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Rembrandt

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1606? - 1669

Rembrandt

The great painters

Rembrandt van Rijn's painting "The Night Watch" is world famous. The painting dates from 1642 and since that time it has been commented on, praised and discussed on innumerable occasions. It is indeed an intriguing painting: it depicts something – but what? On the other hand, it is an ordinary painting: a group of Amsterdam residents depicted as members of the civic guard around their Captain Frans Banning Cocq. The painting was intended to be hung in the new great hall of the renovated Kloveniersdoelen (the headquarters of the civic guardsmen). Such group portraits belonged to a tradition that dated back to the first half of the sixteenth century. Banning Cocq's

colleagues did themselves equal justice: they too commissioned group portraits by well-known artists. Rembrandt's painting therefore originally hung in the company of a number of other recent group portraits in the new Doelenzaal of the Kloveniersdoelen where the guardsmen regularly met to eat, drink and smoke together.

At the time that Banning Cocq commissioned Rembrandt, the latter was already much in demand as a portrait painter. He was also ambitious and had left his birthplace (Leiden) at an early age in the hope of making a better career for himself in the richer, larger town of Amsterdam. He was successful. With his

expensive portraits and paintings of biblical and mythological figures and stories, Rembrandt served the elite among the wealthy bourgeoisie and art lovers.

The Amsterdam art market was, however, much wider in scope. Around the year 1650, the city had some 175 artists. The majority of them produced cheap paintings for an anonymous market, mainly small landscapes and so-called genre pieces depicting everyday scenes. These painters did not achieve eternal fame, but their work is a mark of the wealth and scope of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Spurred on by the great demand from ordinary citizens for paintings to decorate their homes, all over the

Republic artists tried to create their own niche in the market. It has been calculated that in the seventeenth century over five million paintings must have been produced. This figure clearly illustrates that Dutch painting was not dominated by a few great masters working in important artistic centres such as Amsterdam, Haarlem and Utrecht. It is therefore not Rembrandt alone who symbolises the remarkable cultural boom of the seventeenth century, but also the hundreds of second and third-rate local painters who tried to make a living in the shadows of famous masters or working in smaller artistic centres like Enkhuizen and Zwolle.

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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Famous paintings of Rembrandt and their stories
The painter and his pupils (master – apprentices)
Famous seventeenth-century painters:
Vermeer, Hals, Steen, Ruysdael

Secondary education sector

Commissioned art
Economics, society and cultural growth
The Muiden Circle
Art appreciation, “true” and false Rembrandts
Rembrandt as a global celebrity

Past and Present

What did the guardsmen in the painting like about Rembrandt’s depiction, and what do we think about it?

In the Treasure Chest

Palette, paints and brushes
Reproduction of a self-portrait of Rembrandt

References

Places to Go

Amsterdam: The Rijksmuseum and the Rembrandthuis
Alkmaar: Stedelijk Museum
Leiden: the Lakenhal
The Hague: Mauritshuis
Haarlem: Frans Hals Museum

Books for young people

Thea Beckman, *De stomme van Kampen* (H. Avercamp) (12+)
Anne Marie van Cappelle, *Het wonderlijke schilderij van Antonio* (Brugge 1533) (10+)
Annejoke Smids, *Meester van de schaduw* (Caravaggio) (12+)
Dick Walda, *Het mysterie van de Nachtwacht* (12+)
Jan Wolkers, *De spiegel van Rembrandt* (10+)
Bert Natter, *Rembrandt, mijn vader. Verteld door Titus van Rijn* (12+)
Lyrisch van Rembrandt. Twintig nieuwe gedichten naar de oude meester (14+)

Background literature

B. Haak, *Hollandse schilders in de Gouden Eeuw*, Amsterdam 1984.
Gary Schwartz, *De grote Rembrandt*, Zwolle 2006.

Websites

www.rembrandthuis.nl
www.holland.com/rembrandt400/consumer/nl/geschiedenis.vpro.nl/dossiers/25903180
www.rijksmuseum.nl/onderwijs (with a Rembrandt game)