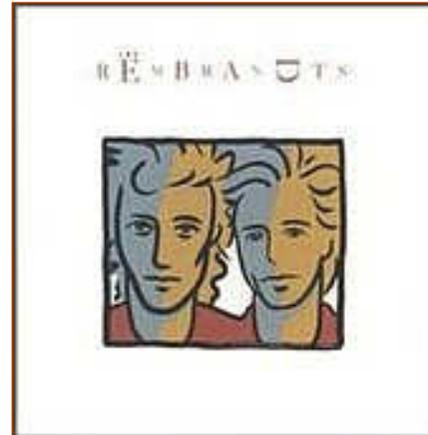


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Leiden was a much smaller town back then than it is now, and it is not unlikely that Rembrandt Harmensz. and Jan Lievensz. already met as children. Jan was one year younger, but began his apprenticeship six years earlier than Rembrandt, who was getting a liberal education. They are known to have shared at least one master, Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam (see entry 38); Jan apprenticed with him for three years, Rembrandt only for six months.

It is generally assumed today that the two artists worked together in the years between 1625 and 1631, possibly even sharing a studio. If this were true, it is strange that Jan Jansz. Orlers, who specified that Lievens worked in his father's house, did not mention this important detail. Orlers, a former burgomaster of Leiden and collector of Lievens' work, does not mention this association in his biographical sketches of Lievens and Rembrandt in 1641. There are many analogies in their subject matter and even their models, and there is evidence of a competition of sorts in the etchings and paintings, culminating—and ending—in 1631 with the parallel Lazarus and Crucifixion pictures. In the last analysis, however, the closeness of their association is an extrapolation from Constantijn Huygens' detailed, side-by-side discussion of the two young artists, whom he met in Leiden in 1628. Were they the only artists in Leiden? Are we in the realm of historical fact or Art Fiction?

On the strength of this literary association, the legend of Rembrandt's collaboration with Lievens has taken root and proliferated, much to Lievens' detriment, for he is often lumped together with Rembrandt's workshop or circle. Even when he finally gets an exhibition, it is



subtitled "A Painter in Rembrandt's Shadow" (Braunschweig 1979). What was the nature of their partnership? Did Rembrandt serve or pretend to serve as Lievens' journeyman to satisfy guild requirements? Did they work on paintings and etchings together, or only compare notes at the printer's shop? What could have been the affective tenor of their relationship?

Male rivalry? Mutual admiration? Camaraderie? More? Who was dependent on or beholden to whom and for what?

Lievens, who painted quite a few self-portraits himself (the first is dated 1626), had a six-year head start in his career and already had an excellent press; he had even been considered a child prodigy. We know from Huygens' account that he was sure of himself to a fault and not a little pushy (this was confirmed by letter from Lord Ancrum to his son in 1654). In contrast to Rembrandt, who had a pupil in Leiden as early as 1628 (Gerrit Dou)—the first of many more to come—Lievens seems not to have had any at all. Yet it is difficult imagining Rembrandt taking Dou, and then Jouderville as pupils while still working in Lievens' studio. And if they did get along well enough to work together, why did they fly so radically apart in 1631?

And if lack of models is supposed to explain the high frequency of self-portraiture by Rembrandt in 1629-31, how does Lievens' presence in the same studio, but absence in Rembrandt's work fit in the same scheme of things (see entry 58)?

The only documented evidence of anything nearing a collaborative effort in the medium of paint is the sickly-sweet portrait-head of a child in the Rijksmuseum (Inv. 1461a, opp. left) that bears the inscription "*Rembrandt geretucaer Liev.*", in other words: Lievens retouched by Rembrandt—surely the most cruel of jokes. The case of the etchings is another matter. Both began trying their hands at this medium around 1627, Lievens possibly even earlier. This presumes that someone had the materials and a press, most likely a third party like Jan Jorisz. van Vliet, although Lievens let other engravers copy his pictures (F. van den Wijngaerde, M. van den Enden). As in the paintings, there are many similar subjects, usually single figures, many of which represent an old man and an old woman traditionally identified as Rembrandt's father and mother.

More to the point, however, is a series of etchings, all dated 1630 or 1631 (Rembrandt's most intensive period of etching), and signed with what seems to be the "RHL" monogram without a crossbar, thus reading "RL" (see entry 6). Apart from the fact that Rembrandt is a first name and Lievens a last name, might this be a downplayed admission of collaboration? At least one author, André Charles Coppier (1929), argued that the "RHL" monogram was the studio logo used by Rembrandt and Lievens. Apart from pulling the rug from under one's feet, this raises the question of what the "L" really stood for.

Strangely enough, the copies of Rembrandt paintings engraved by van Vliet in Leiden at this time give Rembrandt's name as "RH. v [or van] Rijn" (there is one exception), leaving out the "L." Was there an ambiguity in the presence of this "L" (Lucas van Leyden/Leiden/Lievens?), which is generally taken to mean "Leydensis" (i.e. of Leiden)? Did Rembrandt benefit, and perhaps later suffer, from this built-in reference to Lievens (whose name rhymed so well with Rubens)?

Nevertheless, in 1631 their respective ways parted; one leading to London, the other to Amsterdam. Rembrandt's production of etchings plummeted, and his signature almost immediately began taking on new forms (see entries 6 and 50). Did the end of his "association" with Lievens and van Vliet and the beginning of his more formal association with Hendrick Uylenburgh somehow create the legal/commercial/personal necessity to reformulate and particularize Rembrandt's signature further? By 1633, the only thing that remained of his past in his name was the way it was pronounced.



Alleged portrait sketch of Jan by Rembrandt