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Govert Flinck

(Kleve 1615 – 1660 Amsterdam)

The Penitent Saint Jerome

c. 1635-39

inscribed (lower right): *Rembrandt fecit*:

pen, sepia ink and wash on laid paper

12 x 13 cm.;

4 3/4 x 5 1/8 in.

Provenance

Paul J. Weis, New York, until December 1994;
From whom acquired by a private collection, Belgium.

Literature

O. Gersht et. al., *Govert Flinck - Reflecting History*, exh. cat., Kleve 2015, p. 173, cat. no. 33.

Expertise

P. Schatborn, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam, 1995;
T. van der Molen, Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam, 2015.

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Exhibited

Kleve, Royal Fine Arts Museum, *Govert Flinck - Reflecting History*, 4 October 2015 – 17 January 2016.

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This spirited sepia ink and wash drawing, which was traditionally ascribed to Rembrandt, was reattributed in 1995 to Govert Flinck – one of Rembrandt’s most gifted followers – by Peter Schatborn and dated by him to the mid to late 1630s (c. 1635-9): a period when Flinck was still working strongly under the influence of the older master. The rapid pen and ink and sepia wash drawing technique with cross hatching is typical of Flinck’s Rembrandtesque drawings executed during the 1630s.

The extent to which Flinck modelled his drawing style on Rembrandt can be seen by comparing Flinck’s *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* (Ecole des Beaux Arts, Paris) with a drawing by Rembrandt for a figure in the *Conversion of Saul* (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin), where the hatching technique is broadly similar. Flinck was also greatly influenced by Rembrandt’s etchings, as can be seen in Flinck’s first and only signed and dated drawing: the *Man Standing in Oriental Costume* of 1638 (George Abrams Collection, Fogg Art Museum, Massachusetts, fig. 1), where there is a similar interest in light and shadow; though there the refined technique is closer to Rembrandt’s prints than his drawings. Other parallels are with two sheets in the Boijmans van Beunigen Museum, Rotterdam: his *Two Studies of a Seated Man* (R13 PK, fig. 2) and *The Angel Appears to Manoah and his Wife* (R8 PK, fig. 3), both of which belonged to Sir Joshua Reynolds, and also a *Study of a Horse* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, fig. 4), which was believed at one time to be a study for the horse in Rembrandt’s *The Good Samaritan* (Wallace Collection, London, fig. 5): a painting thought until recently to be by Flinck when its attribution was returned to Rembrandt. As with the *Two Studies of a Seated Man*, Flinck’s interest in the fall of light and shadow is evident and can also be seen in our drawing in the cast shadow of the outstretched arms of the saint, who receives the divine light while kneeling in the desert.

After about 1643, when Flinck had begun to establish himself as an independent master, he seems to have largely abandoned the Rembrandtesque hatching style of the 1630s in favour of a softer style using chalk in preference to pen and ink and, possibly for commercial reasons, many of these later drawings are signed.

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The subject of *The Penitent St Jerome in the Desert*, one of the '4 Fathers of the Latin Church', was somewhat unusual in Dutch art in seventeenth-century Holland given its predominantly Protestant clientele and, as was the case with his master Rembrandt, the majority of Flinck's biblical paintings and drawings illustrate Old Testament subjects or scenes from the *Life of Christ* or *Acts of the Apostles*.

Biography

Born in Kleve, capital of the Duchy of Cleves, Flinck received his artistic training in Leuwarden, under Lambert Jacobsz, who also taught Jacob Backer. He moved to Amsterdam in order, according to Houbraken, to 'put his skills to the test' and lodged for a time in the house of the art dealer Hendrick van Uylenburgh along with Rembrandt. He worked for a time as an assistant in Rembrandt's studio where he became such a successful imitator of the manner of the older master that, according to Houbraken, his works were often taken to be by Rembrandt and sold as such. This is plausible given the strongly Rembrandtesque quality of his important work of the late 1630s, the *Isaac Blessing Jacob* of 1638 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, fig. 6) and the many other works by him in important museum collections, such as the *Negro Archer* (Wallace Collection, London, fig. 7), which were formerly attributed to Rembrandt. It was only around 1642, the year that Rembrandt painted the *Night Watch*, that Flinck started to develop a fully independent career as a painter, abandoning his earlier Rembrandtesque style in favour of a more courtly classicising aesthetic and brighter palette, influenced by Italian and Flemish prototypes.

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Figure 1. Govert Flinck, *Man Standing in Oriental Costume*, 1638.
George Abrams Collection, Fogg Art Museum, Massachusetts

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Figure 2. Govert Flinck, *Two Studies of a Seated Man*.
Boijmans van Beunigen Museum, Rotterdam, R13 PK

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Figure 3. Govert Flink, *The Angel Appears to Manoah and his Wife*.
Boijmans van Beunigen Museum, Rotterdam, R8 PK

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Figure 4. Govert Flinck, *Study of a Horse*.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 5. Rembrandt, *The Good Samaritan*.
Wallace Collection, London

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Figure 6. Govert Flinck, *Isaac Blessing Jacob*, 1638.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



Figure 7. Govert Flinck, *Negro Archer*.
Wallace Collection, London