

**REMBRANDT EXHIBITION AT HARVARD'S BUSCH-REISINGER MUSEUM
FEATURES GROUPS OF WORKS AND ENCOURAGES THE STUDY OF
TECHNIQUE**

Exhibition Commemorates the 400th Anniversary of the Birth of Rembrandt van Rijn



Rembrandt van Rijn, *Three Studies of a Child and One of an Old Woman*, c. 1640. Brown ink and brown wash and touches of white gouache (discolored) on white antique laid paper, 21.4 x 16 cm. Fogg Art Museum. Gift of Meta and Paul J. Sachs, 1949.4. Photo: Photographic Services © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

CAMBRIDGE, MA (July 17, 2006)—Selected primarily from Harvard collections, **Rembrandt and the Aesthetics of Technique**, an exhibition at the Busch-Reisinger Museum from **September 9 to December 10, 2006**, will invite visitors to engage intensively with nearly fifty drawings, paintings, and prints by the master, his pupils, and his contemporaries. The exhibition will focus primarily on the role of technique—the artist's manipulation of his materials—in enabling the innovative visual effects that distinguish Rembrandt's creative achievement. Arranged in several small groups of works, the installation will encourage visitors to make comparisons that highlight, through similarity or contrast, some of the artist's technical decisions. The exhibition was organized at the Harvard

University Art Museums by William W. Robinson, Maida and George Abrams Curator in the Department of Drawings, and Ivan Gaskell, Margaret S. Winthrop Curator in the Department of European Painting, Sculpture, and Decorative Arts. Robinson and Gaskell are two of the world's leading scholars in the field of 17th-century Dutch studies.

Rembrandt's technical skill tends to be overshadowed by his genius and by his mastery of so many other elements, including invention, iconographical innovation, and expression. Yet technical factors—such as the use of pen strokes that are thick in some areas and thin elsewhere,

broken or continuous, densely packed or widely dispersed—determine much of the aesthetic impact of his or any artist’s production. “With each stroke, he chose to produce a particular mark in a particular form with a particular material using a particular instrument in a particular place on a particular surface,” said Gaskell. “The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said of the relationship between talent, genius, and skill, ‘Genius is what makes us forget skill.’ While there is no disputing Rembrandt’s genius, we are determined to explore the skill involved in the making of the objects by proposing visual comparisons among works to draw attention to technical features.”

The exhibition provokes viewers to look carefully at what can only be seen when confronting the original works of art. The focus on technique, using carefully selected groups of works in conjunction with an encouraged first-hand visual analysis of the objects, is what sets this exhibition apart. “It is only through the close examination of the actual works that this technical proficiency is revealed,” said Robinson. “These traces of technique are lost or distorted in the reproductions in books, slides, or digital images. Although technological developments in the media through the years have helped to promote the appreciation of art and the study of art history, in this exhibition we are presenting a case for people to engage with the original works in a more intensive way and, we hope, come away with a different understanding.”

The installation features groups of works that are divided into categories that illustrate various techniques for rendering tonality, emotional expression, perspective, space in landscape, and other effects. One group consists entirely of landscapes with rustic buildings. Although they share the same subject matter, the different media—drawing ink, wash, chalk, printer’s ink—applied with a wide range of strokes, produces an astonishing array of impressions of space, light, shadow, and texture. Another group focuses the visitor’s attention on Rembrandt’s inventive use of drawn and etched lines to evoke the psychological interaction between two figures in scenes from the Bible.

While the two curators served as the senior organizers of the exhibition and collaborated in the development of the concept, much of the research to establish pairings or small groups of objects was conducted by Willemijn Lindenhovius, curatorial intern in the Department of Drawings, and

Edward Wouk, Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University, and Mellon Intern in the Department of European Painting, Sculpture, and Decorative Arts. “This exhibition is fundamental in terms of its support of our mission of teaching and research,” said Thomas W. Lentz, Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard University Art Museums. “While it exemplifies innovative, transdisciplinary curatorial scholarship, it also points to the essential role of the Art Museums in educating graduate students and advanced level interns by means of both theoretical discussion and guided practice.”

A grant in support of the exhibition came from The Netherland-America Foundation, Inc. Additional funding for the exhibition came from Dr. Alfred Bader and Johnny Van Haeften and also from The Annemarie Henle Pope Special Exhibitions Fund.

Featured Works

Featured works by Rembrandt in the exhibition include the painting *Portrait of an Old Man* (1632), the renowned pen-and-ink drawing *Landscape with a Farmstead (Winter Landscape)* (c. 1648–50), the drawings *A Farm on the Amsteldijk* (c. 1650–52) and *Zacharias and the Angel* (c. 1635), and impressions of several important etchings, such as *The Three Trees* (1643) and *Landscape with a View Toward Haarlem (The Goldweigher’s Field)* (1651). Also included will be one of only seven known letters written by Rembrandt from the collection of the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

Brochure

A gallery guide will accompany the exhibition. It contains the essay “Rembrandt’s Genius, Wittgenstein’s Warning” by curator Ivan Gaskell and a checklist of objects. A grant in support of the gallery guide came from the Consulate-General of the Netherlands, New York.

The Harvard University Art Museums

The Harvard University Art Museums are one of the world's leading arts institutions, comprising of the Arthur M. Sackler, Busch-Reisinger, and Fogg Art Museums, the Straus Center for Conservation, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the HUAM Archives, and the U.S. headquarters for the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis.

The Harvard University Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. As an integral part of the Harvard community, the three art museums and four research centers serve as resources for all students, adding a special dimension to their areas of study. The public is welcome to experience the collections and exhibitions as well as to enjoy lectures, symposia, and other programs.

For more than a century, the Harvard University Art Museums have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and scholars and are renowned for their role in the development of the discipline of art history in this country.

Location and Hours

The Fogg Art Museum and the Busch-Reisinger Museum are located at 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Adjacent to them is the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, located at 485 Broadway. Each museum is a short walk through Harvard Yard from the Harvard Square MBTA station.

Hours: Monday **through Saturday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.**; **Sunday 1:00–5:00 p.m.**; closed on national holidays.

General admission is \$9; \$7 for senior citizens; and \$6 for students. Paid admission includes entrance to all three Art Museums, including study rooms, public tours, and gallery talks.

Admission is free for Harvard University ID holders, Members of the Art Museums, Cambridge Public Library cardholders, and visitors under 18 years of age. Admission is free to all on Saturdays before noon. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or on the Internet at www.artmuseums.harvard.edu.

The Harvard University Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

###

For more information about these exhibitions or the Harvard University Art Museums, please contact:

Daron Manoogian, Public Relations Manager
Harvard University Art Museums
tel 617-495-2397; fax 617-496-9762
daron_manoogian@harvard.edu

Mary Haus / Casey Barber
Resnicow Schroeder Associates
tel 860-679-9204 / 212-671-5179
mhaus / cbarber@resnicowschroeder.com