

## THE NAME GAME / PIETRO LASMAN

Also known as Pieter Lastman (1583-1633), Jan Lieven's master for three years around 1618-21 and Rembrandt's master in Amsterdam for several months in 1623. This very successful history painter had made the requisite pilgrimage to Italy and Rome, but either discouraged or failed to inspire his pupils to follow in his footsteps.

He seems to have been an assiduous signer of his own works and to have worked on his name as well as on his signatures: we can observe a gradual change in spelling between 1606 and 1608 from "Lasman" to "Lastman." J.J. Orlers, in his 1641 biographical note on Rembrandt, still referred to him as "Lasman." The signatures on his drawings and paintings take several forms, alternating between initials (with or without monogram) and monogram plus the last name spelled out. Although some early initials (1613) are done in a very ornate script with letters traced in a single flowing line, his preference seems to have been for a clear monogram—"P" with stem extended to the right like a foot—in Roman capitals, more often than not painted to imitate a carved inscription.

Rembrandt's earliest initials and monograms—before he gave his "R" its closed-loop, one-stroke form (see entries 40 and 50)—are reminiscent of Lastman's signature on paintings, while the latter's handwritten signature bear an uncanny resemblance to Rembrandt's looping "R" (see fig. lower right). It was in fact only when his "R" came into its own, sometime in 1629, that Rembrandt finally incorporated the "L" into a monogram.

For his part, hard put to create a monogram out of "I.L.," yet neither pedantic enough to stick to "J. Livius," nor modest enough to settle for the plain "L" he occasionally used, Lievens made more sparing application of his signature (see entry 49). When he did sign, he remained faithful to his master's classic signature style.

Of course any relationship that could be traced between these two generations of signatures would be conjectural, but precisely because the signature is both a personal text and a sign of context, it can be studied as a document revealing strategies to assert degrees of individuality, background and identification. (except for the two signatures in the lower right corner, my copies were sketched in front of the originals).

