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## A National Gallery, a Dutchman called Rembrandt and HIGHLIGHTS

by Asbjorn Lonvig



A few years ago I rushed out of a room in Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Gesticulating to my family, there are three Rembrandts - hanging side by side inside that room!! Come, come, come. "Who is Rembrandt?", one said. I believe it was in order to joke about my enthusiasm.

At an exhibition at the National Gallery in Denmark - in Danish it's called [Statens Museum for Kunst](#) - there is an exhibition titled "Rembrandt? The Master and his Workshop". It takes place 4 February - 14 May 2006.

At this exhibition there are 100 Rembrandts! There are 19 paintings and then prints and drawings by Rembrandt. As I entered into the dark room with one spotlight on each Rembrandt my enthusiasm was transformed into thankfulness and humility. Thankfulness and humility due to the fact that I was blessed to experience this. Contributions and loans from the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, the Mauritshuis in the Hague, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the National Gallery in London, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and more made this unique event possible. An experience of a lifetime. The bare presence of 100 Rembrandts in one museum was far from the only highlight.

### 2 genuine Rembrandts found in Copenhagen.

*The National Gallery in Copenhagen found two genuine Rembrandt paintings by the master himself in their archives. Two paintings that have lived a life of obscurity in the collections at the National Gallery after having been rejected as genuine Rembrandts at different points during the 20th century.*

As soon as I came home from the exhibition I took a close look at my own archives. But unfortunately I found no Rembrandts.

The 2 paintings are now reattributed to Rembrandt. After three years of studies conducted in close co-operation with international experts, The National Gallery is in a position to conclude that in addition to a rich collection of prints and drawings by Rembrandt, the museum also owns two genuine paintings by the master himself.

Below you can study the two reattributed Rembrandts.



**Study of an Old Man in Profile**, c. 1630  
 approximately 20 x 25 cm - that's 8" x 10"  
 oil on canvas  
 Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69)

You **must** click on the painting. I have made a large image available, so that you can enjoy it yourself.

The small *Study of an Old Man in Profile* is find made by Karl Madsen at Fredensborg Castle, where he discovered the painting in a storage in 1899. However, Rembrandt scholars doubted this attribution from as far back as 1933 onwards. Their doubts were mainly caused by the coarse style of painting. The scholars of the time found it difficult to reconcile this coarseness with what they thought of as the typically very meticulous and carefully finished style of Rembrandt's early works. Recent art history has, however, pointed out that even during the earliest stage of his career - the years spent painting in his native town of Leiden - Rembrandt experimented with broader and more varied brushstrokes. Like other works by the young Rembrandt, this small painting appears to be a practice piece. X-ray studies bear out this theory by showing us that the old man's head was painted on top of another head that appears in several of Rembrandt's paintings from those years. At the same time, studies of the wooden panel show that the wood can be traced back to Rembrandt in terms of both geography and time.



**The Crusader**, c.1659-61  
approximately 60 x 80 cm - that's 23" x 31"  
oil on canvas  
Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69)

You **must** click on the painting. I have made a large image available, so that you can enjoy it yourself.

In 1911 the Rembrandt connoisseur and then director of The National Gallery, Karl Madsen, found *The Crusader* in a remote corner of Fredensborg Castle where it had been placed in temporary storage. Despite Karl Madsen's evident enthusiasm for the painting, its status was soon called into question, and in 1969 it was rejected as a Rembrandt. The most recent studies now tell us that the painting is a sketch for *The Knight with the Falcon* (Göteborgs Konstmuseum). X-rays support this assumption by demonstrating that the underlying layers of paint are built up in a manner typical of Rembrandt. The piece presumably depicts the Dutch Saint Bavo, and the painting has the convincing oscillation between the precise and the spontaneous that is so typical of Rembrandt. At the same time it exemplifies the pastose manner of painting characteristic of the artist's late work.

There are, however, some signs to suggest that parts of the painting were done by one of Rembrandt's students, a common practice at the master's workshop.

The studies took place in co-operation with an international panel of experts comprising the head of the Rembrandt Research Project, professor dr. Ernst van de Wetering, research technician with the Rembrandt Research Project Karin Groen, senior conservator David Bomford from the National Gallery in London, and head of conservation at the National Gallery Jørgen Wadum. Based on the latest knowledge about Rembrandt and the artists in the circle around him - and technical studies such as x-rays, infrared reflectography, dendrochronology (the science of dating wood), studies of the canvas thread count, ground, layers of paint, etc. - the National Gallery has obtained much more knowledge about the works in question. For example, the two reattributed works have been placed at either end of Rembrandt's life's work. The studies are documented in a comprehensive book published in connection with the exhibition.

**The National Gallery - Statens Museum for Kunst.  
The Old Building.**

A National Gallery with Rembrandts you would probably expect to look like this:



The museum building dates back to 1896 and was designed in ornamental historicism by the architect Wilhelm Dahlerup. This building reflects the exuberant joy - so typical of the period - taken in mixing several historical styles. This is most clearly evident from the richly decorated facade and the imposing entrance, which makes for a solemn transition from the outside world into the museum collections.

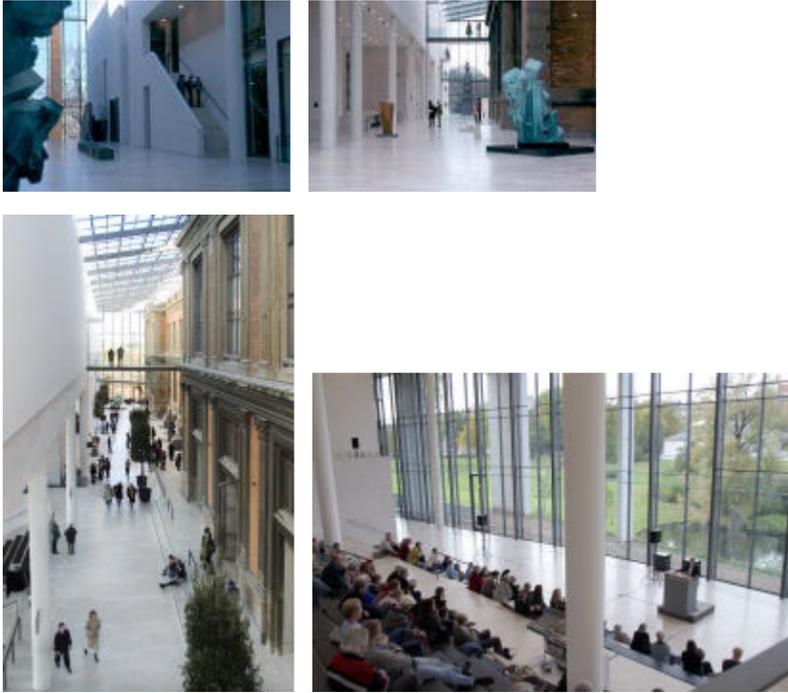


And the interior?  
You might expect it to look like this.  
Wouldn't you?

**The National Gallery - Statens Museum for Kunst.  
The New Building.**

You would NOT expect the architecture to look like this:





In the huge stage room there was a projector and a screen.  
Wonderful surroundings for an interactive lecture.

The National Gallery has two faces.  
The new facade.  
And the old facade.  
One that depicts care for contemporary and modernistic trends.  
And another that depicts care for the past.

The first highlight was 100 Rembrandts in one place,  
the second highlight was the two genuine Rembrandt paintings  
and the third highlight is an exhibition called...HIGHLIGHTS.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS - an exhibition.**

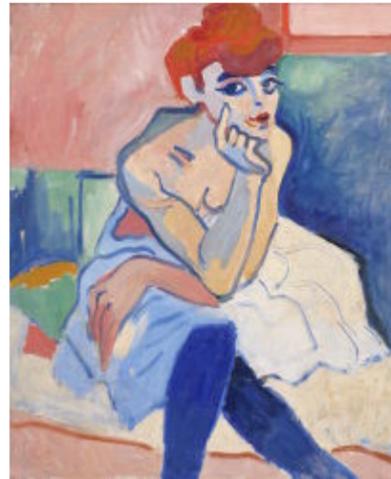
The most outstanding works in the collections of the National Gallery are presented in a new, challenging way.  
In connection with an extensive fireproofing of the old building a plentiful selection of 700 years of art - ranging from contemporary artist Baselitz via Jorn, Picasso, Braque, Matisse to Eckersberg, El Greco, Cranach, Mantegna, Lorenzetti - and many others.  
I must not forget Rubens.  
The presentation is in some ways like the compact floor-to-ceiling hanging of the past, as experienced by the first guests to the National Gallery when it opened in 1896.



The works are hung from floor to ceiling and arranged chronologically.  
However, the surroundings are changed, and the old paintings presents themselves quite differently in the white, spacious rooms of the new building, just as the juxtaposition of the works show new analogies.

#### **2004 - 1905 Contemporary and Modern Art**

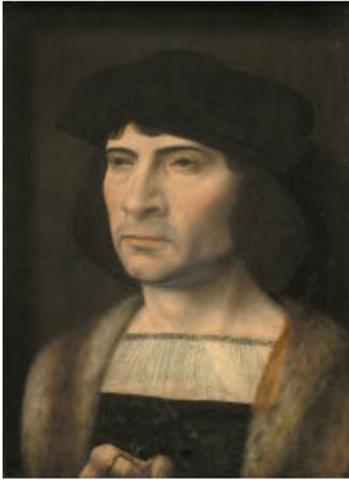
I have selected some of the art works from HIGHLIGHTS. They are shown in reverse chronological order:



Georg Baselitz (f. 1938), Crema, 2004, oil on canvas  
Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973), Naked Woman lying by Window, 1971, pencil, red and blue chalk  
Asger Jorn (1914 - 1973), Vision Rouge (Red Visions), 1944, oil on canvas  
Amedeo Modigliani (1884 - 1920), Alice, 1918, oil on canvas  
Georges Braque (1882 - 1963), Arbres (The Trees at l'Estaque), 1908, oil on canvas  
André Derain (1880 - 1954), La danseuse ou la femme en chemise (woman in chemise), 1906, oil on canvas  
Henri Matisse (1869 - 1954), Portrait of Madame Matisse. The Green Line, 1905, oil on canvas

**1820 - 1337 Older Art.**  
Shown in reverse chronological order:





C.W. Eckersberg (1783 - 1853), Bella and Hanna. The Eldest Daughters of M.L. Nathanson, 1820, oil on canvas  
El Greco (1541 - 1614), Portrait of a Man, 1570-1575, oil on canvas  
Nicolas Poussin (1594 - 1665), The Testament of Eudamidas, 1644-1648, oil on canvas  
Jan Gossaert (1478 - 1532), Portrait of a Man, 1493-1532, oil on wood  
Lucas Cranach d. Æ. (1472 - 1553), Venus with Cupid stealing honey, 1530, oil on wood  
Parmigianino (1503 - 1540), Portrait of Lorenza Cybo, 1523, oil on wood  
Andrea Mantegna (1430 - 1506), Christ as the suffering Redeemer, 1495-1500, tempera on panel  
Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1317 - 1348), St. John the Baptist, 1337-42, tempera on panel

**After HIGHLIGHT.**

The hanging is sure challenging. The art works do not have the space they usually have.  
The juxtaposition of the works is challenging.  
Old paintings side by side with new.  
Styles are mixed.  
Old paintings in the new building.  
Sure new analogies are exposed.

But I have as a spectator a unique opportunity to explore.  
I myself had paid no attention to Gijsbrechts before.  
The Flemish Cornelius Nobertus Gijsbrechts.  
He was a painter at the Danish Royal Court for some years.  
He painted kind of photo realistic.  
He had a wonderful twisted brain, he painted the backside of a framed painting.  
A painting from 1675 seemed contemporary to me.  
I know a contemporary guy who paints in exactly the same way.  
I admire the craftsmanship.

Last time I had this feeling that a deceased artist lives right now was in Chicago.  
In Oak Park I saw several of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses.  
One from 1909 seemed built yesterday.

**Two more exhibitions:**

Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen: EgoShow, the x-room 18 February - 14 May 2006 and Danish Sculpture 1850-2000 in The Sculpture Street between the old and the new building.  
It's not fair to either Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen or Danish sculptures to say anything about these exhibitions.  
I saw them.  
But my perception tools had been shut down due to mental exhaustion.

**Thoughts.**

Doing something challenging in the art world that forms a synthesis without deriving focus from the art - that's a branch of art itself.  
With the exhibitions  
"Rembrandt? The Master and his Workshop" and  
SMK HIGHLIGHTS  
the National Gallery has succeeded in this branch of art.

Once I saw something challenging in the art world that formed a synthesis without deriving focus from the art.  
It was back in 1993.  
Koldinghus Castle Ruin in Kolding, Denmark is most delicately restored and renewed by the architects Inger and Johannes Exner 1972-92.  
The combination of this extraordinary historical atmosphere, the contemporary architecture and Miró's sculptures formed a synthesis.

The presence of the name Allis Helleland in both cases, at the National Gallery and at Koldinghus Castle Ruin might be coincidental?  
It is not.

**Photos: By SMK Foto (permission granted)**

**ATTENTION**

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