A CORPUS OF REMBRANDT PAINTINGS
Volume IV – Self-Portraits

Ernst van de Wetering with contributions by Karin Groen, Peter Klein, Jaap van der Veen, Marieke de Winkel
The Rembrandt Research Project

- The authoritative reference work for all Rembrandt’s self-portraits
- 650 Illustrations
- 250 in color!
After the publication of Volume III the approach of the first three volumes needed to be revised. It had become clear that the strictly chronological method employed in those books would not be effective for the final period, covering 1642 until 1669 (the year that Rembrandt died). The project group therefore chose for a method in which larger groups of pictorially interconnected works were studied, such as the self-portraits, portraits, history paintings etc. Rembrandt’s workshop practice was scrutinised more closely as well.

In Volume IV the focus lies on Rembrandt’s self-portraits. During this research it became obvious that matters of authenticity cannot be viewed separately from questions relating to the original function and meaning of these works. Rembrandt’s intriguing life-long practice of portraying himself in front of a mirror is examined in depth in this volume. As a result, not only has the group of approximately forty painted self-portraits gained transparency, but also new insights have been developed regarding Rembrandt’s drawn and etched self-portraits. The problems of authenticity relating to a substantial amount of self-portraits which in the past were attributed to Rembrandt in this volume receive an unexpected nuance: through a combination of technical and stylistic research it is demonstrated that some of Rembrandt’s self-portraits were in fact painted by others in his workshop.

In clear and accessible explanatory texts the different paintings are discussed. Among the many illustrations are life-size colour reproductions of the faces of the self-portraits under discussion. Details are shown where possible, as well as the results of modern day technical imaging like X-radiography.
The volume contains an – in several respects eye-opening – essay by the head of the Rembrandt Research Project, Ernst van de Wetering, on the problems of authenticity and function of Rembrandt's self-portraits. In addition, the book includes groundbreaking contributions by Marieke de Winkel on the meaning of dress and costume in Rembrandt's self-portraits, by Karin Groen on the use of grounds in Rembrandt's workshop and in paintings by his contemporaries, and a study by Jaap van der Veen concerning 17th-century ideas about authenticity in art. This work of art history and art research should be part of every serious art historical institute, university or museum. The enigma of Rembrandt's self-portraits, one of the most compelling phenomena in art history, has been unravelled by Ernst van de Wetering with unprecedented thoroughness.


Price available upon request

Figs. 23 and 24. Rembrandt, Self-portrait, 1669, canvas 86 x 70.5 cm. London, The National Gallery (IV 27). Detail and corresponding X-Ray. A lead white-containing underpainting shows up strongly.

Contains eye-opening and groundbreaking insights into Rembrandt's works made in front of the mirror.
Sample Texts

Fig. 9. Rembrandt, Self-portrait with shaded eyes, 1634, panel 91 x 55.1 cm, detail. Las Vegas, U.S.A., The Wynn collection (IV Addenda 2)

Fig. 10. Rembrandt, Large self-portrait, 1652, canvas 112.1 x 81 cm, detail. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (IV 8)

Fig. 11. Rembrandt, Small self-portrait, c. 1655, panel 48.8 x 40.2 cm, detail. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (IV 13)

Fig. 12. Rembrandt, Self-portrait, 1642, panel 69.9 x 58.4 cm, detail. Windsor Castle, H.M. Queen Elizabeth II (IV 1)

Fig. 13. Rembrandt, Self-portrait, 1657/9, canvas 32.7 x 42.7, detail. Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, on loan from the Duke of Sutherland (IV 15)

Fig. 14. Rembrandt workshop, Self-portrait, 1660, canvas 75.6 x 61.1 cm, detail. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria (IV 21)

— Signatures

As is particularly evident in the case of several of the early self-portraits discussed in this book, the study of signatures plays an increasingly greater role in our attempts to define Rembrandt’s autograph oeuvre.\(^{11}\) It is estimated that they were applied to an original paint layer that was not yet dry (see for instance IV Addenda 1 and 2; fig. 9, and IV Corrigenda I A 22). But even then their authenticity — and with it the authenticity of the painting concerned — cannot automatically be taken for granted.

Fig. 15. Rembrandt, Study in the mirror, c. 1652/3, pen and brown ink, brown and grey paint, 12.7 x 9.4 cm (1:1) (Bib. 34). Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet

Fig. 16. Rembrandt, Study in the mirror, 1629, etching, 17.6 x 13.5 cm (slightly reduced) (B. 336) (reproduced in reverse)

Once again, one cannot avoid noting the way that, in the world of Rembrandt research, the splitting of the oeuvre according to techniques — into paintings, etchings and drawings — and of scholarship into specialists based on them hampers an integrated understanding of his work as a whole.\(^{15}\) The fact too that the drawn self-portraits are treated here in a separate section is a manifestation of this over-specialization according to medium.