



CM MASTERPIECE
MINUTE



Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and their guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

This week we look at a masterpiece of printmaking in a self-portrait by the famous Dutch artist Rembrandt.

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, or simply Rembrandt, was born in Leiden in the Dutch Republic in 1606.

Leiden was the home of one of Europe's great universities, where Rembrandt was briefly

enrolled, and it was also known for its printing presses and for its small community of English pilgrims who would set sail for Plymouth Rock during Rembrandt's childhood.

While he found success as a young artist in his hometown, the driven and ambitious Rembrandt had relocated to the booming commercial center of Amsterdam by 1632.

He earned his first big paychecks by painting life-size portraits of the wealthy, often self-made merchants of the city. He also attracted commissions from the ruling stadholder, Prince Frederick Henry, in the 1630s and 1640s.

Rembrandt is best known for the enormous group portrait, the Night Watch at the

Rijksmuseum, painted in 1642. However, during his lifetime, Rembrandt's fame rested on his prints, which reached audiences all over Europe and were primarily in the medium of etching.

In this, his best known etching self-portrait, Rembrandt shows himself at work—holding a drypoint needle, which he is using to add details to an etched copper plate. His Signature hanging in the window is done with this delicate tool. While he continued to paint self-portraits through his career, this was the first in a decade in etching and is currently on view in the recently opened exhibition *Rembrandt and Printmaking in the Netherlands*.

Rembrandt was endlessly curious, and though he never left the Netherlands, he was fascinated by other cultures. He collected art work from all over the world, including Mughal India, China, Java and Renaissance Italy. His close ties with the Amsterdam's thriving Jewish community—many of Portuguese origin—are well known.

He also delighted in the science-y side of printmaking, tinkering obsessively and pulling impressions after each set of changes (called states), sometimes using paper imported from East Asia and modulating ink levels to manipulate surface tone. Sometimes he would make intentional errors—known as foul-biting—in the acid-bath etching process, for unexpected variations.

This has been Doc Brown with Masterpiece Minute. Thanks for joining us here on Virtual SDMA—see you next Friday!

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