A CORPUS OF
REMBRANDT
PAINTINGS

VI

REMBRANDT'S PAINTINGS REVISITED

A COMPLETE SURVEY

Stichting Foundation
Rembrandt Research Project

A CORPUS OF

REMBRANDT PAINTINGS

VI

Stichting Foundation
Rembrandt Research Project

ERNST VAN DE WETERING

REMBRANDT'S PAINTINGS REVISITED

A COMPLETE SURVEY

with collaboration of
CARIN VAN NES

translated and edited by
MURRAY PEARSON

Springer

Frontispiece:

Rembrandt, *Self-portrait with two circles*, *c.* 1665/1669,
canvas 114.3 x 94 cm.
London, Kenwood House

Disclaimer

This is a publication of the Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project. The opinions expressed in this volume (VI), and the previously published volumes I-V in the Series *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, should be understood as "opinions" that are meant for academic use only. The opinions represent the Foundation's best judgment based on available information at the time of publication. The opinions are not statements or representations of fact nor a warranty of authenticity of a work of art and are subject to change as scholarship and academic information about an individual work of art changes. Opinions have been changed in the past according to new insights and scholarship. It should be understood that forming an opinion as to the authenticity of a work of art purporting to be by Rembrandt is often very difficult and will in most cases depend upon subjective criteria which are not capable of proof or absolute certainty. Therefore, the conclusions expressed in the volumes are only opinions and not a warranty of any kind. Third parties cannot derive any rights from these opinions. Neither the Foundation, nor the members of its board, nor the authors, nor the cooperators, nor any other parties engaged in the Rembrandt Research Project accept any liability for any damages (*schade*), including any indirect or consequential damages or losses and costs. Anyone is free to disagree with the opinions expressed in these volumes.

We are grateful for the help of René J.Q. Klomp (Stibbe Lawyers, Amsterdam) and Ralph E. Lerner (Sidley Austin Brown & Wood Lawyers, New York).

Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project
A CORPUS OF REMBRANDT PAINTINGS VI

Originally published by Stichting Foundation Rembrandt Research Project in 2015

ISBN 978-94-017-9173-1 ISBN 978-94-017-9240-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-9240-0

A C.I.P. Catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Control Number: 82018790

This work has been made possible by the financial support of a number of benefactors who wish to remain anonymous.

Published by Springer,
P.O. Box 17, 3300 AA Dordrecht, the Netherlands
www.springeronline.com

Typesetting – Pre Press Media Groep bv,
Zeist, the Netherlands

Contents

Foreword

This is the last of a series of books titled *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* published in the context of the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP). In five earlier Volumes, which appeared in 1982, 1986, 1989, 2005 and 2010, large sections of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre were catalogued. The present volume gives a complete and where necessary revised overview of Rembrandt's entire painted oeuvre. The Rembrandt Research Project (RRP) was an endeavour first set up by a group of Dutch art historians in 1968 with the aim of systematically investigating the nature and extent of Rembrandt's known paintings. As the last member of that group still active, I am now bringing the project to its close with a volume, which contains all the paintings of which, I am convinced, Rembrandt was the author or co-author.

The plates of course constitute the most important part of the book. Thanks to modern printing techniques, they show the treasure-house of the images that determined the greater part of Rembrandt's life as an artist. In that section (pp. 70-477) each painting of Rembrandt's oeuvre is reproduced in the best available quality. Each image is accompanied by an elucidatory Note (see the Notes to the Plates pp. 480-687). These Notes vary markedly in their level of detail and extent of argumentation, mainly depending on the complexity of the problems of attribution in certain cases. The following categories of paintings required special attention in this regard:

1. Paintings not previously dealt with in the earlier Volumes of the Corpus

As owners and users of *A Corpus* will know, the first three consecutive Volumes were organized in a strictly chronological order (from 1624-1642). For various methodological reasons, this chronological approach was exchanged for a thematic approach after Vol. III. In Vol. IV, which appeared in 2005, all Rembrandt's self-portraits and studies in the mirror were dealt with by placing them in a wider context (including drawings and etchings with Rembrandt's effigy). The same approach was used in Vol. V for the so-called small-scale history paintings.

This change in the order of working and related methodology was necessary to gain a deeper insight into essential aspects of Rembrandt as an artist, which in turn enabled us to get to grips with the works from the puzzling decade of the 1640s and from Rembrandt's complex late period up to 1669. The approximately 100 possibly autograph paintings that were not considered in Volumes I-V were almost all painted after 1642. These comprise portraits, group portraits and '*tronies*'; large-scale history pieces; life-size biblical, mythological and allegorical figures; and landscapes. The most problematic paintings from the period after 1642 were investigated afresh in the course of my extensive travels between 2005 and 2012. On the basis of new insights, I became convinced that Gerson and Tümpel, in their surveys of Rembrandt paintings, and various museum curators, in the catalogues of their collections, had unjustifiably disattributed from Rembrandt 26 paintings from the period after 1642. These can be found in the section 191–324 of this book. The relevant Notes to the Plates are marked with an ∗.[1]

2. Reassessments of works that had been disattributed by the RRP in Vols. I-III

A second reason for presenting a revised image of Rembrandt's complete painted oeuvre in the present Volume is that among the paintings strongly doubted or disattributed from Rembrandt in Volumes I-III of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* there are 44 works which, as a result of the insights I have arrived at in the meantime, and thanks to new information that has become available, need to be re-introduced into Rembrandt's oeuvre. The reattributed paintings of this category can be found in the section 1–190 in this book and are also marked with an ∗.[2] A number of these reattributions have already been announced in the *Corrigenda* sections of the Volumes IV and V, in Chapter II of *Corpus* V and elsewhere. However, in view of the relative inaccessibility of the *Corpus* volumes up till now, they are again included with the re-attributed paintings in this book.

3. Re- or newly discovered paintings

Another important reason for rounding off the *Corpus* in this Volume with a survey of Rembrandt's

1 List of reattributed paintings from after 1642 that were rejected by various authors: 189, 191a, 193, 195, 203, 206, 212, 216, 221, 230, 235a, 238, 251, 259, 263, 266, 271, 275, 276, 277, 280, 285, 288, 293, 309, 310.

2 List of reattributed paintings from before 1643. These paintings were either rejected or strongly doubted by the majority of members of the Rembrandt Research Project (the C and B numbers in *Corpus* I-III) and by other authors who in certain cases followed their opinions or v.v.: 1, 2, 3, 13, 17, 19, 32, 33, 35, 36, 42, 44, 45, 46, 61, 63a/b, 79, 81, 82, 85, 86, 87a/b, 109, 115, 118b, 126, 130A, 134, 141, 142, 146, 151, 152, 154, 156, 157, 170, 171, 172, 173, 180, 188.

entire painted oeuvre is that, since the discovery of the *Baptism of the eunuch* in 1973 [9], eight paintings that are now widely accepted as authentic have been discovered, or have re-surfaced, having been lost sight of for decades. These paintings need to be incorporated in the chronology of Rembrandt's oeuvre as well. They are marked with an ☆ in the Notes to the Plates.[3]

It may come as a surprise to the reader – if it does not sound altogether shocking – that 70 paintings which had been removed from Rembrandt's oeuvre or were strongly doubted should now be reinstated. Not that the negative judgments of the original Rembrandt Research Project – or for that matter those of other Rembrandt scholars of the previous generation such as Gerson and Tümpel – have all been universally accepted without reservations. However, the conspicuous disparity between the number of paintings accepted as Rembrandts in this book and the markedly smaller number accepted by specialists of that generation – and also by more recent scholars influenced by them – does call for some explanation.

It will be evident from Chapter I in this book, which is devoted to the history of attribution and rejection of paintings in the style of Rembrandt (pp. 1-53), and in the considerable number of Notes to the Plates marked with an asterisk, that the older generation of Rembrandt researchers – including the founding members of the Rembrandt Research Project – worked according to traditional connoisseurship, i.e. their judgments were largely based on intuitively applied criteria concerning style, brushwork and quality. They did, however, apply such criteria within more stringent – in fact overly strict – norms. In retrospect, it is surprising to note how shallow the underpinning of these frequently negative opinions was. In the present book, the arguments put forward by the various scholars for these disattributions are evaluated in a rigorous, often unsparing manner, and confronted with alternative facts and new insights.

I gradually came to realize that a subtler approach with a greater range of arguments of different kinds was called for. Arguments based on technical evidence as well as those of a more art-historical or art-theoretical nature, could lead to a greater degree of certainty than previously thought. Although not all of these arguments were *decisive* when taken alone, when considered together they frequently *converge* towards a more definitive conclusion (see on p. 65: the 'Bayesian approach'). This approach also embraces insights into Rembrandt's painting technique, the operation of his workshop and teaching practice, as well as the study of the possible functions of his paintings. Moreover, it was found rewarding to pay more attention to the fact that paintings age in a variety of different ways (see, for instance, the Notes to [206] and Plates [275a/b].

The Plates and Notes to the Plates

The paintings are presented in the Plates section in chronological order (pp. 70-477). For various – usually obvious – reasons it was decided sometimes to group them in small clusters (even when separated by a year or even two), in order to demonstrate more clearly the connection between certain works or certain trends and changes in the way Rembrandt seems to have been thinking and acting.

In the main, the Notes on re-attributed paintings are for obvious reasons quite extensive: after all, the purpose of these Notes is to justify the re-attribution. But I also wanted and indeed had to comment on the other paintings. The reader will find that these Notes vary quite radically in their structure, length and content. Their terse and often somewhat essayistic tone is due to the fact that as a rule no defence is offered for the inclusion of the painting concerned in Rembrandt's oeuvre, such as was provided in Volumes I-III for each so-called A-number. With works that are documented as autograph it was of course unnecessary, but along with those works there are many others which, although not explicitly documented as such, are so clearly authentic that their attribution may be accepted as self-evident. In the case of a great many paintings, therefore, I saw no reason to provide explicit arguments for their attribution, all the more so since that has already been done convincingly in many cases in the five volumes of *A Corpus*.

Nevertheless, in all cases I have included information in the Notes. Anyone who takes the trouble to read the Notes to the Plates will find that they provide a kaleidoscopic image with a range of very different kinds of data, views, hypotheses and questions relating to Rembrandt's theory of art, painting technique and workshop practice. Sometimes it may be biographical matters, or questions relating to his family and friends; but iconographic, pictorial and aesthetic points of view are also raised. My occasional expressions of surprise or amazement will perhaps invite the reader to look at a painting with different eyes, in which case the analyses of pictorial characteristics of the works concerned that are frequently offered may be of assistance.

In short, there has been no effort to provide a sequence of 324 standard catalogue texts, except in the case of portraits, where as a rule brief attention is given to the identity and biography of the sitter, often on the basis of data taken from *Corpus* Volumes I-III.

A more detailed account of the order of presenting the Plates and associated Notes can be found on pp. 63-65.

3 List of paintings discovered or that have re-surfaced since 1976: 9, 18, 21, 22, 30, 69, 122, 182.

Pendants

Leafing through the Plates in this book the reader will notice that, in the case of those portraits painted by Rembrandt for which a pendant has survived, the relevant pairs are reproduced next to the other under a single number (a and b). This arrangement is maintained, even if one of the two paintings is painted, either wholly or in part, by a hand other than Rembrandt's. This solution was chosen in accordance with 17th century workshop practice. In the accompanying captions and Notes to the Plates the extent of Rembrandt's autograph contribution in the relevant pair is briefly indicated. In making these assessments connoisseurship inevitably played a role.

The chapters

It is clear from the above discussion that the present revision of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre is not the first. Do my efforts come any nearer to the truth? Or can one speak of a wave movement, whereby reduction and expansion of the oeuvre succeed one another like some natural process?

This history is outlined in Chapter I under the title *What is a Rembrandt? A personal account.* The narrative begins around 1870, the period in which art historians began to engage systematically with the problem of the nature and extent of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre. I shall draw frequently from Catherine Scallen's book *Rembrandt, Reputation, and the Practice of Connoisseurship* (2004) devoted to the first sixty years of this history. Attention will then shift to the following episode, when Horst Gerson became increasingly influential. The narrative spotlight will then turn to the 'pre-history' and history of the Rembrandt Research Project, which for many still remains opaque. I have given this part of the narrative a relatively personal touch because only in this way could it be made clear why the canon of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre presented here differs so markedly from those of my predecessors and older colleagues.

The second (small) chapter of this book 'What is a non-Rembrandt?' is devoted to an attempt to discern some structure in the large body of paintings from Rembrandt studio and beyond.

The scholarly apparatus

As indicated above, this book should not be considered as a conventional *catalogue raisonné* with a complete art-historical apparatus. The rationale behind this free approach is that volumes I-V of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings* will be readily accessible online with comprehensive references and indices by the time that this volume appears (in Springerlink and The Rembrandt Database http://www.rembrandt-database.org). Moreover, many museums with Rembrandts in their collections have devoted extensive catalogue entries to the paintings concerned. The form adopted for this book is rather intended to convey to the reader the essence of my approach and the insights to which this has led during the latter phase of the Rembrandt Research Project.

I myself, of course, do not consider this book to be 'the definitive' catalogue of Rembrandt paintings. The diaspora that Rembrandt's oeuvre has undergone, and in the case of many paintings their relative inaccessibility for systematic investigation, plus the fact that the mystery of Rembrandt's creative mind will never be fully fathomed, mean that this work will never end, even though I believe that demonstrable advances over the past 20 years have been achieved.

To this it should be added that those who try to demarcate the limits of Rembrandt's autograph oeuvre should not be seen as *douaniers* – a kind of 'Rembrandt police' whose judgment is decisive in any way. Unfortunately, the money and prestige of owners play a role in the Rembrandt world; whereas actually everyone should be free to set his or her own label under a particular painting on the basis of their own admiration, love or knowledge of the painting concerned – or indeed to reject such a label. The only really significant reason for compiling critical oeuvre catalogues is that art-lovers and art-historians simply cannot do without surveys of the oeuvres of artists they admire or study that are as thoroughly grounded as possible.

Acknowledgements

The nature of this book, for which many paintings have been investigated *in situ* over the past years, has involved innumerable others, museum directors and collectors, curators and restorers, art dealers, researchers of various kinds, documentalists and many others, who have extended to us their courtesy, hospitality, assistance and expertise. There have been so many that it is impossible to thank them all individually, and we only hope that all those who recall our work contacts will recognize themselves as the recipients of our deep gratitude.

Many people were also involved in the financial support of our work. In lending their assistance they had in mind above all, and without exception, the scholarly significance of this book. Without their support it would not have been possible to undertake the necessary work trips, the research associated with them, or the translation and editing of the book. We want those who count themselves among this group of benefactors also to know that they have our most sincere and deep thanks for their generosity, in the knowledge that they have rendered an important service to art historical scholarship, the museum world and the wider public of art lovers and museum visitors.

The following persons were more immediately involved in the creation of this book:

Alexander Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, the RRP's publisher since 1981, who spurred me on to round off the *Corpus* project with this book;

Rudie Ekkart, director of the RKD and Mariët Westermann, Vice President of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, who played key roles in the negotiations in advance to first make the *Corpus* as a whole freely available digitally to a wide public;

Yoka Janssen, who, as our publisher (on behalf of Springer), from 2011 on guided the development of the book in a most subtle and inspiring manner;

Murray Pearson, the translator for the RRP since 1996, who translated the book through the several stages of its creation with love, editorial acumen and in friendship;

Jeanne Hundersmarck of Pre Press Media Group, who ensured during the book's development that the layout should gradually assume its proper form through constant refinement;

Margaret Oomen, who has been an indispensable support in the management of financial matters;

Michiel Franken, who most willingly gave us access to the RRP archive in the RKD;

Bob van den Boogerd, whose extensive experience in the compilation of catalogues for Museum het Rembrandthuis, came to our help in brilliant and timely fashion during the long final sprint toward completion.

Jaap van de Veen, who was always ready to share with us archival material related to Rembrandt.

We thank the friends and colleagues who were willing to serve as sounding board and/or advisor for the somewhat risky first chapter of the present book.

My deepest feelings of gratitude go to my partner in life, Carin van Nes, not an art historian herself but at home in the world of conservation and a gifted painter. In 1976 she helped me write my first article on Rembrandt's way of working and since then has been my muse in my work on Rembrandt.

We also organized and supervised together the content of the Amsterdam exhibition '*Rembrandt. All his paintings*' (December 2012-April 2014), with life-size reproductions of all the works included in this book.

During the work on this Volume Carin overcame countless obstacles to mastering the digital management of the project. Day in and day out she stood by and advised me, since at my age I am unfortunately incapable of entering the digital age. We have hugely enjoyed this exciting life with the works of Rembrandt, the development of ideas about it, and making new discoveries; and equally the joint work during lecture tours. Without her, this onerous but inspiring project could never have led to the publication of this book within four years.

We often fled the workroom and the house in order to be able to concentrate fully on the work in seclusion. For this purpose, Ad and Marie Jeanne Nuyten, Reinette and Hans Jansens van Gellicum and Sytske and Gilles Stratenus were always ready, with friendship and hospitality, to provide this possibility.

Chapter I

What is a Rembrandt?

A personal account

In 1916 the wealthy, American railway magnate and art collector Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919) bought a Rembrandt titled *Old woman with a book* (**fig.1**). In 1898 the painting had been shown in Amsterdam at the first ever major Rembrandt exhibition. It was hardly surprising therefore that Frick (fig. 2) wanted it for his collection – the same collection which is now a public museum and considered to be one of the treasures of New York City. Today, however, the *Old woman with a book* is nowhere to be found in the display rooms of the Frick Collection; it hangs unseen by visitors in one of the offices of the museum staff.[1]

Abraham Bredius (1855-1946), the famous Rembrandt connoisseur[2] (fig. 3), had initially thought the painting to be by Rembrandt – possibly in collaboration with a pupil. But when Bredius learned of the purchase, he wrote to Frick:

'I am sorry to read that you have bought Mr. Porgès "Rembrandt" Old woman with a book. This is certainly not a Rembrandt, but by Carel van der Pluym one of his minor pupils.... I do not understand why Mr. de Wild did not warn you against buying the picture.'

This led to an exchange of letters between Bredius, Frick and his adviser in America, Carel de Wild (1870–1922) (fig. 4), a Dutch emigré painter and painting restorer who had encouraged Frick to buy the painting. Of this correspondence, only Bredius' letters to Frick have been preserved together with a

Fig. 2. Henry Clay Frick (1898).

Fig. 1. Carel van der Pluym, *Old Woman with a Book*, mid 1650s, canvas 98 x 78 cm. New York, The Frick Collection.

1 For a detailed analysis of the painting and its history, see the entry by Margaret Iacono in *Rembrandt and his School. Masterworks from the Frick and Lugt collections,* exhib. cat. New York (Frick Collection), 2011, pp. 64-72.

2 M. de Boer, J. Leistra en B. Broos, *Bredius, Rembrandt en het Mauritshuis !!!*, The Hague (Mauritshuis) 1992, p. 17.

Fig. 3. Abraham Bredius during archival research (*c.* 1915).

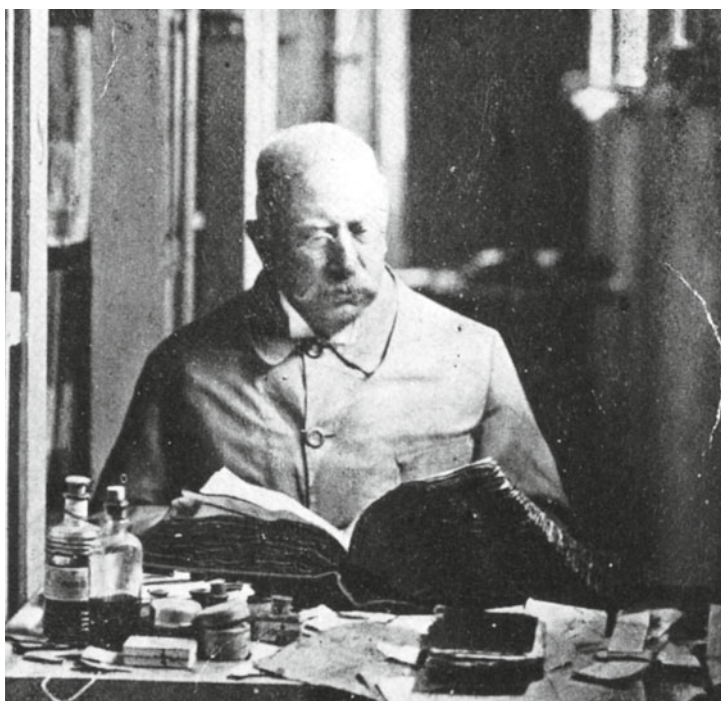

Fig. 4. Carel de Wild as a painter (*c.* 1910).

long and furious letter from De Wild to Bredius.

What mainly incensed De Wild was the fact that so influential an expert as Bredius could alter his opinion – and in such a short time at that. In his letter, preserved in the RKD in the Hague, De Wild asked Bredius:

> *'What would you think of an "expert" on precious stones, through whom you had bought a pearl, who later told you he had made you buy a pebble? Would you not warn everybody against such a man, whose practices verge on criminal ignorance? Or would you offer your excuses and say that the alleged expert was "constantly learning"?'*

For this was indeed what Bredius had written to Frick to explain his change of opinion:

> *'We learn constantly by studying and comparing'….. 'Formerly we all believed the picture to be by Rembrandt, but our knowledge of the master has developed.'*

To which De Wild furiously replied:

> *'I am not the least surprised that collectors become thoroughly disgusted with this "constantly learning", which in plain language means constantly changing your mind.'*

How was it possible that a painting which, to our eyes, appears so remote from a genuine Rembrandt, could nevertheless for a long time have been considered an authentic work by the master? This question introduces the issue to which the present chapter is devoted: the learning process which investigators of Rembrandt's paintings necessarily undergo in their attempts to determine the extent and the limits of his painted oeuvre. This is thus not merely a question of Bredius' developing insight, it concerns a learning process to which all scholars before and since Bredius – and to this day – have had to submit. But because most of them have left no reflection of this learning process in their writings, one can only follow their thinking indirectly from incidental shards of argumentation, usually extremely cursory, buried in their mostly brief notes.

A new beginning

The idea of the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP) was to establish an altogether new beginning. The project was set up in 1968 by a group of Dutch art historians with the object of developing a rational methodology capable of grounding and justifying their judgments of the authenticity of paintings in the style of Rembrandt. The result was to be an oeuvre catalogue of Rembrandt's paintings which would be unique in its thoroughness.

I became involved in this project through a series of accidents, an active involvement that has lasted more than 45 years.

Apart from a brief history of the problems of attribution associated with Rembrandt's paintings, the present chapter is a record of the author's learning experiences over the years of involvement with the Rembrandt Research Project. The Notes to the Plates in this book in particular where re-attributions are concerned, contain numerous examples of what I mean by these 'learning experiences'.[3] Inevitably, my continuing reflections on the methodological implications of this project, and of related work in this area by both my predecessors and contemporaries, have given this account a conspicuously personal tone; but I also believe that this approach allows me to convey more clearly why, over the course of its existence, the RRP has undergone crucial changes of direction.

I shall begin with a very brief account of my own pre-history, as this may explain why my conceptual outlook and my position within the Rembrandt Research Project gradually but fundamentally diverged from that of my older colleagues – and from what was then usual in the art historical world.

A freshman

I began my studies in Art History in 1963 at the relatively late age of 25 at the University of Amsterdam. Between 1956 and 1961, I had studied at the Art Academy in The Hague, where I was trained as an art teacher in the traditional manner. Between 1961 and 1963 I taught art to high school students, but during those years – a period of rapidly successive –isms in the art world – I was intensely preoccupied with finding my own way as an artist. As a young provincial I was adrift in this confusing world, like so many others

3 See the Notes to the Plates with an asterisk * and an open star ☆.

Fig. 5. Josua Bruyn during the presentation of *Corpus* Vol. III (1989).

Fig. 6. Bob Haak during a research trip in Sweden (1969).

seeking an outlet for my artistic drive and a legitimation of my artist's dream.

I therefore decided to study Art History in Amsterdam, thinking to find there the historical and intellectual stimuli that could liberate me from my impasse. I soon learned, however, that art historians in general paid relatively little attention to the creative process between artist and artwork, which was what I was actually trying to fathom. Greatly disappointed, I had already left the University when something happened that made me return. To my surprise, Professor Bruyn, one of my teachers (fig. 5), invited me to work for a year as a student-assistant with the Rembrandt Research Project which was about to start. I was looking for part-time paid employment and so welcomed the opportunity. My only connection with Rembrandt was my great admiration for his drawings and the fact that I had written two papers on one of his pupils, Aert de Gelder.

My task would be to prepare the working files of the first research trips to be undertaken by the members of the RRP team. The possibility that I would become more deeply involved in this project only arose when Professor J.G. van Gelder (1903-1980) (see figs. 19 and 21), the oldest member of the team, fell ill shortly before the first research trip. This was a three-week period of work in London that Van Gelder was scheduled to undertake with Bob Haak (1926-2005), the founder of the project (fig. 6). At the same time Josua Bruyn, co-founder and chairman of the RRP, was to be present in London with a group of his students, and so it had been arranged that from time to time Bruyn would join Van Gelder and Haak during their work.

But now the plans had to be changed: I was asked to join Haak and Bruyn in London because they thought I could be of some use – for example if Haak, now having to work mostly alone, needed to dictate his observations during investigations. This experience would change my life completely in many respects.

One evening in May 1968 Haak and I took the night boat to Harwich and thence the early morning train to London, arriving at the service entrance of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. From that morning on we spent day after day in the conservation and research laboratories of the National Gallery, then the Walhalla for anyone involved in technical research on paintings. Haak wanted to study four paintings a day, which became the basic schedule of future research trips. In those days two or three hours of intense study per painting seemed like an eternity.

Matters had been very different in 1895 when Bredius discovered the *Polish Rider* (Plate 236) in a remote Galician castle. Shortly after his discovery he wrote:

> *'A single glance at the whole, an inspection of the technique that required no more than seconds, were all that was necessary to convince me at once that here, in this remote region (....) hung one of Rembrandt's greatest masterpieces!'*[4]

That was traditional connoisseurship *per second*. Whether the RRP could really aspire to more certainty in their judgment in two or three hours per painting will become evident below.

The authority of the connoisseurs

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the history of Rembrandt attributions in Bredius' time (and later) was the credence given to the authority of the specialist in the art world, the connoisseur. As we just saw even the specialist himself seemed to have subscribed to this faith, although in his heart of hearts he must have known that the foundations of his knowledge were usually rather shaky. And, as we have seen, Bredius had openly admitted as much to Frick with an unusual frankness.

In her book *Rembrandt, Reputation, and the Practice of Connoisseurship*, Catherine B. Scallen presented an analysis of the history of Rembrandt connoisseurship between 1870 and 1930.[5] This period saw an explosive

4 Broos in De Boer et al. op., cit.[2], p. 17.

Fig. 7. From left to right: The restorer Alois Hauser (1857-1919); Max J. Friedländer and Wilhelm von Bode (Berlin *c.* 1900).

growth of Rembrandt's 'oeuvre' from some 300 catalogued by the art dealer John Smith in 1829-1842 to the more than 700 paintings attributed by the Rembrandt specialist Wilhelm Valentiner (1880-1958) (see fig. 8). These new attributions were (and would continue to be) mostly based on connoisseurship. By contrast, there are only relatively few paintings that are conclusively documented as works by Rembrandt (see p. 39).

Connoisseurship has long been an indispensable means of bringing order to the chaos of works of art which, over the course of centuries, had been dispersed throughout the world.[6] The essence of traditional connoisseurship is the ability, based on experience, to recognise the hand of a painter. Max J. Friedländer (1867-1958), the renowned connoisseur of early Netherlandish paintings (fig. 7), wrote in his book *On art and connoisseurship*:

> *'The way in which an intuitive verdict is reached can, from the nature of things, only be described inadequately. A picture is shown to me. I glance at it, and declare it to be a work by Memling, without having proceeded to an examination of its full complexity of artistic form. This inner certainty can only be gained from the impression of the whole; never from an analysis of the visible forms.'*[7]

Yet it has to be said that modern research on panels, underdrawings and painting technique has shown that about half of Friedländer's conclusions were wrong.

And the same - *mutatis mutandis* –applies to Bredius (see the captions in Chapter II), who once had said in an interview:

> *'When I stand before a painting, I instantly see, weigh and evaluate by means of an unconscious comparison. I know: it is him or it is not him.*[8]

There appears to be a striking similarity between Friedländer's and Bredius' immediate attribution and the human ability to recognise another person. This latter ability is truly remarkable. Brain scientists have established that a relatively large part of our cerebral capacity is devoted to the recognition of other people. Nobody who has ever recognised another person from a distance, as Friedländer recognised a Memling, has ever felt the need to continue scrutinising the features, the posture etc. of the recognised person in order to ascertain what exactly led to that moment of recognition.

There is, however, an essential difference between recognising a person and recognising the maker of a painting. Someone who recognises another person has already seen that person and had dealings with him or her in the past. A connoisseur believes he can recognise in a particular painting the characteristics of the presumed author's work that he has previously seen in *other* paintings by that painter. The mental impulse seems just as strong as in the recognition of a person. Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann used the term 'Gestalt' to refer to that totality of characteristics, only semi-consciously observed in a work of art, that can lead one to an attribution of that work.

Connoisseurship is thus not an exclusively art-historical 'method'. It is rather akin to an attribute that can be seen as part of our natural cognitive repertory. In the animal kingdom in general, the need to be able to recognise an individual immediately is of vital importance – corresponding to what Friedländer referred to as an 'intuitive' process. During our first research trip, after spending hours studying a painting with growing confusion, to my surprise Bob Haak would sometimes say:

> *'I'll have a look in my Bredius*[9] *to see what I noted on my first confrontation with this painting'*,

thus implying that *that* had perhaps been the moment of truth.

In other words, with paintings, connoisseurship is based on a belief in the recognisability of the handling of the visible paint surface by a specific artist. However, connoisseurs such as Max Friedländer, mentioned above and Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), the famous connoisseur of early Italian paintings, pointed out the fallibility of connoisseurship, particularly with major artists.

5 Catherine Scallen, *Rembrandt, Reputation and the Practice of Connoisseurship*, Amsterdam 2004.

6 The following is a passage from my article 'Connoisseurship and Rembrandt's paintings: new directions in the Rembrandt Research Project, part II', *The Burlington Magazine*, 150 (2008), pp. 83-90.

7 M.J. Friedländer, *On art and connoisseurship*; the first German edition was published in Zürich in 1939; the edition used here is a translation by T. Borenius, Oxford 1946 (4th ed.), p. 173.

8 Op. cit.[2], p. 16.

9 A. Bredius, *Rembrandt: Schilderijen*, Utrecht 1935.

In the course of this chapter and in the Notes to the Plates in this book, I shall return repeatedly to the problem of the fallibility of connoisseurship – specifically with Rembrandt as the major artist concerned.

Rembrandt connoisseurship and its history.

For potential buyers of a work by Rembrandt, it is absolutely essential to be certain before purchasing so costly a painting. In his letter to Bredius cited above, De Wild had stated the collector's demands in this respect in no uncertain terms. In this situation, buyer and dealer could only appeal to the authority of connoisseurs. Meanwhile, in the face of the increasing demand for paintings by Rembrandt, particularly in the United States, the art trade made feverish attempts to raise supply to match this demand – with often questionable consequences for the authentication of these works, as was demonstrated by the case of Frick's *Old woman with a book* (see fig. 1).

The preeminent authority in the field of Rembrandt paintings toward the end of the 19th century was the previously mentioned William Bode (later Von Bode) (fig. 7), the influential director of the Berlin museums. He was originally trained as a lawyer, but as a young man he had developed a great interest in art and particularly in the paintings of Rembrandt. He travelled restlessly throughout Europe to see with his own eyes as many works as possible in museums, private collections and held by art dealers and in salerooms.

In 1878, on one of his travels, Bode met Abraham Bredius, ten years his junior, and encouraged the well-to-do young man to devote his life to the study of 17th century Dutch art. Bredius was to become a protégé and pupil, and later a friend of Bode. Yet another Dutchman would be patronized by Bode, the art historian Cornelis Hofstede de Groot (1863-1930) (fig. 8). Like Bode, and entirely in his spirit, both Bredius and Hofstede de Groot would devote their immense energy to the study of 17th century Dutch art, and especially to the study of Rembrandt.

A striking aspect of the collaboration between these three men, who were joined in 1905 by the young German art historian, Wilhelm Valentiner (see fig. 8), was the fact that while they each made their mark in the art historical world as independent figures, they showed great solidarity in their support for each other's authority over a long period of time. They thus formed an unassailable bloc which could concertedly ward off any outside criticism – and there was occasional criticism – by referring to each other's consentient judgements on paintings, whether or not by Rembrandt, lending their opinions the appearance of having been 'proven'. The interaction between the art trade and the activities of connoisseurs, so indispensable in this trade, became ever more difficult to disentangle, all the more so since these four connoisseurs

Fig. 8. Cornelis Hofstede de Groot with his assistants in front of his house, no. 84 on the Lange Voorhout in The Hague. Collection Hofstede de Groot, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague. The photograph was taken in 1929 after the completion of Hofstede de Groot's *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII Jahrhunderts*, Esslingen en Parijs 1907-1928, whose ten volumes are seen stacked on the table. Standing, from left to right: Hans Kaufmann, Wilhelm Valentiner, Karl Lilienfeld, Wolfgang Stechow, Kurt Erasmus, Kurt Bauch, Siegfried Wichmann, Otto Hirschmann, Eduard Plietzsch. Sitting: Hofstede de Groot en Elisabeth Neurdenburg. (Information quoted from *Rembrandt in perspectief*, Zwolle 2014).

were themselves also collecting works by Rembrandt, either for the museums they worked for or for their own personal collections. One cannot avoid the impression that a kind of cartel, an unfortunate concentration of power seemed to have arisen. In a certain sense this was indeed the case, and yet at the same time ethical and – in so far as they existed – scholarly standards were nevertheless maintained. However vague their arguments for or against an attribution to Rembrandt might be, in the beginning these four experts believed in their own and each other's connoisseurial infallibility.

Early connoisseur's handicaps

It is all too easy today to overlook the difficulties that confronted any attempt to reconstruct Rembrandt's painted oeuvre in the 19th century. First of all, Dutch art of the 17th century had been scattered in an extraordinarily wide diaspora. A large part of Rembrandt's oeuvre had ended up in remote country houses and other places all over Europe where they were practically untraceable. Apart from some English country houses, the inventorizing of the vast number of other private collections, great and small, had scarcely begun.[10] Innumerable paintings that served

10 Gustav Waagen, *Kunstwerke und Künstler in England und Paris*, Berlin 1837-39.

as wall decoration were only gradually being recognized as works of art of potential historical significance and only then did they appear on the art market.

The difficulties of studying Rembrandt's oeuvre in this dispersion of his works were immense. For example, before 1870 photography, which has since routinely been used as a means of collecting images of paintings, had not developed to the stage where it could be used on a large scale to assist in comparative research on paintings.

Another handicap was that relatively little was known about Rembrandt himself: the first biographies to be taken serious were those by Kolloff (1854), Vosmaer (1877), Michel (1889). 'Knowledge' about Rembrandt was to a large extent determined by personal projections and by *a priori* assumptions, which only gradually shifted over time. An early example of such stubborn assumptions is a remark made by Heinrich Füssli (1741-1825), the Swiss painter (known in English as Henry Fuseli) who later succeeded Joshua Reynolds as the president of the British Royal Academy of Art. In 1801 Füssli wrote of Rembrandt:

> *'Shakespeare alone excepted, no one combined with so much transcendent excellence so many, in all other men unpardonable faults – and reconciled us to them.*'[11]

This assumption of Rembrandt's capricious genius has long served as an explanation for the enormous differences of quality observed in his presumed oeuvre. Another persistent idea was that of Rembrandt as a solitary genius. To quote Füssli again:

> '*If ever he* [Rembrandt] *had a master, he had no followers; Holland was not made to comprehend his powers*.'

The assumption of Füssli and so many of his successors, that Rembrandt was misunderstood in his own time and was for that reason hardly ever imitated by any of his contemporaries, led to the inference that every Rembrandtesque painting that appeared to have originated in the 17th century must have been painted by Rembrandt himself. This of course implied a far greater range of style and quality in what was considered Rembrandt's own work than was accepted at the beginning of the RRP when, as we shall see, the prevailing belief was that the quality of Rembrandt's works was stable and that his style had only gradually evolved.

During the time when Bode and the group of allied Rembrandt experts were active, another *a priori* assumption began to play an important role, that of the close correlation between Rembrandt's life and work. The young Bode, in his attempts to set Rembrandt research on a professional scholarly basis, tried to identify as many links as possible between Rembrandt's life and work. Scallen noted:

> 'While Bode was by no means the first writer to make connections between Rembrandt's life and his art, he carried this exercise further than anyone had before, and in doing so drew some rather dubious conclusions. In addition to his identification of Saskia in many pictures, Bode characterized paintings of a specific young blond woman made around 1632 to 1634 (fig. 9) as revealing the countenance of Rembrandt's sister Liesbeth. His 'identification' of Liesbeth in Rembrandt's art led Bode to surmise that this sister had moved to Amsterdam to keep house for Rembrandt while he was still a bachelor. Bode seemed untroubled by the total lack of archival evidence to support this hypothesis, believing that the paintings themselves were evidence which should be considered just as trustworthy as written documents.'[12]

An assumed knowledge of several figures– either actual or assumed – in Rembrandt's intimate circle gradually developed. In his doctoral thesis titled *Rembrandts Umgebung* [Rembrandt's social circle](1905), Valentiner would further extend this group of potential models. The preoccupation with Rembrandt's family became and remains still a favourite pursuit, not only for the writers of historical novels about Rembrandt or for film-makers who portray his life, but also for the public at large to whom this welcome 'knowledge' of Rembrandt's private life always appeals. Above all, Rembrandt's self-portraits, thought to be created as a form of self-contemplation before

Fig. 9. Rembrandt, *Bust of a young woman* (possibly with Maria Uylenburgh as model), see Plate 78.

11 See Susanne Heiland and Heinz Lüdeck, *Rembrandt und die Nachwelt*, Leipzig 1960, p. 73.
12 Scallen, op. cit.[5], p. 62.

Fig. 10. Rembrandt, *Bust of an old man wearing a fur cap* (detail), 1629. Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, see Plate 43.

Fig. 11. Jan Lievens (1607-1674), *Oriental 'Sultan Soliman'* (detail), *c.* 1628, canvas 135 x 100.5 cm. Potsdam-Sanssouci, Gemäldegalerie.

Fig. 12. Gerard Dou (1613-1675) *Bust of an old man* (detail), *c.* 1630, panel 24.3 x 19 cm. Kassel, Gemäldegalerie.

Fig. 13. Jacques des Rousseau (1600-1638), *Bust of a man with baret, gorget and chain* (detail), 1635, panel 76 x 57 cm. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

the mirror, came to represent Rembrandt as an artist who flourished in the intimate circle of his quotidian environment.

In a process of circular reasoning this presumption of the primacy of his private life led to an identification of Rembrandt's 'portraits' of his relatives – which were in turn seen as evidence of this primacy. These works were consequently the ones least subjected to any critical appraisal with regard to their attribution. The influence of Bode's and Valentiner's use – or rather misuse – of these painted 'documents' was such that wherever a 'family member' appeared in a painting that fact alone was considered as evidence for the authenticity of the painting. The fallacious use of presumed family members, worked into the paintings as hallmarks of authenticity, led to the situation in which very large differences in style and quality within Rembrandt's oeuvre became acceptable to the group of connoisseurs associated with Bode.

This is not to deny categorically that Rembrandt, like other 17th-century painters, (for instance, Jan Steen and Gerard Terborch), used members of his family as models. In the present book it is also assumed that in particular Henrickje Stoffels (b. 1626), Rembrandt's common law wife from *c.* 1650 until her death in 1663, and his son Titus (1641-1667) from time to time served as Rembrandt's models (see the Notes to 223 and 242). The young blonde woman identified by Bode, Valentiner and Bredius as Rembrandt's sister Liesbeth (fig. 9) was most probably Maria van Uylenburgh (d. 1638), wife of the art 'entrepreneur' Hendrick Uylenburgh with whom Rembrandt, as head of the portrait studio, is thought to have been a business associate during his first Amsterdam years. In the 1639 inventory of Lambert Jacobsz, a Friesian painter and business relation of Hendrick Uylenburgh and Rembrandt, a painting is cited and described as '*a small tronie of an Oriental woman, the likeness of Uylenburgh's wife*, [painted] *after* [a work by] *Rembrandt*'.[13] It was probably the face of this woman that was used by Rembrandt and other members of the workshop around 1632 in the production of the '*tronietjes*' of Oriental women (see also 78 fig. 1, 79, 80 and, for instance, Bredius 88).

But Bode and especially Valentiner went much too far in this respect. At the time, it was not yet realized that figures who were designated as Rembrandt's father, his mother, his brother etc. must in fact have been more or less professional models who were also used by other painters in Rembrandt's circles, such as (in his Leiden period) Jan Lievens, Gerard Dou, Jacques des Rousseaux and others. This can be demonstrated by a number of paintings by these artists, including Rembrandt, of an old man who can be identified as one and the same model (figs. 10-13). This same figure was long alleged to be Rembrandt's father.

The idea of Rembrandt – outlined by Füssli in 1801, quoted above – that '*no one combined with so much transcendent excellence so many, in all other men unpardonable faults*', became elevated by the Bode circle to a norm. Hofstede de Groot warned the young art historian, Willem Martin (1876-1954) (fig. 15), that if he could not see and accept the weaknesses in Rembrandt's work he could not possibly know the true Rembrandt in the way that the previous (i.e. Hofstede de Groot's own) generation of scholars had.[14]

This line of thinking could not help but lead to the consequence that the breadth of the stylistic and qualitative range within which an autograph Rembrandt could be 'recognized' was simply enormous. This is

13 H.L. Straat, 'Lambert Jacobsz', *De Vrije Fries* 28 (1925), p. 76, no. 51.

14 Cornelius Hofstede de Groot, 'Zur Rembrandt-forschung', *Der Kunstwanderer* 5 (1923), p. 32 (cited form Scallen op.cit.[5] , p. 274).

what accounted for the explosive expansion of Rembrandts 'oeuvre' around 1900.

The gradual reduction of Rembrandt's oeuvre

After the period of 'expansionism' – in which Bode, Hofstede de Groot and Valentiner all persisted – Bredius set about reducing that overly expanded oeuvre, a change of course which inevitably meant that he had to summon the courage to rescind some of his earlier opinions and thereby acknowledge the fallibility of his judgement. This is what we witnessed at the outset of this chapter. In 1912, in a letter to an art dealer Bredius admitted this in even more explicit terms than he had in his letter to Frick:

> *'You knew beforehand that I am not infallible … I am not ashamed of this. Our metier is so difficult that even the best connoisseur can blunder.'*[15]

When Bredius eventually published his survey of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre in 1935 and 1937, it included 624 paintings. Horst Gerson (1907-1978) (fig. 14), was one of the young art historians who had assisted Bredius in the production of his book. Gerson would later write that two different tendencies emerged around the same time, a Valentiner-Rosenberg party which favoured a large Rembrandt oeuvre and a Martin-Bauch group which tended to reduce the number of autograph works still further.[16] Jakob Rosenberg (1893-1980) (fig. 19) was a German art historian who, like Valentiner, had emigrated to the United States. Willem Martin, director of the Mauritshuis (fig. 15), took a lively and critical role in the debate. Kurt Bauch (1897-1975) (see figs. 8 and 19) was another German art historian who would devote part of his life to Rembrandt. In 1966 he published his handlist of 562 paintings which, in his view, were authentic Rembrandts.

It is probably not by mere chance that the Valentiner-Rosenberg party was active in the United States. Given the complex web of interests and affiliations involving powerful museums and collectors, the unrestrained import of suspect Rembrandts during the inflation of the painter's oeuvre made the field of Rembrandt studies in the US both confused and tricky. This explains why, in his Rembrandt monograph which appeared in 1948, Rosenberg adopted a remarkably reticent position with regard to Rembrandt attributions and disattributions. He accepted 664 paintings and appended only a brief list of those paintings that Bredius had included in his 1935 survey but which he himself did not believe in; and when it came to the paintings that he apparently still accepted, but which Bredius had *not* included and therefore by implication disattributed, Rosenberg remained silent.

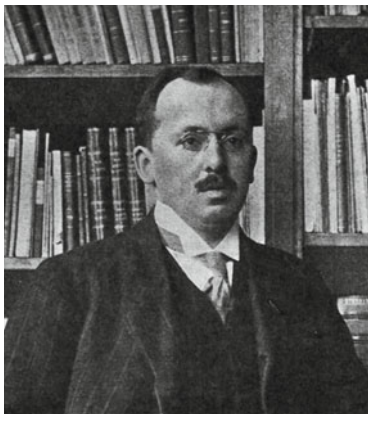

Fig. 15. Willem Martin *c.* 1920.

Willem Martin and Kurt Bauch, on the other hand, were both active in Europe and therefore were able to operate more independently of the art market and critically. Martin, for instance, wrote a devastating critique of Valentiner's *Rembrandt. Wiedergefundene Gemälde* [Rediscovered paintings].[17]

Two years after Bauch's survey of 1966 Horst Gerson's own survey appeared. As Bredius' former assistant, he had accepted a request from Phaidon, Bredius' publisher, to compile a new edition of the latter's much used book, an edition which appeared in the Rembrandt Year 1969, the 300th anniversary of Rembrandt's death. Gerson's own monumental Rembrandt book from 1968 was a coffee-table version of his revised edition of Bredius. In both versions, Gerson removed a further 110 works, still attributed to Rembrandt by Bauch. Only 420 now remained – of which he considered 72 to be doubtful. The lasting influence of Gerson's judgments on the confused state of opinion concerning the present nature and extent of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre is an issue that is frequently raised in the Notes to the Plates in this book.

Fig. 14. Horst Gerson in the RKD (1965).

Horst Gerson

Horst Gerson (1907-1978) (fig. 14 and see fig. 19) was born in Berlin and studied art history in Berlin, Vienna and Göttingen. In 1928, he moved to the Netherlands and in 1940 took Dutch nationality. He began his ca-

15 Scallen op. cit.[5], p. 233.
16 Bredius/Gerson 1969, p. IX.
17 Willem Martin, 'Zur Rembrandtforschung', *Der Kunstwanderer* 5 (1923), pp. 407-411.

reer in art history as a young assistant to Hofstede de Groot (see fig. 8), who had completed his oeuvre catalogue of Rembrandt's paintings in 1915.[18] In that catalogue he dealt with both existing paintings by Rembrandt and Rembrandts for which documents of various kinds attested to their one-time existence. Hofstede de Groot had charged fees for his expert opinions, on the basis of the claim that his work involved the same level of professional expertise as other scientifically schooled specialists such as doctors or lawyers. In a manner as imperious as it was short-sighted, he remained dogmatically loyal to any standpoint once taken: he was, for instance, never to alter his belief in the authenticity of Frick's *Old woman with a book* (see fig. 1). The fact that Carel de Wild had been Hofstede de Groot's protégé may explain De Wild's position and his outrage at Bredius' behaviour in this affair.

Horst Gerson became an expert over a broad range thanks to his work in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (Netherlands Institute for Art History) (RKD) between 1932 and 1965. This institute was built on the extensive documentation of 17th century painting assembled by Hofstede de Groot and a group of assistants, among whom were also Kurt Bauch and Valentiner (see fig. 8). Gerson's expertise not only covered the 16th and 17th century painting of the Northern and Southern Netherlands, but also extended to the painters of other countries up to the 19th century. He was able to draw on this expertise when it came to writing his *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung der holländischen Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* [Dispersion and impact of Dutch painting of the 17th century], which appeared in 1942.

It is clear that Gerson's studies must have frequently been concerned with Rembrandt, if only because of the great many Rembrandt pupils and followers who fell within his field of scholarship: his own doctoral thesis was on Rembrandt's pupil and friend Philips Koninck. A high point of this involvement with Rembrandt's paintings was his discovery in 1962 of Rembrandt's earliest dated painting in the depot of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon, the *Stoning of St Stephen* from 1625 Plate 5. This discovery secured for Gerson the reputation in the art historical world as the most important Rembrandt specialist. The fact that Gerson had also assisted Bredius naturally contributed to this reputation, but being a modest and scrupulously honest scholar he never drew attention to this since, in his own words, his contributions to Bredius' book had been limited.

It is clear from Edward Grasman's biography of Gerson, published in 2007[19], that Gerson's critical – or even, as will become apparent below, overcritical – approach to Rembrandt's painted oeuvre was in some sense a reaction to Kurt Bauch's *Rembrandt Gemälde* published in 1966, the first survey of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre since that of Bredius. It is evident from Gerson's 1968 review of Bauch's book in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* [20] that he found Bauch still too generous in his purging Rembrandt's oeuvre of non-Rembrandts. Moreover, Bauch provided no argumentation for his disattribution of certain paintings; he simply left his reasons unstated and did not include reproductions of the rejected paintings in his book. Gerson, on the other hand, in his revised edition of Bredius' book did give reasons for his decisions, albeit rather lapidary ones, as we shall see, and reproduced the paintings he had removed from Bredius' canon as is only natural in a revised edition.

Anyone who takes the trouble to read Gerson's *Notes* accompanying all paintings in his revised Bredius will be struck by the one-sidedness of his argumentation. His opinions are on the whole remarkably simple judgments of quality, always related to the execution of the painting concerned or of the lead white-containing passages that he thought he could identify as Rembrandt's underpainting in the few available X-radiographs. The following are representative examples of his succinct verdicts: 'a vigorously painted work of high quality' 146; '*the X-ray photograph reveals a weak underlaying structure*' (Br. 45); '*the X-ray shows very powerful underpainting*' 322; '*powerful execution*' (Br. 64); '*weak in construction and insensitive in handling, the painting does not convey that sense of inner conviction and certainty that is to be found in authentic works*' 277; '*not strong enough*' (Br. 133); '*Very poor*' 45; '*One of the most powerful and at the same time most delicately painted study[ies] of the Leyden period*' (Br. 141); '*the execution is less vigorous than in other portraits of this period*' (Br. 203); '*The execution is too tame for Rembrandt himself*' 156.

Grasman found a revealing exchange of letters between Gerson and William Suhr (1896-1984), the New York restorer who had treated more Rembrandts in his workshop than anyone else before him (see fig. 19). This correspondence gives us a good idea of the nature of the Rembrandt expertise anno 1967; as quoted from Grasman:[21]

> 'To Gerson's question as to his opinion on the *'Self-portrait'* in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston 178 [now in the Thyssen collection] Suhr replied with a definite '*Surely not.*' Gerson's marginal annotation on this letter – '*O.K. You are probably right*' – suggests that while he agreed with this view, he nevertheless harboured some resistance to it: Gerson's note in his

18 Cornelius Hofstede de Groot et al., *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 10 Vols, 1907-28.

19 Edward Grasman, *Gerson in Groningen. Een portret van Horst Gerson, Kunstkenner, Hoogleraar Kunstgeschiedenis (1907-1978)*, Hilversum 2007.

20 Horst Gerson, Book review of Kurt Bauch, *Rembrandt Gemälde* (Berlin 1966), *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, (1968), pp. 207-208.

21 Grasman (op. cit.[19]), pp. 88-89.

Fig. 16. Pupil of Rembrandt, *Old Woman reading*, *c.* 1629/1630, canvas 74.4 x 62.7 cm. Wilton Estate, Salisbury.

> Bredius-edition makes clear the nature of that reluctance: […] *there are many strange features about the self-portrait which make the attribution to artist and period doubtful.*
>
> On the other hand Gerson rejected Suhr's favourable judgment of the self-portrait from New York 32. Whereas Suhr noted: '*Rather Rembrandt*', Gerson wrote without further explanation: '*I am not convinced that the attribution to the young Rembrandt is correct*'.

Grasman continues his commentary on this exchange of letters:

> 'Gerson similarly wanted to know Suhr's opinion of the canvas in the possession of the Earl of Pembroke (fig. 16). The latter replied that he increasingly had doubts about it as Gerson could well imagine. Four words sufficed to deal with the matter: '*Increasing doubts*' '*Can understand*'.

Grasman continues:

> 'Compared with the terseness of these notes, even Gerson's short text on this painting in the revised Bredius catalogue is verbose: "There are certainly weak areas in the picture – the washed out pages of the book, for example, and the empty body of the woman – but on the other hand the figure itself is strongly constructed and the brushwork of the face is of superior quality; so a collaboration with Rembrandt must still be considered a possibility." …'About our Plate 167 Suhr notes; *there was a time when I doubted it because I saw with my ears. Bachstitz had told me that he had seen it cleaned by De Wild* [i.e. Carel's son Louis (see fig. 19)]) *and the restorer made it into a Rembrandt. My doubts at the time prevented some important people from bidding at the Erickson sale. After Mr. Middendorf had bought the picture, following his own good sense, I cleaned it. All the stories about it being fixed are nonsense. It is beautifully preserved in its main parts. Just too good for any pupil. I am certain Rembrandt. These eyes. The force. The impact*'. [Grasman adds:] 'Despite this, Gerson would omit the painting without comment.'

The ambition of the RRP founders radically to improve the quality of research with respect to the authenticity of Rembrandtesque paintings is thus fully understandable. It would also involve an attack on traditional connoisseurship, of which Gerson was a typical representative. It was on the basis of connoisseurship that Gerson had implemented his drastic reduction of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre – a reduction which became world news. His most notorious disattribution concerned the famous *Saul and David* in the Mauritshuis 212.

During the well-attended International Rembrandt Conference in Berlin in 1970, one year after the publication of Gerson's controversial revision of Bredius' book, the atmosphere could be cut with a knife – mainly because of Gerson's sweeping purge of Rembrandt's oeuvre.[22] Another source of irritation among the assembled international host of Rembrandt specialists was the news, which had filtered abroad during the previous year, of a revolutionary, but from the outset controversial, initiative: the founding of the RRP.

The founding of the Rembrandt Research Project

The announcement that the RRP would make the greatest possible use of technical investigations had been enthusiastically received in the international press. It was even suggested that, thanks to the application of these methods, the RRP would once and for all eliminate all doubts regarding the authenticity of paintings attributed to Rembrandt. As a result, the art historical world was under the impression that the members of the RRP were claiming to write the definitive Rembrandt catalogue, which quite understandably elicited mixed feelings. During the Berlin conference, which I attended as a shy observer, I found myself during the intervals being interrogated by participants of that conference who knew that I was in some way connected with the project.

It must be admitted that the rumours were indeed alarming. Was it true that the RRP would only accept some 250 paintings as genuine? Were the rumours correct that the *Supper at Emmaus* in the Louvre 218, even the *Polish Rider* 236 had been put in question by the team? Did the participants of that project really believe that employing the research methods of the

22 Werner Sumowski, 'Kritische Bemerkungen zur neuesten Gemälde Kritik' in *Neue Beiträge zur Rembrandt-Forschung* (ed. Otto von Simson und Jan Kelch, Berlin 1973, pp. 91-110).

natural sciences could establish the truth? How can connoisseurship be practiced by a committee when the development of the connoisseur's expert eye requires a personal development and individual intuition?

Such questions were fired at me by sceptical Dutch art historians who attended the Conference and by such formidable figures as Julius Held and Werner Sumowski. What could I say? I was merely an assistant in the RRP.

Bob Haak's initiative

The decision to initiate the Rembrandt Research Project was indirectly linked to the notorious affair surrounding a false Vermeer, the *Supper at Emmaus* (fig. 17) which eventually turned out to have been produced by Han van Meegeren (1889-1947), a painter from The Hague who felt his talents as a painter had been ignored. Between 1937 and 1946 almost everyone – including Gerson – had taken the forged painting to be an original masterwork. Shortly after Van Meegeren's revelation that he had painted it – as well as a number of other forgeries – Vitale Bloch, the art historian, collector, dealer and publicist (1900-1975) wrote:

> 'In the long term, the most serious aspect of the Van Meegeren affair is not that the Dutch State and many other wealthy collectors have been deceived, but that a number of critics and experts, whose judgment was always considered irreproachable, were so completely off-target, and appear to have so little insight into the spirit in which seventeenth-century masters painted, that they were incapable of distinguishing between forgeries and genuine paintings.'[23]

Fig. 17. Han van Meegeren (1889-1947), *The Supper of Emmaus*, 1937, canvas, 118 x 130.5 cm. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen.

The Van Meegeren affair did indeed traumatize the Dutch art world and gave rise to a widely felt paranoia regarding questions of authenticity which would also affect the early years of the RRP. In this context it should be pointed out that Van Meegeren's Emmaus painting was actually 'discovered' by Bredius, who began the article in which he published his find with the words:

> 'It is a wonderful moment in the life of a lover of art when he finds himself suddenly confronted with a hitherto unknown painting by a great master (….) we have here a – I am inclined to say – the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer (…..) quite different from all his other paintings and yet every inch a Vermeer.' [24]

As mentioned earlier, the initiative for the Rembrandt Research Project came from Bob Haak (see fig. 6). Because of the radical impact of the Second World War on his early life Haak had been unable to take up an academic study and was therefore, as an art historian, an autodidact. [25] In 1950, only three years after the court case that followed Van Meegeren's confession, Haak had become an assistant to the art dealer D.A. Hoogendijk. It was Hoogendijk who in 1937 had in good faith been the intermediary in the sale of the *Supper at Emmaus* to the Boijmans Museum (since 1958 the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen) in Rotterdam. Nowhere, perhaps, was the impact of the scandal so keenly felt as in Hoogendijk's shop. When the dealer gave the young Haak access to his file on the case soon after he became his assistant, the highly impressionable young man must have felt his career mapped out for him: he wanted to become a specialist in 17th-century Dutch art, open to the possibilities of the modern scientific investigation of paintings – which had, after all, proved that Van Meegeren's confession was not the boasting of a fantasist, as some thought, but the truth. [26]

Haak worked for four years with Hoogendijk, who from an early stage regularly sent him alone to London auctions to acquire paintings. During that time Haak laid the foundation for his profound knowledge of 17th-century Dutch painting which would eventually result in his monumental book *The Golden Age. Dutch painters of the seventeenth century*. [27] It is significant in this context that Haak was a gifted amateur draughtman and etcher.

In his years with Hoogendijk, Haak befriended a

23 Unidentified newspaper, 15 November 1945. In M. van den Brandhof, *Een vroege Vermeer uit 1937*, Utrecht 1979, p. 9.

24 A. Bredius, 'A new Vermeer', *The Burlington Magazine* 71 (1937), p. 211. See also Jim van der Meer Mohr, 'Eerherstel voor Abraham Bredius?', *Tableau* April 1996, pp. 39-45.

25 In 1991 his outstanding contributions to this field was recognized by the award of an honorary doctorate from the University of Amsterdam.

26 P.B. Coremans, *Van Meegerens faked Vermeers and De Hooghs. A scientific examination*, Amsterdam 1949.

27 B. Haak, *Hollandse schilders in de Gouden Eeuw*, Amsterdam 1984. The English translation appeared in the same year.

Fig. 18. Daan Cevat with 20.

young Dutch art dealer living in London, Daan Cevat (fig. 18), with whom he came to share a deep interest in Rembrandt and his school. This interest received a tremendous boost in 1954 when Haak was appointed assistant curator in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and became involved in the preparation of the major Rembrandt exhibition held in that museum in 1956. He later loved to relate what he had felt when, during the setting up of the exhibition, he saw the (exactly) one hundred assembled Rembrandts leaning against the museum walls waiting to be hung and noted the bewildering differences in style and quality among many of these paintings. He became convinced that it was impossible for all these to have been painted by one and the same artist. That conviction assumed a dominant role in Haak's many conversations with Cevat, who in the meantime had begun to build up a collection of works from the Rembrandt school, including some works by Rembrandt himself 1 and 20. During these discussions the seed was sown of a research project – the subsequent Rembrandt Research Project – which, Haak hoped, would bring order to the chaos that in his opinion still reigned. For this purpose Haak contacted Josua Bruyn (1923-2011) (see figs. 5 and 21), who in 1961 had been appointed Professor of Art History at the University of Amsterdam. Financial support for what was now officially baptized the 'Rembrandt Research Project' was forthcoming from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (ZWO, later NWO).

Assumed imitations and forgeries

To understand the history of the RRP, it is important to realize that Haak and his dealer friend Cevat believed that many of the alleged Rembrandt paintings that they questioned were later imitations or even fakes. For instance, they seriously doubted the seventeenth-century origin of *Christ and the woman taken in adultery* in the National Gallery in London 196. They also doubted the authenticity of the Kassel *Winterlandscape* 207. I remember that Haak even thought it likely that the six surviving paintings from Rembrandt's Passion Series for Frederik Hendrik (see p. 178) in Munich were copies after lost originals. In the course of this chapter it will become apparent that, just as in the case of Gerson's judgments, behind such suspicions lay strongly held preconceptions as to Rembrandt's style and its development.

Haak's conviction that there were a considerable number of imitations, forgeries and later copies among the works commonly attributed to Rembrandt was shared by the other members of the team assembled round Haak and Bruyn. This was articulated by Bruyn when he presented the RRP to an international assembly of Rembrandt specialists at the in Chicago Symposium '*Rembrandt after 300 years*' in 1969 (fig. 19):

> *I should like to emphasize, [...], that the majority of rejected pictures, which till now tended to be relegated more or less automatically to his [Rembrandt's] school, do not belong there. Even Dr. Gerson, in his recent edition of Bredius' catalogue, resorts too often, in my opinion, to attributions to [Rembrandt pupils such as] Flinck, Van den Eeckhout and Jan Victors, even though, in other cases, he considers rejected Rembrandt pictures as later copies or imitations. I think that in these latter cases he is generally right. I also think that these later imitations, whether they are innocent pastiches or conscious fakes, are responsible for many more mistaken attributions than the school-pieces. These imitations [...] present a formidable problem that has hardly been tackled at all. For the greater part, they have not yet been recognized, let alone grouped according to date and place. Some of them can boast fabulous pedigrees, going back to famous eighteenth-century collections, or were reproduced in eighteenth-century prints.*[28]

Viewed in this light Rembrandts oeuvre had, as it were, to be reconstructed from the ground up.

Teamwork

The original RRP team consisted of six members: three of them, Bob Haak (see fig. 6), Josua Bruyn (see fig. 5) and Jan G. van Gelder (see fig. 21) have already been introduced above, where I gave a brief account of Haak's background and of my first working visit together with him.

In his professional life Haak was at that time chief curator of the Amsterdam Historical Museum (since 2012 the Amsterdam Museum). Haak's book *'Rembrandt, his life, his work, his time'* would appear in 1969. Josua Bruyn was Professor of Art History at the University of Amsterdam. As one of my teachers at that University, it was he who had invited me to act as his

28 *Rembrandt after three hundered years: A symposium – Rembrandt and his followers, October 22-24, 1969*, The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago 1973, pp. 33-40, esp. p. 36.

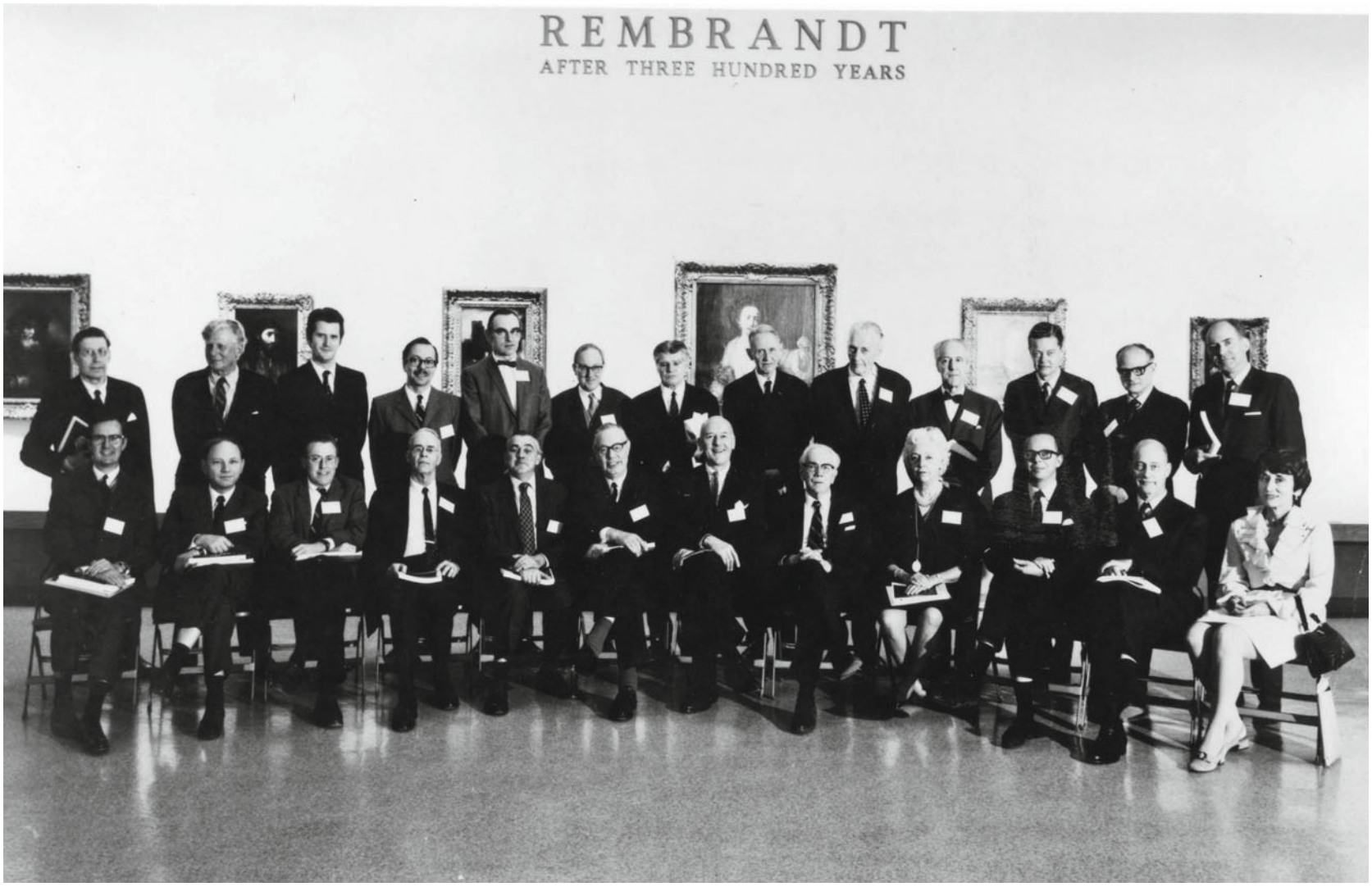

Fig. 19. The participants of the Symposium '*Rembrandt after threehundred years*', The Art Institute of Chigago, October 1969, pp. 22-24.

STANDING (BACK ROW), Left to Right:

1 C.F. Louis de Wild, New York
2 William Suhr, New York
3 Hubert von Sonnenburg, Conservator, Metropolitan Museum of Art
4 Nathan Stolow, National Conservation Research Laboratory, Canada
5 Alfred Jakstas, Conservator, Art institute of Chicago
6 Wolfgang Wegner, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich
7 Kurt Bauch, Professor, University of Freiburg
8 I.Q. van Regteren Altena, formerly Professor, Art History Institute, University of Amsterdam
9 Cornelis Müller-Hofstede, Professor, Berlin
10 A.B. de Vries, Director, Mauritshuis, The Hague
11 Josua Bruyn, Professor, Art History Institute, University of Amsterdam
12 Harold Joachim, Curator of Prints and Drawings, Art Institute of Chicago
13 E. Haverkamp-Begemann, Professor, Yale University

SITTING (FRONT ROW), Left to Right:

14 David G. Carter, Director, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
15 Jan Bialostocki, National Museum, Warsaw, and Professor, University of Warsaw
16 J. Richard Judson, Professor, Smith College
17 Wolfgang Stechow, Professor, Oberlin College
18 Seymour Slive, Harvard University
19 J.G. van Gelder, Art History Institute, University of Utrecht
20 C.C. Cunningham, Director, Art Institute of Chicago
21 Jakob Rosenberg, Harvard University
22 Agnes Mongan, Director, Fogg Art Museum
23 Christopher White, P&D Colnaghi, London
24 Horst Gerson, Professor, University of Groningen
25 Madlyn Kahr, New York

---

one-year-assistant in his work for the RRP. Bruyn had previously specialised mainly in 15th and 16th century Netherlandish art but had also worked on stylistic issues related to Rembrandt.[29] Because of his academic position he was chosen to be chairman and operational leader of the RRP. Jan G. van Gelder, (emeritus) professor at the University of Utrecht, the Nestor

29 Josua Bruyn, 'Rembrandt and the Italian Baroque', *Simiolus* 4 (1970), pp. 28-48.

Fig. 20. Lideke Peese Binkhorst (left) and the present author (right) (1989).

of the group, was widely known in the international art-historical community. He had been one of Bruyn's teachers, and had published several articles dealing with Rembrandt's early paintings.[30] Because he had become seriously ill, at the last moment I was asked to replace him and assist in the first working trip to London. His state of health subsequently remained delicate and he was therefore to remain with the project solely as an observer and advisor. In 1979 he decided to end his involvement with the project once Volume I had appeared, but in fact he did not live to see its publication in 1982; he died in 1980.

The other art historians who were asked to participate in the Project were Jan A. Emmens, Pieter J. J. van Thiel and Simon H. Levie. Emmens (1924-1971), Professor of Art theory and Iconology at the University of Utrecht and author of the book *Rembrandt en de regels van de kunst* [Rembrandt and the rules of art] (1964) would be especially concerned with iconographic and iconological issues related to Rembrandt. After his untimely death in 1971 attempts to fill his position in the RRP were unsuccessful. Pieter van Thiel (1928-2012) (see fig. 21), from 1964 Head of the Department of Paintings at the Rijksmuseum had been involved in the purchase for the Rijksmuseum of the *Holy Family by night*, attributed to Rembrandt.[31] Van Thiel was invited to participate in the RRP as a representative of the Rijksmuseum. Simon H. Levie (b. 1925) (see fig. 21), director of the Amsterdam Historical Museum, the sixth original member of the RRP, had no previous experience in the field of Rembrandt research. Lideke Peese Binkhorst-Hoffscholte (b. 1940) (fig. 20), an art historian who had been working as a research editor for the Encyclopaedia of World Art, and who assisted Engelbert Kirschbaum with his *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie* in Rome, was to head the secretariat of the RRP. She eventually became more involved in the scholarly aspects of the project: pursuing the provenance of the paintings to be investigated and collating information on reproductive prints after paintings that were attributed to Rembrandt or had once been considered to be Rembrandts. Over the years, she was closely involved in the editorial work involved in the preparation for publication of Volumes I-V of the *Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*.

Looking at this list of team members, two obvious questions arise. Firstly, if the RRP was to be an interdisciplinary project and, given the methodological approach that was intended, why did the team consist solely of art historians? And secondly, given that choice, why was Gerson, the Dutch art historian with by far the most experience in the field of Rembrandt's paintings, not part of this team?

The answer to the first question is to be found in the Foreword to *Corpus* I:

> 'Bearing in mind the many and differing problems that could be expected in connection with scientific investigations into the physical structure of the paintings, as well as with tracking down information in the archives, the question arose of whether experts in these fields ought not to be included in the team. This question was seriously considered but answered in the negative. Given the possibility of maintaining contact with experts in other fields whenever necessary, we decided that the homogeneity of method and results would be served best by forming a team consisting of art historians only.'

Only later did I realize that Bruyn and Haak had made an intelligent decision in this regard. When in 1993 I resolved to continue the project with an interdisciplinary team[32], I found that in the daily operation of the project interdisciplinarity was not the sensible option. The art historians who worked on the texts for the relevant parts of the *Corpus* were at the same time those who were best equipped, because of the overview of the field that they commanded, to decide what were the relevant questions to put to the representatives of other disciplines and how the data generated by external specialists could be interpreted in the ultimately art historical context of the RRP. Moreover, the specialists from other disciplines concerned usu-

30 Jan G. van Gelder, 'Nieuwe werken van Rembrandt', *Oud Holland* 62 (1947), pp. 177-182; id., *Rembrandts vroegste ontwikkeling*, Amsterdam 1953 (*mededelingen van de KNAW*, Afd. Letterkunde, vol. 16, no. 5) [*28 pp.*]; id., *Rembrandt als leermeester*, exhib. cat. Leiden (Lakenhal) 1956. [*71 pp.*]; id., 'Een Rembrandt van 1633', *Oud Holland* 75 (1960), pp. 73-78; id., 'Frühe Rembrandt-Sammlungen', in: Otto von Simson, Jan Kelch (eds.), *Neue Beitrage zur Rembrandt-Forschung*, Berlin 1973, pp. 189-206.

31 P.J.J. van Thiel, 'Rembrandts Heilige Familie bij avond', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 13 (1965), pp. 145-161.

32 E. van de Wetering, 'Letter to the Editor', *The Burlington Magazine* 135 (1993), pp. 764-765.

Fig. 21. 'Rembrandt lunch' the members of the Rembrandt Research Project around 1979
From left tot right: J.G. van Gelder, S.H. Levie, B. Haak, E. van de Wetering, J. Bruijn, P.J.J. van Thiel.

ally divided their attention with so many other projects in their own fields that one could not expect them to possess such a grasp of all aspects of this project – specifically of those aspects related to questions of attribution – that they would be capable of deciding themselves when and where their contribution was likely to be significant.

The second question regarding the composition of the team is: why was Gerson not involved with the RRP? As Grasman discovered whilst researching archival material for his biography of Horst Gerson, in 1967 the latter had on his own initiative expressed his concern to the funding organization, the *Netherlands Organisation for Pure Scientific Research* (ZWO, later NWO), over their intention to subsidize the 'Bruyn committee', as he called the future RRP. The main reason for his concern was that, in his opinion, apart from Van Gelder, the members of the committee had too little experience of research in the field of Rembrandt paintings. At the time, it should be said, Gerson was unfamiliar with Haak's book on Rembrandt, mentioned above, which would be published two years later (see above). Moreover, Gerson thought the projected travel programme was far too expensive. Grasman ends this account with the comment that:

> 'Unaware of Gerson's advice to the ZWO, the Rembrandt-team, and Bruyn in particular, kept their distance from Gerson, wanting above all to begin with a clean slate.'

In effect, it meant that the RRP had initially set itself, as it were, the aim of 're-inventing' Rembrandt as a painter. This ambition, as will be seen, had far-reaching consequences for my role within the RRP.

From temporary replacement to member of the team

In the event, Van Gelder's illness lasted much longer than had been anticipated. His planned research trips to Paris and Berlin in 1968 (together with Levie), and to the Scandinavian countries, and to Poland, (with Haak) had already been arranged. But he was still unable to participate. During the London campaign Haak and Bruyn had apparently found that I could be of some use to the RRP, so it was decided that for the time being I should continue to replace Van Gelder. I could record the observations dictated by my senior colleagues while at the same time I might also be of some use in studying and discussing the paintings with them. As I remarked above, given my earlier training as an artist, paintings were familiar objects to me and scrutinizing them had become second nature. In my capacity as (temporary) assistant I thus remained a participant in the project. Gradually I became so deeply involved in the work that in 1970 I was formally appointed a member of the RRP team (fig. 21).

My participation in the project, however, carried with it no salaried position. Except for Lideke Binkhorst, whose salary was funded by ZWO, the official

members of the team derived their financial security from their positions at universities and in museums. Consequently, in September 1969 a post was created for me as a staff member of the Central Research Laboratory for Objects of Art and Science, with which an unspecified cooperation had been agreed at the foundation of the RRP. I seized the opportunity with both hands, for it meant that beside my obligations in the Central Lab I could continue to work with the Rembrandt Research Project – a golden learning opportunity for a questing young painter!

As a result of an extensive travel-cum-research programme all the *c.* 624 paintings attributed to Rembrandt by Bredius – in so far as they could be found – would be examined by members of the RRP. We travelled in pairs of varying composition. None of our predecessors had been able to form such a detailed image of Rembrandt's painted oeuvre based on examination of the paintings themselves, and in the relatively short time-span of five years. How often one finds in the notes in Bredius/Gerson the comment: 'neither Bauch nor I have seen this painting'. But actually, given the procedure of travelling in couples, none of the team members would in the end have seen all the paintings either.[33]

The RRP team had set itself an enormous task. The focus of their investigation was the painting as an artefact, but no-one in this team apart from Bob Haak had any experience in the field of examining old master paintings in depth. During his time at the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum and the Amsterdam Historical Museum he had usually supervised the restoration of paintings from those museums. Similar experience with the paintings as historical artefacts therefore had to be developed by the other team members and as quickly as possible.

When Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, the Dutch/American Professor of Art History, then at Yale and a specialist in the Dutch art of the 17th century with extensive art-historical knowledge of Rembrandt's art, suggested that he might profitably participate in the project, Bruyn replied that the geographical distance between the Netherlands and the US made such cooperation virtually impossible, since, as he emphasized, it was essentially important for the team members to have regular and frequent contact to discuss the planning and results of the project. As a rule, the participants came together each Friday lunch time – which between 1968 and the end of the initial project in 1993 must have been around 1000 times (see fig. 21).

The problematic role of science

Moving on from the resolution that technical and scientific research would play an important role in the project, it had been decided, as mentioned above, that the project should be carried out in some form of collaboration with the Central Laboratory for Objects of Art and Science. This national laboratory was founded in 1963 with the main purpose of establishing a scientific basis for the conservation and study of the nation's diverse cultural heritage.

At the time, however, in this institution there was no experience of the investigation and authentication of 17th-century Dutch paintings. Nor was there full clarity within the RRP team as to the specific role of scientific research for their project.

It was a lucky coincidence that around the time the RRP was founded the Central Laboratory was planning to organize a major international conference in Amsterdam under the aegis of the Conservation Committee of the ICOM (the International Council of Museums). The conference was planned for September 1969. A plan was conceived between the RRP and the Central Lab to organize their own subsidiary symposium as an adjunct to this conference with particular focus on the limits and possibilities of the scientific research of paintings by or attributed to Rembrandt. All international specialists with any such experience were invited to attend this symposium and give papers on such matters as the use of X-ray and other radiographic techniques, on microscopic and chemical analysis of ground- and paint samples, on the analysis of wood supports and canvas etc.[34] In his opening speech, Bruyn characterised the situation as follows:

> '*The art-historian's problems fall into two categories: a) those caused by paintings which date from Rembrandt's life-time, work by pupils or old copies. It seems doubtful whether scientific investigation may help to distinguish these from the master's own works. b) those caused by later copies, pastiches or forgeries which, because of possible differences in their physical structure, may be identified by technical investigation. This would require large-scale application of standardized methods in order to reach significant results that may be considered valid criteria.*'

During the symposium it became clear that, indeed, the results of any research methods applied to Rembrandtesque paintings so far had yielded nothing of direct significance for the attribution of any such works to Rembrandt. Whilst it may be possible to prove by technical investigation that a painting is not from the 17th century, and consequently *not* by Rembrandt, the converse – using these methods to prove *conclusively* that a painting *is* by Rembrandt – was at

33 Eventually I would see all the paintings except three 30, 120a/b.

34 *Symposium on technical aspects of Rembrandt paintings*, organised by the RRP and the Central Research Laboratory for Objects of Art and Science, Amsterdam, pp. 22-24 September 1969. A summary of this symposium was written by Renate Keller, but not published.

that time impossible. Bruyn's scepticism on this point during his opening speech for the 1969 Amsterdam symposium seemed for the time being to be confirmed, although much later he was proved to have been too pessimistic on how strong the evidence from the use of such methods could be.

It may be worth stating the point here that, on the one hand, historical works of art are complex man-made objects whose materials, manufacture, style and quality can in principle vary even when made by the same person. And on the other hand, works that are closely related in these respects could have been done by different painters, e.g. in Rembrandt's immediate circle. If only for this reason, it seemed useless to search for some material or technical idiosyncrasy specific to Rembrandt that would provide an infallible key to problems of authenticity. Earlier investigation of the grounds on Rembrandt's canvases and panels, for example, had led to the conclusion – mistaken as it turned out – that 'each painting by Rembrandt may have been a technical creation as well as a pictorial one'. [35]

Moreover, as we soon discovered, there were insurmountable practical obstacles to the search for clues that might identify Rembrandt's autograph works: Rembrandt's oeuvre is accessible for this kind of research only to a limited and varying degree. In their diaspora, his paintings and those attributed to him have often found their way into small museums, or private collections, where at that time it was simply not feasible to conduct thorough technical and scientific investigations. For this reason alone, what Bruyn in his introduction to the symposium had referred to as the

> *'… large-scale application of standardized methods in order to reach significant results that may be considered valid criteria'*

appeared to be impossible. Other restrictions also apply to the systematic collection of representative samples of paint and other materials from such unique and valuable paintings, depending on the permission of the museums or owner's concerned.

It was fortunate that at this time X-radiographs of more and more paintings were becoming available. They seemed to be a useful tool for looking into and through the paint, the grounds and the support. But it took years before we were able to read and interpret these images such that we were able to obtain data of relevance to the authentification of Rembrandtesque paintings. It eventually turned out that the interpretation of these observations and data was only possible once we had sufficient insight into 17th-century workshop practice. But at the time, that insight was in many respects missing. In 1969 material research on paintings was still in its infancy.

Nevertheless, during the symposium there was revealed to us one wholly unexpected and promising possibility for obtaining an answer to the question of whether a painting was or was not a later imitation: by a stroke of good fortune, we met the dendrochronologists from the Institute for Wood-biology of Hamburg University. They had accompanied the Hamburg medical radiologist Martin Meier Siem, who had made X–radiographs of many paintings – including works by Rembrandt – without removing the paintings from the wall. In this way, purely as a hobby, he had assembled a large collection of X-radiographs of old paintings, from which it was now necessary to find and interpret possibly relevant 'symptoms' and 'micro-symptoms'. It was known that there were phenomena whereby, by means of X-radiation, certain kinds of paint loss or radical changes in specific areas of the image could be recognized, as well as indications of the re-use of some painting-supports. But this was not enough.

A breakthrough came when Meier Siem, aware that in paintings on panels the 'shadow' of the grain of the wood was visible on the X-radiograph, realized that these traces might be able to yield significant information. Knowing of the possibilities of dendrochronology – the dating of wood on the basis of measuring the growth rings – he contacted the Institute for Wood biology attached to the university of his home city of Hamburg, whose dendrochonologists, Bauch and Eckstein, saw the promising possibility of applying their dating method to art historical problems of dating, by measuring the annual growth rings in the end grain on the top ends of the oak panels that were widely used by 17th-century Dutch painters. [36] Their technique is so little invasive that owners were usually willing to allow this investigation with their paintings.

Since the initiators of the RRP had assumed at the outset that among the many paintings attributed to Rembrandt there would be many later copies and forgeries (see p. 12), the potential of this dating method for resolving that issue was obvious. Thus arose the cooperation between the RRP and the Hamburg wood biologists – latterly in the person of Peter Klein – which has continued to this day. The gradual accumulation of dendrochronological data on Rembrandtesque paintings on oak panels (the majority, in fact) would eventually confront the members of the RRP with a surprising realization. But before we arrived at that point, we had scrutinized hundreds of paintings on our study trips, describing and provisionally attributing or dis-attributing them according to our own working procedures.

35 See *Corpus* I, p. 17.

36 Bauch J, Eckstein D, 'Dendrochronological dating of oak panels of Dutch 17th century paintings', *Studies in Conservation*, 1970 15 pp. 45-50.

The first five years with research trips

In retrospect, this work over the years during which we made our research trips now appears remarkably straightforward. The only extraordinary aspect of it was that hardly anyone before us had ever worked on the oeuvre catalogue of an artist in this way – or rather, had previously been *able* to work in this way. Until then the compilers of such catalogues had amassed specific documentation and visual material, usually over many years, arranging it in various ways and commenting on that material for publication. Where possible, the relevant works were seen in museums, in auction houses on viewing days or in the living rooms of private collectors – but rarely were these works investigated further as artefacts with their own facture and material history. Black and white photographs had been the most important means of developing an image of an oeuvre as a whole.

What was done in the context of the RRP seemed like a revolution that had been made possible by affordable air travel and by the funding of these trips by an organisation persuaded that all the travel expenses and the costs of photographs, X-radiographic and other documentation would be repaid by the anticipated results. The relevant department of the state-funded ZWO took the view that the interdisciplinary collaboration involving scholars and specialist scientists as planned by the RRP fitted exactly with their policy.

It was also important that Arthur van Schendel, Director of the Rijksmuseum, whole-heartedly supported the plans of the RRP. Van Schendel (1910-1979) was at that time president of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and specifically active in the Conservation Committee of that organisation – a global community of art historians, restorers and scientists who wanted to raise the level of management, conservation and restoration together with the associated scientific research on objects of cultural heritage. Each request made by the RRP for access to one or more paintings attributed to Rembrandt for investigation made mention of Van Schendel's support of the RRP (**fig. 22**). This recommendation was all the more significant because in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum Van Schendel was responsible for one of the most important collections of paintings by Rembrandt in the world.

When the two investigators from the RRP appeared on the agreed day at the institution concerned, their accommodation had always been prepared. The first paintings to be scrutinized were usually already taken from the museum walls, removed from their frames and ready for investigation, usually in the conservation workshop. In scrutinizing the paintings and the relevant X-radiographs etc. we followed a checklist procedure which made little distinction between objective record and subjective impression. The art-historian Frans Grijzenhout, in his analysis of the RRP and aspects of its history published in 2007, characterized that checklist as 'astonishingly simple judged by today's state of knowledge'.[37]

The checklist comprised the following:
– Title of the work and Bredius no.; owner/museum; date of investigation; the investigating team members; conditions during the examination of the painting;
– support; measurements; ground; paint surface (visibility of canvas or pattern of grain, relief, any characteristics of paint substance and/or application); the painting's condition; craquelure;
– signature; observations based on indications in X-radiographs and under ultraviolet radiation, preparatory studies, [reproduction] prints etc.; pentimenti;
– general impression; argumentation [regarding possible attribution or disattribution]; provisional conclusion;
– desired photographs, cross-sections, etc. (indicated where necessary on a photocopy of a reproduction of the painting)

The dangers of a provisional conclusion

By including in our checklist the penultimate requirement to enter a 'provisional conclusion', however, we had created a potential conflict between on the one hand registering our observations as neutrally as possible, and on the other hand the natural urge to record a provisional opinion regarding the painting's authenticity. We had long hesitated before adding this requirement, but once it was there the temptation to express a provisional opinion as to the painting's authenticity proved to be irresistible.

Although we all knew that they were intended to be only provisional, voicing these opinions on certain paintings, albeit within a restricted circle, did at times unwittingly contribute to the very confusion that the RRP had set out to eliminate. Inevitably, these 'opinions' gave rise to rumours that in turn gained wider circulation – as was already evident at the Berlin Conference of 1970 (see above p. 10/11). It would have been procedurally much sounder if we had omitted this demand for a provisional conclusion from our checklist and postponed the development of an opinion about the authenticity of a painting until all *c.* 600 works included in the Bredius canon had been investigated by us in the same way and chronologically or otherwise ordered according to their various properties.

The content of the present book is a testimony to the danger of expressing such premature verdicts.

37 Frans Grijzenhout, 'De zaak Rembrandt: Van project naar research', in *Over de volle breedte: Amsterdams universitair onderzoek na 1970* (ed. M. Polak, J. Sevink, S. Noorda), Amsterdam 2007, p. 34.