the same. Because if they were both in the same studio on the same day and the assistant is mixing the pigments and they both go and take from that same batch then they at least on that day they were in the same place at the same time. But it doesn't mean that they worked that way.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah, but the chemistry of pigments isn't.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: It's not that specific.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Is it?

>> The pigments will be easier than the media, even now they're getting incredibly detailed analysis of Rembrandt paint media with Karen Grodin's study for example. And they're finding trace elements of things like cherry gum and really, really minor components that we barely have the techniques to identify. So it's possible but it won't give us the whole picture, there's always going to be things that we're missing partly because we don't even know what we're looking for when they're in that small quantity.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: But there's a sentence in Orlers' biography of Rembrandt that he says after studying with Lastman in Amsterdam he goes back to Lievens and works on his own. So that's.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Yeah, yeah.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Joshua pointed out that it's probably a myth that they shared a studio based on that sentence in Orlers' biography.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: It's an interesting -- yeah that makes good sense. Yes ma'am.

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>> Shifting topics rather dramatically. Why did Rembrandt go bankrupt, was he a womanizer, a drinker? I know starving artists but he'd been around.

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[ Laughter ]

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>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: That's a long story.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Oh I know why he went bankrupt. This is my theory. No it's blamed on a lot of things that he didn't manage his money very well for example. But I think that the major thing was that he was making, there was a kind of tulip mania in the 1640's but instead of tulip bulbs it was for old master prints. And Rembrandt we know in the biography, his biography in Baldinucci for example, Baldinucci says that Rembrandt would go to an auction and because he esteemed art so much, the fine art so much that he would come out immediately with an extravagant bid for an old master print. And we know he paid extravagant prices for especially prints by Lucas van Leyden because he thought of himself as the 17th century heir to Leiden's greatest artists of the 16th century. But anyway he wasn't the only one who was paying these extravagant amounts of money for prints, there were others who were doing this too. So it was a kind of tulip mania but then for old master prints. What Rembrandt didn't foresee and I don't think we can blame him either for that because nowadays we don't see financial crises or depressions and he didn't see that coming either. But because of the Anglo-Dutch war in 1652 the price of these prints which was his investment, his way of investing they plummeted. And so the prices he paid for these prints he couldn't recuperate this money and I think that's the main reason why when all artists were under a lot of pressure because of the economic -- because the economy went down the drain because of the Anglo-Dutch war, first Anglo-Dutch war. That Rembrandt didn't have



the means to realize ready cash yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Interesting yeah, he was a bit of a spendthrift overall and he bought a house for his beautiful new wife in 1639 which was very expensive and he started defaulting on the mortgage payment so that's another thing. So the print buying is an important part of it but he wasn't a good money manager overall.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Yeah and in the 1640's after the Night Watch and a month before he delivered the Night Watch Saskia died. After that point for about nine years he paints hardly anything at all. And so his income would have been reduced.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: That too.

>> Dr. Jonathan Bikker: Because of that yeah.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: Interesting story, interesting man. Okay Max, how are we on time?

>> Perhaps one more question.

>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: One more question, one more question. Anyone? Anyone here at the panel? Oh okay yes go ahead.

>> I'm just wondering when you were talking about like using the watermarks on the paper and everything to determine where these prints were made and at what time periods and that if there was any work done on let's say the different inks that had been used at different times or from different areas to make these prints? If there has been any study done on that aspect of it?

>> Dr. Andrew Weislogel: That's an excellent question and actually something I don't know very much about at the moment. But it's actually a timely thing because I know a couple of conservators who were starting to study the make-up of inks and the profiles of inks. The way I understand it unless the ink was considerably you know deviated from the standard black colour the make-up of most inks is relatively similar and the printing inks used to make Rembrandt's prints and most other prints in the 17th century are you know just primarily are a black carbon pigment in some kind of a binder. So I think -- I've been talking with a couple of people I know who can train you know x-ray fluorescence on materials like this and determine what perhaps other trace elements might be available and might be present in those inks. And I don't know the answer to that question but I think that's an avenue that some people are looking into to find what other trace elements along with the carbon which doesn't show up in that type of imaging are present in those inks. So a very good question and I wish I could give you a better answer and perhaps our conservator knows more about that, I don't know.

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>> Dr. Stephanie Dickey: There's always room for new discoveries which is a great thing. Well thank you all for being here. I need to acknowledge once more the generosity of Bader Philanthropies and the Museum's Assistance Program of Canadian Heritage both of which contributed funding to make this event and our exhibition possible. The exhibition is here until December 1st after which it goes on to

Edmonton, Regina and Hamilton. The first travelling show from the Bader collection that has been organized in quite some time so that's very exciting. And again we thank very much our lenders who have contributed to the selection of works that will be here on view and then also be shared with people elsewhere in Canada. And a very warm thank you to our speakers for today.

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[ Applause ]

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