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Rembrandt Rediscovery in Berlin's Gemäldegalerie

For over 30 years, the painting *Landscape with Arched Bridge* was considered to be the work of Rembrandt's student Govert Flinck. According to the latest research, the work is by the master himself and now completes the important Rembrandt holdings of Berlin's Gemäldegalerie. The painting is currently on display from April 8, 2022 in the special exhibition *David Hockney – Landscapes in Dialogue. The "Four Seasons" of the Würth Collection in Berlin* in the Gemäldegalerie.

When the *Landscape with Arched Bridge* (Cat. No. 1932) entered the collection of the Gemäldegalerie in 1924, it was still considered to be a work by Rembrandt. For Wilhelm von Bode, the then Director General of the Royal Museums and an internationally renowned Rembrandt specialist, this was the fulfillment of a wish he had harboured for several decades. With this landscape, he was able to close an important gap in the collection and complete Berlin's outstanding Rembrandt holdings:

The painting comes from the important collection of the Grand Duke Friedrich August von Oldenburg (1852-1931), whose painting collection was dismantled in 1918 after his forced abdication. In September 1919, the former Grand Duke had around 115 of his best works transported to the Netherlands largely unnoticed in a covert operation, where they ended up in the Amsterdam auction house Frederik Muller & Cie. From there, a selection of 40 top works was sent to the U.S. for sale, including *Landscape with Arched Bridge*, attributed to Rembrandt. According to Bode, however, the work did not sell because of the high price and the small size of 28.5 x 39.5 cm. In 1923, it passed into the possession of the art dealers Paul Cassirer and Julius Böhler. A year later, the landscape was finally acquired in exchange for three works from the collection for the Kaiser Friedrich Museum – an extremely auspicious transaction for the Gemäldegalerie, as it no longer had sufficient funds to make such a high-profile purchase.

Landscape with Arch Bridge was considered an authentic work by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn until the 1980s. In 1989, however, it was written off after an investigation by the Rembrandt Research Project and re-assigned to Rembrandt's pupil Govert Flinck. The decisive factor for the reattribution was above all the comparison with the painting *Landscape with Stone Bridge* in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum. The Rembrandt Research Project pointed out the astonishingly far-reaching stylistic, technical, and thematic similarities of the Berlin picture with other landscape representations by Rembrandt, especially the landscape in Amsterdam. However, it was precisely this observation that subsequently served as

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the decisive argument for attributing the Berlin painting to a successor or imitator of the master.

Recent examinations of the Berlin painting and the evaluation of technical photographs, which were not available in 1989, have now confirmed that the work was painted by the artist himself. It is now possible to identify changes and corrections in the painting that were made during the painting process. In this way, the development of the composition with its masterful lighting and the stimulating chiaroscuro contrasts becomes comprehensible. In contrast, the Amsterdam painting is hardly characterized by modifications and interventions of the artist. Accordingly, the work of the Gemäldegalerie should not be regarded as a successor, but rather as a precursor of the Amsterdam landscape. This conclusion is supported by the dendrochronological findings, which point to a later date of origin for the Amsterdam painting. The major revisions Rembrandt made to the Berlin work also explain the striking differences in the painting style of the two pictures. In the Berlin version it is comparatively dense and compact, in the following Amsterdam version translucent and precise.

Although Rembrandt painted only a few landscapes, they were stylistically and compositionally groundbreaking for later generations of artists. Above all, through his masterfully staged and dramatically sharpened use of light, he created atmospheres that were extraordinarily atmospheric for landscape painting in the 17th century. Currently, only seven landscape paintings are known from Rembrandt's painterly oeuvre. With the reattribution of the Berlin painting, this number now increases to eight works.

The Gemäldegalerie owns one of the world's most important and extensive collections of works by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn. With *Landscape with Arched Bridge*, this important work complex now comprises 20 works. As with the original acquisition of the painting around 100 years ago, an important gap can thus be closed and the holdings are successfully rounded out.

The painting is currently on display from 8 April 2022 in the special exhibition **David Hockney – Landscapes in Dialogue. The "Four Seasons" of the Würth Collection in Berlin**. In it, Hockney's monumental four seasons series *Three Trees near Thixendale* from the Würth Collection enters into an striking conversation with landscape images from the collections of the Gemäldegalerie, the Nationalgalerie and the Kupferstichkabinett. Thus, Hockney's engagement with the art of previous centuries and parallels to great role models such as Rembrandt, John Constable and Vincent van Gogh and become apparent.

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