



TITLE: *The Descent from the Cross by Torchlight*
 ARTIST: Rembrandt van Rijn
 DATE: 1654
 SIZE: Image 8 1/2 x 6 3/4; framed :13 1/8 x 11 1/4 inches
 MEDIUM: Etching with drypoint
 ACCESSION #: 96.9
 Additional works in the collection by the artist?
 Yes No



RELATED TERMINOLOGY

Etching: An engraving printmaking method where the design is cut or bitten into the metal plate with a sharp needle. The needle scratches a layer of soft wax or resin that temporarily coats the metal printing plate for the purpose of allowing the artist to draw his or her work. Once the drawing with the needle is complete, the etcher immerses the plate in acid to burn the drawing into the plate where the artist's needle has scratched away the waxy substance.

HISTORIAN'S STATEMENT

"Rembrandt printed more self-portraits than anyone before him and practically anyone since, and... one can see how intensely he studied himself and worked to convey something of his character and the strength of his intellect through his self-portraits" –H. Perry Chapman

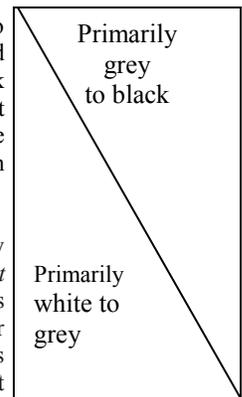
ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn is one of the most distinguished Dutch painters or printmakers in western art. He expressed his talent through a variety of artistic themes. These themes, as well as his subject matter, contrast with those of other Dutch painters. Most Dutch artists painted still-life imagery or everyday scenes. Rembrandt, however, varied his works with mythological figures, biblical subjects, and self-portraits. His oeuvre includes more than 600 paintings, 300 etchings, and about 2,000 drawings. Rembrandt's painting style was distinctive. He created dramatic figures using energetic brushstrokes. During his life, Rembrandt became a significant artist through his instinctive ability to rapidly capture a scene within the borders of a two dimensional surface. In addition, he achieved recognition by painting portraits for important patrons. Whether his art was lucrative or not, Rembrandt always showed skill and emotion.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION: Light and Dark

Rembrandt's paintings and prints reveal his love for dark and light contrasts. According to Van Hoogstraten, who was Rembrandt's pupil, Rembrandt applied a rule that can be seen in his artworks. The highest values were situated around light. The darkest tones juxtapose less dark tones to avoid a total meeting of the edges of his light and dark sections. Rembrandt's light nonetheless depends on darkness. Contrast of light and dark is important but Rembrandt seemed to make his light come from the darkness. Light glows from the skin of figures, from surfaces, and from the deeper space of his compositions. It is easy to see at a glance the light-dark structure of Rembrandt's composition in *The Descent from the Cross by Torchlight*.

In 1654, Rembrandt started issuing religious prints of similar size and orientation, horizontal prints for Infancy scenes and vertical prints for the varied scenes from the Life of Christ. *The Descent from the Cross by Torchlight* (1654) appears to be one of these religious prints but it also shows Rembrandt's use of light and dark. Light extends from the upper left corner of the print where the cloth provides a white area. The light drops downward to the lower right, where it is reflected on the waiting stretcher below. It shines onto the knees and legs of Christ and across his face. Rembrandt divided his composition diagonally, nearly in half, through the use of light and dark. In the left hand resultant triangular area, the action is highlighted in a value image of primarily white to grey. The right area is primarily grey to black.



MEDIA DESCRIPTION: Rembrandt's Etching Techniques

Rembrandt, an innovative printmaker, contributed to the development of etching and drypoint by drawing more freely on the copper plate than printmakers before him. The artist utilized a "step" process by making revisions after each printing. This allowed consecutive editions made from the same plate called "states." He adjusted and diversified his etching lines through pressure control on the needle and through burning. He combined etching with drypoint, used varnish to control the effect of acid on the plate, and made modifications to his images through the use of wax and varnish. He used a burnisher to remove lines and intensify the effect of light.

REFERENCES

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Self-Portrait with Lace Collar. 1629, 15" x 11 1/3", Oil on canvas. Mauritshuis, The Hague, Netherlands.

Creating Your Own Self-Portrait Like Rembrandt ACTIVITY LESSON PLAN: K—5

Session Activity:

Each student will have the opportunity to create a self-portrait utilizing strong lights and darks as Rembrandt did in his series of self-portraits and as he did in works like *The Descent from the Cross by Torchlight*.

Objectives

Students will be introduced to prints and self-portraits by Rembrandt.
Students will learn the effects of using lights and darks like Rembrandt.
Students will be introduced to the term "value."

Materials:

Images of prints and self-portraits by Rembrandt
Spotlight
Drawing and painting materials
Printmaking materials if desired

Vocabulary :

Value
shadow, darkness, contrast, and light are expressions of value.

Activity Procedures:

1. Show *The Descent from the Cross by Torchlight* and other prints by Rembrandt which emphasize lights and darks. Many images of prints by Rembrandt can be accessed on the internet. A variety with appropriate subject matter for public school elementary use are available.
2. Ask students to identify what is light and what is dark in the prints. Ask them to identify areas between the light and dark. Explain the vocabulary word "value" and relate it to the discussion.
3. Ask what is happening in the prints.
4. Show students a self-portrait by Rembrandt that shows strong light and dark contrast (self-portraits by Rembrandt are also available on the internet).
5. Ask them to describe what is light and what is dark in the portrait.
6. Provide a spotlight for student use in the classroom. Allow students to spotlight each other to notice lights and darks on their faces.
7. Have them create light/dark portraits of each other in pencil or paint.
8. If desired, translate these images to become styroform prints.

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: K—5

Strand B: Creation & Communication

Standard: The student creates and communicates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas using knowledge of structures and functions of visual arts.

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS: 6—12

Strand D: Aesthetic & Critical Analysis

Standard: The student assesses, evaluates and responds to the characteristics of works of art.

Self-study in Light and Dark ART HISTORY LESSON PLAN: 6—12

Session Activity & Objectives:

Even though most artists produce self-portraits during their lifetime, Rembrandt depicted himself in approximately forty to fifty paintings, thirty-two etchings and several drawings. Therefore, many scholars agree that a Rembrandt self portrait reflects "his journey of self discovery." Students will explore Rembrandt's self-discovery which also reflects his emotions. Mainly, Rembrandt's self-portraits focused on his face. They provide a psychological description through change of his pupil color, his wrinkles, his lips, and so on

The objectives of this lesson plan are:

- The students will discuss the effects of light and dark on the expression in Rembrandt's painting.
- The students will discuss Rembrandt's self-portraits through speculation of his thoughts and emotions.

Discussion:

First students will discuss Rembrandt's print *The Descent from the Cross by Torchlight* and the way he expressed his emotion in the work. The print provides a good introduction since it only uses value. Then students will be introduced to the self-portraits pictured here. One self-portrait was painted in 1634 and the other self- portrait was painted in 1661. Ask students the following questions:

- How does the light and dark affect the expression in each painting?
- Can you imagine Rembrandt's feelings by an examination of his facial expressions?
- Compare and contrast the use of light and dark in each painting.
- Compare and contrast Rembrandt's life stage and feelings in each painting.

After extensive discussion about Rembrandt's paintings, the students will create self-portraits. These paintings will utilize strong lights and darks and emotional expression.



Self-Portrait, 1634, 20 1/2" x 24", Oil on panel, Galleria Degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.



Self-Portrait, 1661, 30 1/3" x 35 4/5", Oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, Holland.