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## WALL TEXTS

Kulturforum, Kupferstichkabinett

### Drawings from the Rembrandt School

24 August – 18 November 2018

#### Anthonie van Borssom

Anthonie van Borssom was known up to this point only for his drawings of landscapes and animals, as well as his small figural sketches. It was always suspected that he had trained with Rembrandt, though it was not documented. If this were the case, he would also have had to draw biblical and historical subjects, since these formed the core of the artistic training in Rembrandt's workshop. Here for the first time, three drawings with historical motifs are attributed to Van Borssom.

The attribution is based on the exceptionally dry, stiff, and at times even scratchy, thin outlines and hatching visible in these works as well as in additional drawings from other collections. This characteristic penwork rarely occurs in the work of other draftsmen, but are found in Van Borssom's depictions of animals and landscapes, such as the coastal landscape from our own collection on display here. The decidedly Rembrandt-esque character of the history drawings shown here, which were previously identified as works by the master himself, demonstrates that Van Borssom did indeed serve as an assistant in Rembrandt's workshop.

#### Constantijn Daniel van Renesse

Constantijn Daniel van Renesse, who became town clerk of Eindhoven in 1653, was not a professional artist, though he occasionally took drawing lessons from Rembrandt. In Holland it was common for well-educated laypeople, often jurists, to pursue drawing as an avocation. A few of Van Renesse's works were corrected by his teacher, most famously the Berlin drawing of the *Annunciation*. With a few energetic strokes of the pen, Rembrandt altered his pupil's somewhat pedantic, painterly drawing in colored chalk and wash. He clarified the structure of the pictorial space and the kneeler between Mary and the angel, accentuated Mary's turn toward the left, and transformed his pupil's childlike, softly approaching angel into a large, supernatural figure.

The somewhat fussy handling of the subject and the colored wash are typical of Van Renesse's drawing style. Yet on occasion, he also adopted Rembrandt's abbreviated, sketch-like approach to line, as evidenced by two landscape drawings in Berlin which, though from the hand of Van Renesse, were once considered originals by Rembrandt.

#### Gerbrand van den Eeckhout: *Crucifixion of Christ*

An important exercise for students in Rembrandt's atelier was to draw the Passion of Christ. Many depictions of this theme once considered originals by the master are now attributed to his pupils, including the *Crucifixion of Christ* presented here. Comparison of this work with a drawing of the *Bearing of the Cross* by Rembrandt himself sheds light on the question: Rembrandt, or not?

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In both works, the lines are loose and energetic. Rembrandt focuses the viewer's attention on the forms, gestures, and facial expressions of the central figures, especially the figures and faces of Christ and Mary. Everything is clearly structured, and there is little indication of a larger spatial context. The transparent wash on the figure at the left, along with its shadow, directs and focuses the viewer's gaze toward the main event. The drawing by the pupil, on the other hand, is dominated by a certain *horror vacui*, or fear of empty space. Aside from the sky, the entire image is filled to the edges with distracting details. Amid the tangle of lines to the right, it is unclear who is supporting the falling figure of the Virgin, while the body of the crucified Christ is overly meticulous in its attention to detail. The composition lacks a convincing focus on the essential.

The loose penwork, the fine hatching, the dark pen strokes applied somewhat arbitrarily over lines, the blotchy washes, and the figure and head types all identify the drawing as the work of Gerbrand van den Eeckhout.

#### **Gerbrand van den Eeckhout: *Gideon's Sacrifice***

Reattributions of Rembrandtesque drawings to pupils can also be based on comparison with works made by those students after they left the master's workshop, where a signature or connection to a particular painting provides reliable evidence of authorship. An example is *Gideon's Sacrifice*, one of two studies preserved in Braunschweig for a 1642 painting by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout.

Here the penwork is even looser and more scribbled than in the artist's earlier drawings of ca. 1635 to 1640. Yet formal and stylistic similarities still exist between these and the Gideon drawing, including the decorative spatial motifs that embroider the composition, filling it up to the very edges of the page, as well as the delicate hatching and uniform washes. The spots that accentuate and thicken the lines also occur in the *Crucifixion*, the *Adoration of the Magi*, and *Ruth and Boaz*. Parallels likewise exist in the figures: the little head of the angel in the Gideon drawing with its whimsically sheepish expression resembles the small heads of the spectator in the left background of the *Crucifixion* and Mary in the *Adoration*. Finally, the loosely undulating foliage of the trees recurs in a similar form in the two landscapes that are here attributed to Van den Eeckhout.

#### **Willem Drost: *Hagar in the desert***

Cast out of Abraham's house, Hagar wanders in the desert with her son Ishmael. Their water is gone and Ishmael is about to die of thirst. Hagar lays the child under a bush and sits down to weep, but the angel of the Lord appears, showing her a well and comforting her. The drawings presented here resemble one another compositionally, although the angel sailing down with such wonderful lightness in Rembrandt's image is missing from the pupil's version.

Rembrandt's drawing is characterized by the sparing yet subtle use of the pen. The main figures, caught by the light, are outlined and developed in thin, at times even brittle and scratchy lines. Initially, the angel had a larger wing, which was covered in lead white. The sleeping Ishmael in the shade toward the back and the landscape elements surrounding him

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show heavier, more powerful lines that also clearly emphasize this figure. In the pupil's drawing the penwork is less differentiated than in Rembrandt's; the lines tend to be uniform throughout the entire picture, undermining the spatial separation between foreground and background. The construction of the image is flat and blocky; the figures have broad contours, and the hatching is predominantly dense and parallel, negating the outlines of figures and forms. This manner of drawing is characteristic of Willem Drost.

Drost could have freely copied the drawing by Rembrandt in the latter's workshop, although it is also possible that both works were produced during a shared session in the atelier.

### **Willem Drost: *Cain and Abel***

Here two moments from the history of the first human family are shown: Cain, the son of Adam and Eve, murders his brother Abel, and the dead Abel is discovered and lamented. Both drawings were previously considered original works by Rembrandt; today, however, the Berlin drawing is attributed to Rembrandt's pupil Willem Drost. Compositionally, the two works are strongly analogous, with a similar arrangement of figure groups and landscape motifs. Yet for all their formal resemblance, the style of drawing in the two works differs considerably.

Rembrandt's drawing shows a differentiated approach to penwork, particularly in the two main figures: Abel is developed using thinner lines, while Cain is indicated with broader strokes of the pen. Other areas of the picture, such as the sacrificial altars in the background and the foliage on the left as well as the figure of God the Father in heaven, are only suggested with thin lines. In the pupil's drawing, the lines are coarser and more uniform; the lines in the foreground are as thick as those in the background, diminishing spatial depth. The treatment of the faces is also more simplified than in Rembrandt's depiction. The broad, heavy contours and energetic, uniform hatching are typical of the drawing style of Willem Drost.

Drost emulated Rembrandt's representation, but his execution does not achieve the subtlety of the prototype. It is quite possible that both teacher and pupil produced their drawings during a shared session in the atelier.

### **Rembrandt: *Study of a man with a turban***

This study of a man with a turban was not included in my catalogue of Rembrandt drawings in 2006. I doubted the authenticity of the drawing, which, with its loose, undulating lines, seems a bit like an intentional show of bravura. In the meantime, however, I am inclined to give it to Rembrandt after all. This attribution is based primarily on stylistic comparison with related half-figures and heads in other drawings by Rembrandt from the 1630s.

Connoisseurship, the study of works of art with regard to their unique, individual features, does not necessarily protect against error, for there is no such thing as absolute certainty in the evaluation of drawings. While attributions are indeed based on certain factual criteria—for example, comparisons with the style of drawing in other works, as in the present case—

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the decision for or against an attribution to Rembrandt is also partly subjective in nature. Not all the attributions to followers of Rembrandt presented in my catalogue and in this exhibition will meet with agreement from other specialists.

#### **Rembrandt and Arent de Gelder: *Nathan***

Both drawings show episodes from the Old Testament in which two persons face one another. In the one, David sits on his throne, listening to the admonitions of the prophet Nathan, while in the other Joseph kneels before the enthroned Pharaoh to interpret his dreams. Both drawings were made at the same time. Their compositions are similar with respect to the essential figures and motifs, and both show considerable differentiation in the penwork. Yet there are also differences.

In the drawing by Rembrandt, the figures appear firm and compact; in the pupil's work, the figure of Pharaoh seems loose and even wobbly due to the open, at times "jittery" formation of the contours. In comparison to the solid, three-dimensional figure of David, Pharaoh seems flat, and it is not entirely clear whether he is seated or standing. A number of stylistic features suggest the work of Arent de Gelder: the thin, loose, often energetic lines, some reinforced by darker strokes; the small clusters of delicate parallel hatching; the fine shading produced by rubbing the ink (though this also occurs in Rembrandt's drawing); and the figure and head types, which are quite comparable to the single drawing securely attributed to De Gelder. In this work, De Gelder's style of drawing is extremely close to that of Rembrandt, for which reason the reattribution may not meet with general agreement.

#### **Rembrandt and Gerbrand van den Eeckhout: *Costume studies***

Both studies, which were probably created during a joint session in the master's atelier, were formerly attributed to Rembrandt himself. Today, only the drawing in Leipzig is accepted as an original by the master, while the Berlin drawing is considered a work by Rembrandt's pupil Gerbrand van den Eeckhout.

The drawn lines in the Leipzig costume study are extremely nuanced. First, the figure was created in thin outlines and developed with the brush; next, Rembrandt used broad strokes of the pen to accentuate individual portions of the garment on the back. Fine, nuanced strokes serve both to suggest the light falling on the collar and neck and to indicate the face and head covering of the woman.

In the pupil's drawing, the penwork is more uniform, and the lines differ little from one another in width. Unlike the transparent, diaphanous washes in Rembrandt's drawing, here broad, closed areas filled in with the brush contrast harshly with the light tone of the paper. The woman's face and head covering are less nuanced than in Rembrandt's drawing, and on the whole the forms appear less three-dimensional. Both the uniform strokes of the pen and the flat washes support the attribution to Van den Eeckhout.

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### **Rembrandt and Pieter de With**

Both drawings shown here depict the same section of landscape: a country road with farmhouses along the Schinkel River, southwest of Amsterdam. Yet the two works, both of which were formerly considered to be originals by Rembrandt, show differences that now support the attribution of one version to Rembrandt's pupil, Pieter de With.

The drawing by Rembrandt exhibits a nuanced use of line. Objects and trees in the foreground, indicated in broad strokes, stand out against parts of the image further in the background, rendered in thinner lines. As the image recedes into depth, the strokes of the pen become ever finer, creating the effect of a large expanse of depth and space. The other drawing shows lines that are more homogeneous and uniform and lacks the nuanced execution of Rembrandt's landscape. In the past, these differences in execution were explained in terms of different dates; it is more reasonable, however, to attribute the drawings to two separate hands. The broad, uniform strokes as well as the doll-like figures in the second drawing suggest that it is the work of Pieter de With.

De With could have used Rembrandt's drawing as a model; it is also possible, however, that teacher and pupil sketched together on location.

### **Rembrandt and Jan Victors**

As with the *Bearing of the Cross* by Rembrandt and the *Crucifixion of Christ* by his pupil Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (both on display nearby), this comparison of two drawings of the Passion from the same period—both of which have always been viewed as originals by the master—helps shed light on the question of authorship.

In his *Lamentation of Christ*, Rembrandt clearly delineates the figures with an energetic and at the same time nuanced use of line. The followers of Christ, especially the figures standing next to the cross, are suggested in a few broad strokes that serve to point the viewer's gaze toward the primary figures of mother and son, while the inert, lifeless body of Christ is modeled in fine, elongated, spontaneous-seeming lines. Mary's intimate embrace of her son constitutes the primary motif in the scene. The other drawing, showing *Christ Carried to the Tomb*, uses similar means to draw attention toward the main figures, but here the use of line is less nuanced than in the *Lamentation*, especially (though not exclusively) in the coarse, broad hatch marks on the figure viewed from the rear. The figure of Christ is almost identical to the one in the drawing by Rembrandt, yet the somewhat uncertain and wobbling lines, above all in the ribcage and the dangling arm, betray the hand of a different artist.

Here, Jan Victors is proposed as the author of *Christ Carried to the Tomb*. This attribution, however, is not entirely certain, and the drawing may also be the work of another of Rembrandt's pupils from around 1635.

### **Philemon and Baucis**

Philemon and Baucis, a poor, aged couple, offer hospitality to two strangers and attempt to prepare a meal for them. The goose they are trying to slaughter escapes and seeks refuge with the guests, who now reveal themselves to be the gods Jupiter and Mercury. The drawing in-

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cludes only three figures: Jupiter to the left, Philemon, who has fallen to the ground, and behind him Baucis, or more likely Mercury. The inscription on the drawing—“d. ouden filemon onvan[gt] / t mes in d mond en d Han[d] / op d vloer omgeswickt” (“the old Philemon has a knife in his mouth and is bent over with his hand on the ground”)—was clearly written by Rembrandt. Until now, the drawing itself was also considered to be an original by Rembrandt. Yet numerous weaknesses in the rendering of the figures (loose, shaky lines on the shoulders, lack of clarity in the attachment of arms to shoulders, etc.), speak against Rembrandt’s authorship.

Here the drawing is exhibited alongside examples that have recently been attributed to the little-known artist Heyman Dullaert. Similarities include the somewhat wild penwork and the abrupt alternation of thin and broad lines, which are often spotty or blotchy. Rembrandt’s inscription could then be interpreted as a commentary for the pupil, since the iconography departs from textual and pictorial tradition with the unusual motif of Philemon falling to the ground. Not all connoisseurs, however, will accept this attribution to Dullaert.

### **Ruth and Boaz**

Ruth gleanes in Boaz’s field, picking up the ears of grain the reapers have left behind. Boaz assures her that she has nothing to fear and that he will protect her and receive her into his house. The two drawings, both of which were formerly accepted as originals by Rembrandt, are very similar in their composition, yet their execution differs so strongly that it is difficult to envision them coming from the hand of the same artist.

The smaller drawing shows sketchy yet nuanced lines that clearly define the individual motifs with their areas of light and shadow. Nothing detracts from the event itself; everything is focused on the moment of Boaz’s address and the humility of the woman. The open treatment of the area around the man’s legs is typical of Rembrandt. The other drawing, created at around the same time, has a more picturesque quality. Details of the figures’ garments are clearly developed, and the woman’s breasts—only suggested in the drawing by Rembrandt—are fully visible here. Overall, the image loses itself in the details, which tend to distract from the content of the scene.

The contours of the figures, the many fine hatch marks, the washes, the somewhat arbitrary, spot-like thickening of individual lines, and the figure types are all reminiscent of the drawing style of Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, though the attribution to him is not entirely secure.

### **Tobit and Anna**

The old, blind Tobit falsely accuses his wife Anna of stealing a young goat she had received as wages for her work.

The drawing is very similar to Rembrandt’s small panel of 1645 in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, though here too—as with the drawing of Susanna attributed to Karel van Savoy—the composition is reversed. The figures are arranged in almost the same way and their body positions and gestures are nearly identical, for example in the way Anna’s arm is propped on her hip. The headdresses in both works are similar as well.

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These parallels suggest a pupil's study after the painting rather than an original work by Rembrandt. In addition, the uniform, scarcely differentiated penwork and the numerous blotchy lines speak against an attribution to the master himself. The great Dutch drawing connoisseur Frits Lugt already harbored doubts about the authenticity of the drawing, which had usually been attributed to Rembrandt.

No known pupil has ever been identified as the author of the work. The anonymous artist was probably active in Rembrandt's workshop in the second half of the 1650s, since the style shows parallels with drawings by the master from this time.

### **Susanna**

Susanna, the virtuous wife of a rich man, is spied upon while bathing by two old judges, who blackmail her and attempt to force themselves upon her. Susanna remains firm; the slanderous accusation of the two old men is later discovered, and the men are condemned to death. The subject was extremely popular with artists, including Rembrandt and his followers.

Until recently, the pen drawing shown here was considered an original by Rembrandt. It was compared with a red chalk drawing by the master dating to 1635–36 and now in Berlin, a free copy after a painting of 1614 by Pieter Lastman in the Gemäldegalerie, also in Berlin. While the compositions are analogous, in the pen drawing the two old men press in more closely upon the woman and their threat appears more inescapable than in the red chalk drawing.

The gestural lines of the pen sketch resemble those of Rembrandt's drawings from ca. 1635, such as the *Bearing of the Cross* and the *Lamentation Beneath the Cross* (both exhibited nearby). On the whole, however, the lines here are less differentiated than in the works by Rembrandt; the drawing shows weaknesses especially in the upper body and the arms of the woman. The loose execution, the uniformity of the lines, and the fine hatching as well as the facial types are characteristic of Gerbrand van den Eeckhout. The drawing provides impressive evidence that Rembrandt encouraged his pupils, not to slavishly copy his own compositions, but to interpret them freely and individually.

### **Susanna and the elders**

Two old judges harass the virtuous Susanna while she is bathing. They attempt to force themselves on her by blackmailing her, but she refuses to acquiesce. Caught in their lies, the elders are later condemned to death. The subject "Susanna at Her Bath" was quite popular with Rembrandt and his followers.

The composition of the drawing is based on Rembrandt's Berlin painting of 1647, but is rendered in reverse. The two elders have moved closer to Susanna, and their physical approach seems more threatening than in the painting. The striking similarity between the drawing and the painting, also apparent in the clothing and faces of the figures, arouses suspicion: Rembrandt did not repeat himself so slavishly. The free copying of paintings was part of the training of young artists, and this drawing, too, was probably executed by a workshop assistant of Rembrandt. The great Dutch

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connoisseur of Rembrandt's work, Frits Lugt, already questioned the authenticity of the drawing, and here for the first time it is attributed to Karel van Savoy.

This assertion, however, takes us onto thin ice, for there is only one drawing securely attributed to this artist, and it is known only from a photograph. The limited oeuvre ascribed to Van Savoy is based solely on comparisons with his style, which is characterized by somewhat loose, agitated strokes, the alternation of broad, thick reed pen marks with fine hatching, and sometimes blotchy lines.

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