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Rembrandt Harmensz. Van Rijn
Self-portrait in a Velvet Cap with Plume, 1638

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REMBRANDT HARMENSZ. VAN RIJN

(Leiden 1606 – 1669 Amsterdam)

SELF-PORTRAIT IN A VELVET CAP WITH PLUME, 1638

Etching on laid paper.

Plate 13.4 x 10.4 cm; 5 1/4 x 4 1/8 in.

Sheet 13.8 x 10.8 cm; 5 7/16 x 4 1/4 in.

Framed 37.4 x 34.4 cm; 14 3/4 x 13 9/16 in.

Signed and dated upper left on the plate: 'Rembrandt f 1638'.

Later pencil inscriptions on the verso, upper left: '9918 25D', centre: '25', lower centre: 'B.20', 'H.156', 'only state', 'R.474', '2', '10/6'

A very good, richly inked, black impression of New Hollstein's second state (of four).

Provenance

The Carlyon Family, Tregrehan House, Cornwall, probably acquired by Thomas Carlyon (c. 1755–1830) or William Carlyon (1781–1841);

then by descent to Tristram R. G. Carlyon (1877–1957);

sold *en-bloc* with most of the Rembrandt collection to Colnaghi by the executors in 1958;

With P. & D. Colnaghi & Co., London (with their stocknumber *R. 483* in pencil verso);

Private collection, London.

Literature

A. von Bartsch, *Catalogue raisonné de toutes les estampes qui forment l'oeuvre de Rembrandt, et ceux de ses principaux imitateurs*, Vienna 1797, no. 20.

A. M. Hind, *A Catalogue of Rembrandt's Etchings; Chronologically Arranged and Completely Illustrated*, London 1923, no. 156.

C. White and K. G. Boon, *Hollstein's Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, ca. 1450–1700*, vol. XVIII, *Rembrandt van Rijn*, Amsterdam 1969, no. 20.

E. Hinterding and J. Rutgers, *The New Hollstein Dutch & Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450–1700: Rembrandt*, Ouderkerk aan den IJssel 2013, vol. II, Text II, 1636–1665, pp. 31–32 no. 170 (state ii/iv) and p. 85 (ill.).

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Few other artists depicted themselves as regularly, and with such variety and psychological insight, as Rembrandt. Across more than three decades he etched over two dozen self-likenesses, alongside the painted and drawn self-portraits that have come to define his artistic persona. In these images his own face functions as both the most readily available model and the most pliable “actor”: it allows him to enact a narrative, to “try on” costume and role, and to probe how character might be conveyed through physiognomy.

The self-portraits also had clear professional uses within the Amsterdam of the mid-1630s: they could serve as demonstrations of personal style and virtuosity, suitable for circulation among patrons and prospective buyers, and as exemplary material for pupils learning how expression, age and temperament could be suggested through the smallest shifts of look and pose. Yet Rembrandt’s sustained return to himself exceeds any merely pragmatic rationale; it is bound up with an unusually alert interest in the outward signs of the human psyche.

This *Self-Portrait in a Velvet Cap with Plume* (1638) sits squarely within that moment of intense self-fashioning and public consolidation that marks the later 1630s. The half-length format, the direct, testing gaze, and the deliberately historicising apparel - velvet cap with plume, fur-edged mantle, richly patterned dress - situate the image in the productive overlap between self-portrait and *tronie*. As a painted point of comparison within the same moment, one may cite Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait in a Black Cap* (c. 1637, Wallace Collection, London), which similarly tests the expressive potential of pose and gaze.

The present sheet came from the Carlyon Family, based at Tregrehan House in Cornwall since 1565. After the death of Tristram Carlyon (1877-1957), a sizeable Rembrandt collection was sold to Colnaghi’s, where instead of the usual stock number beginning with the letter ‘C’ they were distinguished with an ‘R’ followed by a number.

Comparable impressions are today held in major public collections, including the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Harvard Art Museums (Fogg); the Art Institute of Chicago; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena; and the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

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Fig. 1. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait in a Black Cap*, c. 1637, oil on oak wood panel, 63 x 50.7 cm. London, Wallace Collection.

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