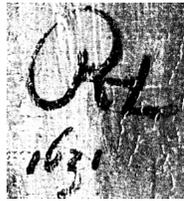
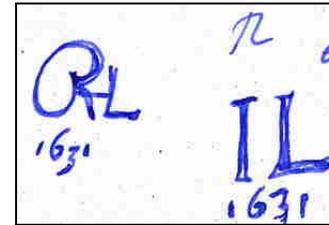


## BODY IMAGE



Have you ever wondered what Rembrandt *really* looked like? Not just his face, but his body too? I first wondered about this when I was studying his unique full-length Self-portrait with a poodle (1631, Br 16, see entry 36) in Paris. Whether the other, poodleless, version of this portrait (stashed away in a private Swiss collection) records an earlier state or a later extrapolation is not my concern here. The fact remains that, oriental stage costume aside, we see a fairly dumpy individual and can only applaud his decision to let himself be upstaged by a fashionable canine. As I pointed out elsewhere, this hangdog expression is to be seen again in his etched Self-portrait from 1633 (B 17, see entry 42). Considered purely formally, the shape of the poodle plus shadow make a good approximation of Rembrandt's monogram.

I wondered about this body thing more specifically in front of the two Crucifixions painted by Lievens and Rembrandt in 1631, which hung providentially side by side at De Lakenhal Museum in Leiden in 1992. It would be exaggerated to speak of self-portraiture here, yet something about these figures echoes the respective stances of the two artists. Lievens: an aesthetic and heroic physique, the figure long and straight, knees relaxed, set back, a hieratic attitude of detached suffering (profuse bleeding notwithstanding), and the whole set in a lofty, dramatic space. Rembrandt: a homely physique, expressive inflexion of the figure, legs tensed, unabashed outpouring of pain and doubt, and the whole within a cramped, earthbound space. These formal qualities are recapitulated by their respective signatures (sketched above, right): Lievens' formal "I L," traced in illusionistically carved Roman capitals; Rembrandt's fluid and



sweeping "RHL" monogram written in cursive capitals. With the monogram on the Portrait of Marten Looten (dated January 1632, see entry 13) depicted elsewhere, it is one of the boldest and most harmonious of the lot (see figs. in entries 36 and 44).

The range of religious expression achieved by these two paintings, supposedly based on the same prototype (the contemporary engraved copy of a famous Rubens Crucifixion), is amazing. Lievens' Christ proclaims that crucifixion humbles even the mighty, while Rembrandt's Christ suggests that surrender to divine will is the power of the lowly.



Left and right: Lievens by Lievens and Rembrandt by Lievens, both roughly contemporary, around 1630 (see entry 58).

