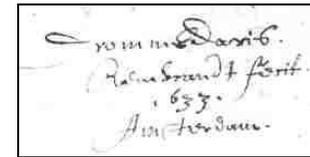
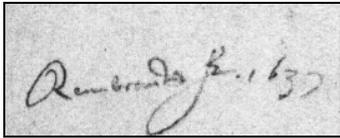
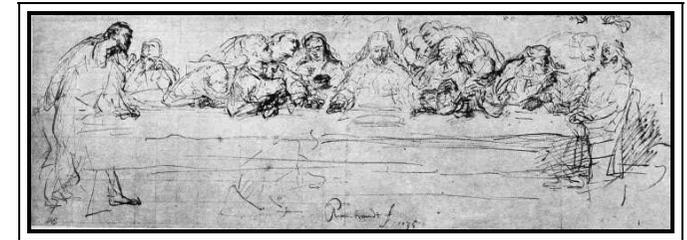


THE EVIDENCE OF THE DRAWINGS

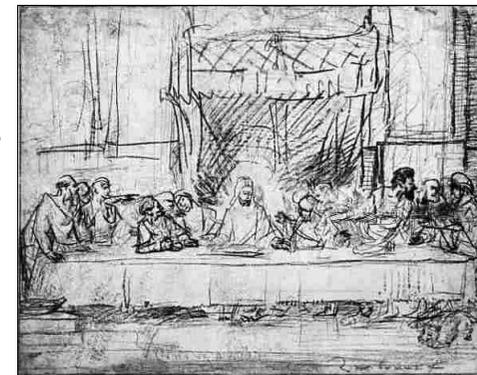
I have given only cursory attention to Rembrandt's drawings because they were generally not made for the market or worked through to the completion expected of paintings and prints. Accordingly, very few drawings are signed, and even fewer are dated, while some rare specimens are inscribed in his hand with information about the subject. Most of those that are signed, however, display signatures that come closer to autographs; they are like his penned signatures and often have a documentary character (Ben. 457, An Elephant, left, Ben. 453, A Dromedary, right). This is probably because drawing, often done with a quill or reed pen, is technically closer to writing.



The two drawings reproduced here are among the three sketches that Rembrandt made around 1635 after Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper (Ben. 445 and 1210). All three are signed: one with "Rembrant f" (bottom), the other "Rembrandt f 1635" (top). The signature on the third sketch (Ben. 444) was partially cut off, but is clearly of the "Rembrandt" type. They seem to be blatant attempts on Rembrandt's part to "get into the act" of one of the most famous works by one of the most famous artists of all time through the application of his signature.



The word "*pensée*" in French, which means "thought" or "idea," is still used in the artistic vocabulary to mean "sketch"; "*une première pensée*" means a first idea, or preliminary sketch for a composition. The large number of sketches and drawings produced by Rembrandt, well over a thousand, only few of which can directly be related to finished paintings and etchings, are as much an intellectual as an artistic achievement. Perhaps because of his relatively long schooling, Rembrandt could think better with a pen and paper in hand, but in pictorial terms.



ADDENDUM

An important fact that I forgot to mention or the importance of which I did not realize until now is that there are about a dozen drawings bearing inscriptions in Rembrandt's hand. These are from a few words to several lines in length, usually on the front of the sketch or drawing, and they generally concern its subject directly: those on the back are usually notes that Rembrandt made to himself about other matters. A few of these notations are partially or totally illegible.

One could ask why Rembrandt made these spontaneous notations at all, or why there are so few of them, but these questions would be very difficult, if not impossible, to answer.

The important thing is that under certain conditions Rembrandt did not hesitate to let drawing and writing co-exist on an equal basis. Although my source (the 1979 [Rembrandt Documents](#)) does not specify whether the same tool was used for the drawing and the writing, this seems to have been the case. Many were done with a reed pen. We therefore have direct proof that Rembrandt could shift casually from one medium to the other, as need dictated. The writing in such cases was no more an aesthetic element than the sketch was, since a sketch or drawing in those days was not an artistic end in itself, but only a means. Both the drawing and the inscription were descriptive or informative, the notation of a thought or idea, or aids to memory.

