

Rembrandt: His Life and Work

An Osher Course

by

Russ Walker

This course is dedicated to the life and work of Rembrandt. In the course of discussing his work - both the familiar works and many that may be new to most students - we will consider the sources he drew on as well as life in Amsterdam during the Golden Age. He was a fascinating and wildly gifted person living in the unique environment of the Dutch Golden Age. In the course we will consider well over 200 images and several videos that reveal the details of his work up close.

The central element of the course is a large PowerPoint presentation. It will be posted in sections on the instructor's website as the course proceeds:

<https://www.math.cmu.edu/~rw1k/>

Instructor bio:

Russ Walker holds three degrees in mathematics including a Doctor of Arts in Mathematics from Carnegie Mellon University. He is a Teaching Professor Emeritus from Carnegie Mellon and has also taught at Ohio Northern University and Seton Hill University. He is the author of an optimization text and a monograph on point set topology.

He has been studying Rembrandt and his work for more than 30 years. He has given guest lectures on Rembrandt at Seton Hill, and taught an Osher course at Carnegie Mellon on Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and Vermeer. He has edited a version of the Book of Tobit illustrated by Rembrandt which is available on his website.

Course outline:

1. The origin of the Golden Age in war and economics
2. Rembrandt's years in Leiden:

Major works: *The Music Party*, *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, first self portraits, *The Artist in His Studio*

Notable events: Attends Latin School then the University of Latin, apprenticed to Jacob van Swanenburg, spends some time studying with Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam, opens his studio, visited by Constantijn Huygens

3. Move to Amsterdam up to painting of *The Night Watch*:

Major works: *Portrait of Nicholas Ruts*, *Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicholas Tulp*, his series on the Passion, *The Angel Preventing Abraham from Sacrificing his Son Isaac*, Self portraits of 1639 and 1640, *The Night Watch*

Notable events: Marries Saskia van Uylenburgh, buys a big house on Sint Antoniesbreestraat, son Titus born

A sequence of works illustrating the Book of Titus will be discussed in this time period.

4. From *The Night Watch* to bankruptcy:

Major works: *The Mill, Aristotle with a Bust of Homer, The Risen Christ at Emmaus, 100 Guilder Print, Danaë, Bathsheba with the Letter from King David, Portrait of Jan Six, Hendrickje Bathing in a River, The Polish Rider, Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph, Christ with Arms Folded*

Notable events: Saskia dies, affair with Titus' nurse Geertje Dirckx, Hendrickje Stoffels enters the household and becomes his companion, birth of their daughter Cornelia, sale of his art collection, possessions, and house

A sequence of works on the nativity of Christ is discussed in this period as is one on the supper at Emmaus.

5. Final years:

Major works: *Peter Denying Christ, The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilus, The Syndics of the Clothmaker's Guild, The Jewish Bride, Return of the Prodigal Son*

Notable events: Moves to modest rental property on the Rozengracht, his work managed by Titus and Hendrickje, *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilus* is rejected, Hendrickje dies, Titus is married, Titus dies, Titus' daughter Titia is born, Rembrandt's daughter in law dies

Selected references:

Bailey, Anthony, *Rembrandt's House*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978. An interesting exploration of Amsterdam in Rembrandt's time.

Beranek, Saskia, *Rembrandt, The Jewish Bride*, in Smarthistory, November 18, 2017.

Beranek, Saskia, *Rembrandt, Self-portrait with Two Circles*, in Smarthistory, October 6, 2019.

Blom, Onno, *Young Rembrandt*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2020. A very well researched presentation of Rembrandt's years in Leiden.

Clark, Kenneth, *Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance*, W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1966. Includes the 1656 inventory of Rembrandt's possessions.

Held, Julius, *Rembrandt's Aristotle and Other Rembrandt Studies*, Princeton University Press, 1969. A scholarly work that also includes discussions of *The Polish Rider, Juno*, and Rembrandt's treatment of the book of Tobit.

Mee, Charles L., Jr., *Rembrandt's Portrait: A Biography*, Simon and Schuster, 1988.

Tümpel, Christian, *Rembrandt*, Fonds Mercator, 1993. A discussion of his work arranged both chronologically and thematically with excellent color reproductions. A coffee table book.

Videos used in the course:

These can be found by an internet search for the title.

Rembrandt van Rijn – The Real Rembrandt

Rembrandt Portrait of a Young Woman Exploring Attribution An Allentown museum of Art video

Rembrandt The Night Watch A Khan Academy video

Hidden Details in Rembrandt's Three Trees

Rembrandt's interpretation of the crucifixion changes how you look at people

Rembrandt's Self-Portraits

Hidden Details in Rembrandt's Three Trees