



ELIZABETH RIPLEY

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REMBRANDT



REMBRANDT

A Biography by
ELIZABETH RIPLEY

PURPLE HOUSE PRESS
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Artist Biographies from
Elizabeth Ripley

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GOYA
LEONARDO DA VINCI
MICHELANGELO
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RUBENS
TITIAN
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WINSLOW HOMER



HEAD OF CHRIST, c. 1645-1650
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Title page: THE LANDSCAPE WITH THE REST ON THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT, 1647
National Gallery of Ireland

Back cover: THE ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO, 1628, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Painting titles are taken from the museums where they reside and may differ from the 1955 edition.
Some paintings originally selected by the author are no longer attributed to Rembrandt or his studio,
they have been replaced with similar works which are credited to him.

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More than four hundred years ago in the town of Leiden in Holland lived a miller whose name was Harmen. Harmen van Rijn he was called, because his mill was on the River Rhine. He and his sons worked hard, and the mill prospered. In the year 1609 Harmen's fourth son was born and he was named **REMBRANDT VAN RIJN**.

The little Rembrandt liked to play alone under the flickering light of the mill; but when he was six years old, his father sent him to school. Although Rembrandt worked hard, books did not interest him. He preferred to climb to the loft of the mill with his younger sister and watch the quivering light play on her pretty face. He often drew pictures of her as she sat in the half-light of the mill loft. He loved to sketch windmills against cloudy skies and shadows moving across wide fields, He longed to become an artist, so that he could paint everything he saw. Harmen was proud of his son's drawings and he decided to send the boy to study with an artist named Swanenburg.

Rembrandt was fourteen when he entered Swanenburg's studio. There he learned how to mix paints and prepare canvases. He was taught to draw with a needle on a copper plate which could be used to print the same picture many times. The printed picture was called an etching.

For three years Rembrandt worked happily in Swanenburg's studio. Then one day the master told his quiet pupil that he had no more to teach him, so Rembrandt decided to go to Amsterdam to study with an artist named Lastman. But the noisy city frightened the shy miller's son, and soon he returned to the peaceful mill in Leiden.

Rembrandt set up an easel in his home and painted all day. Harmen, after he had worked hard at the mill, liked to sit while his son made etchings of his wrinkled face. It amused the miller to dress in the strange costumes Rembrandt had brought from Amsterdam. In one etching the old man wears a high turban and in another, a fur cap.

Rembrandt made so many etchings of his father that today many people are familiar with the face of the honest miller who lived more than four hundred years ago.



BEARDED MAN, IN A FURRED ORIENTAL CAP AND ROBE, 1631
The Morgan Library & Museum, New York

Early each morning Harmen and his three oldest sons went to work at the mill. Quiet settled over the van Rijn house. Rembrandt, painting in his studio, could hear the soft whir of his mother's spinning wheel, as she sat working by the window in the next room.

Rembrandt loved to draw his mother's gentle face. He drew her while she worked wearing a plain dark dress and a huge white bonnet.

Sometimes when she had finished her work she would open a book and start to read. One day he painted her bending over a huge book. She wears a red cloak over her dress, with a decorative brown scarf covering her head. The light which shines on the white pages of the book also illuminates her wrinkled hand. Her face remains in the shadows as she concentrates on her reading. Hour after hour she would sit for him patiently, for she had a deep affection for her quiet artist son.

This is only one of the many pictures Rembrandt painted of his mother and some say she is painted here as the prophetess Anna.



THE ARTIST'S MOTHER, Etching, 1628
Minneapolis Institute of Art



OLD WOMAN READING, 1631
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Rembrandt looked at himself in the mirror. His blond curly hair stood out wildly from his head. Hunching up his shoulders, he let out a fierce shout. He studied his face intently to see how his eyebrows came together and his jaw pushed forward. The ferocious expression fascinated him and in quick rapid strokes he sketched what he saw.

In one year he made twenty etchings of his face. One shows him laughing; another, surprised. Art dealers from Amsterdam visited Rembrandt and were impressed with the young artist's portraits. More and more often they came to buy his etchings. Soon Rembrandt received orders from prosperous Dutch merchants who wanted him to come to Amsterdam to paint their portraits.

Rembrandt decided that he had lived in Leiden long enough. He was now twenty-six years old. His father had died, leaving the mill to his oldest sons, who had little in common with their artist brother. Only his good mother understood her quiet, hard-working son. Regretfully he said good-bye to her. Then he packed his paints and canvases and set out for Amsterdam in search of success.



SELF PORTRAITS, 1630
Morgan Library and Museum, New York

Amsterdam was a prosperous city in 1632. Along her canals were many fine houses. One of them belonged to a well-known surgeon whose name was Tulp, because of the large tulip which was carved on the front of his house. Twice a week Dr. Tulp lectured on anatomy in the amphitheater of the college of surgeons. His students gathered around him while he skillfully dissected a body. In Rembrandt's day, anatomy lessons were so popular that fashionable men and women came to watch the demonstrations. Many doctors commissioned artists to paint pictures of them lecturing on anatomy.

Soon after Rembrandt arrived in Amsterdam, Dr. Tulp called at his studio. He wanted the young artist to paint a picture which would show him lecturing to seven members of the college of surgeons.

This was Rembrandt's first big order. On a canvas five feet by seven he had to include eight life-size figures and a corpse. Rembrandt did not want to copy the style of other artists of his day. Instead of placing the eight doctors in a row, he arranged the group of figures in the shape of a pyramid. A strong light shines on the table where the corpse is lying and plays on the faces of the eight doctors. Rembrandt painted the heads with great care in order that each should be a perfect likeness. Three of the doctors lean over the table, watching the demonstration with intense interest. Two are seated at the near side of the table, their heads turned in profile. Another holds a paper on which are written the names of the eight surgeons. The only doctor who does not look at the corpse is the one whose head forms the top of the pyramid. To the right, behind the table, sits Dr. Tulp, dressed in a black cloak and broad-brimmed hat. Light shines on his face, his white starched collar, and his sensitive surgeon's hands.

Rembrandt was only twenty-six years old when he painted *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*. It was a daring experiment, but it was successful. Proudly Dr. Tulp and the seven surgeons hung the picture in their amphitheater. Suddenly the young artist from Leiden became a popular portrait painter in Amsterdam.



THE ANATOMY LESSON OF DR. NICOLAES TULP, 1632
Mauritshuis, The Hague