

## AN OVERSIGHT

The Bust of an old man with bald head (Br. 148) in Cassel has the peculiarity of displaying the most penetrating eye in all of Rembrandt's *tronies* (fantasy heads) and of being signed "RHL-1632." Barring an oversight on my part, that makes it the only painting from that year to display this type of signature. It shares this distinction with two etchings, an Oriental Figure (B. 152) and the Rat-Poison Vendor (B. 121), both of which share the peculiarity of reversals in the last two digits of the date (see entry 6). A plausible explanation is that these plates were finished early in 1632, and that the artist hesitated long enough on the date to forget that he was signing an etching.

Considering Rembrandt's subsequent application of his signature in its definitive, post-1633 state, "Rembrandt," I assume that he was a consistent man, if not a creature of habit. Give or take the odd exceptions in 1633 and 1634 in which he reverted—for whatever reason—back to the "Rembrant" form, he stuck to the modified spelling of his first name for the rest of his career. This proves that, at a time in history when the spelling of names was not yet standardized, it was not a matter of indifference to him as far as his own name was concerned (see entry 31). If there is a painting signed "RHL-1632," as here, and assuming that no funny business was involved in the signing, then it must have been painted or signed around the beginning of the year. I would not vouch for its authenticity, but the subject and the artificiality of the treatment are not inconsistent with Rembrandt's personal obsessions and fondness for sensational effects.

As for the "RHL-1632" signature, the Rembrandt Research Project did not have the heart either to accept or reject it (like the painting). Here is how they went about it:

"The shape of the letters and figures shows no significant differences from Rembrandt signatures around 1630-32, but the use of the monogram without the addition of 'van Rijn' is unusual for paintings by Rembrandt dated 1632." (Corpus I, p. 587).

In other words, that would make it the second instance of Rembrandt signing a non-Rembrandt (according to the RRP), a fact that they forget to spell out. Probably just an oversight (see entries 20 and 24).

