



escapes any defining concept, going beyond the realm of words. The open structure, with its almost uncompleted appearance, nevertheless asserts itself as one that is finished, one in which the observer directly and completely participates.

Three figures, three styles, three worlds. The change in Rembrandt's painting, taking place over a creative span of forty-four years, is one of an extremely far-reaching nature. The richest display of unparalleled artistry in painting and virtuosity results directly from what are sometimes almost clumsy or wild beginnings – although a closer look reveals them to be most eloquent – until a pictorial form finally develops, the enigma of which remains unsolved to this day. The succession of paintings, together with the no less important etchings, point to a restless searching. Each picture, every version of the same picture, represents a new experiment, referring back and looking forward, with new qualities constantly coming to light. The great abundance of freehand drawings provides evidence of unrestrained creative powers allowing of no submission to any step-by-step process. This development nevertheless constitutes a unity: from beginning to end, Rembrandt was to remain true to those tasks and motifs which he had originally adopted. In retrospect, this development can be seen as following a consistent course.

This becomes particularly clear when one examines different versions of the same subject matter. For example, the seventeen different sketches and arrangements of *Simeon's Song of Praise* (The Presentation in the Temple, Luke 2, ill. pp. 20, 30, 31, 80) alone offer a succession of new versions.

Furthermore, the series of self-portraits – surely not the result of the artist's later occasional financial straits preventing him from coming up with the fee for a model – is without equal. These pictures should not be seen merely as a portrayal of Rembrandt in the various stages of his life, nor do they simply reveal the variety of possibilities by means of which he could convey facial expression although he did experiment with this in impressive ways as a young man (ill. pp. 8, 9, 11). The series is still capable of causing astonishment as one of the most radical self-portrayals in the world of painting. The portraits referred to above include one of his earliest, one from the middle years of his life, and one of the last pictures that he was to produce. On looking at them for the first time, the observer is immediately struck by the diversity of this personality through the manner in which the artist depicts himself as a young man, presents himself in mid-life, and achieves the effect of a personal contact in the final year of his life. If one wishes to get closer to Rembrandt's art, however, it is more important to examine the pictorial qualities by means of which these differentiated inner qualities first become comprehensible. These portraits give us an insight into a career which outwardly consisted principally of constant work with no spectacular incidents. Rembrandt lived in Leiden during his apprenticeship and initial years as an artist, thereafter spending the rest of his life in Amsterdam; unlike other artists, he never travelled to Italy. The climax of his civic prestige was overtaken by the death of his first wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh, in 1642, while legal disputes and a bankruptcy created difficulties for him. However, he was enabled to enjoy a number of years of undisturbed creative work thereafter through Hendrickje Stoffels, his mistress, and his son, Titus. He lived in a secluded manner, but not in isolation, and received commissions from cultured friends and collectors.

After times of mystification, Rembrandt's circumstances and his work have been the subject of extensive research. The conditions under which his pictures were produced, his clients, those depicted in his portraits – all these have been investigated; his subject matter has been related to the art of that time; his painting technique has been reconstructed. Most important, those works originating from Rembrandt's own hand have finally been separated from what soon became an equally high number



Self-Portrait with Wide-Open Eyes, 1630
Etching, sale state, 5 x 4.5 cm (2 x 1 7/8 in.)
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet

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Self-Portrait, 1629
Oil on panel, 15.6 x 12.7 cm (6 x 5 in.)
Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen,
Alte Pinakothek



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Abraham's Sacrifice, 1635
Oil on canvas, 193.5 x 132.8 cm (76¼ x 52¼ in.)
St. Petersburg, Hermitage

Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee, 1633
Oil on canvas, 160 x 128 cm (63 x 50½ in.)
Unknown (formerly Boston, Isabella Stewart
Gardner Museum)



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*Heroine from the Old Testament
at Her Toilet, 1632/33*
Oil on canvas, 109.2 x 94.4 cm (43 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 37 in.)
Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada

Saint Paul in Prison, 1627
Oil on oak panel, 72.8 x 60.3 cm
(28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ in.)
Staatgalerie Stuttgart