

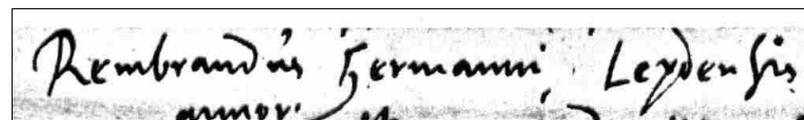
LET'S CALL HIM REMBRANT!

Neeltje Willemsdr. and Harman Gerritsz. van Rijn's sixth son (third surviving) and ninth child out of ten was given the Christian name Rembrant. This was by no means a common name, and I reluctantly take the experts' word for it that he was named after his maternal grandmother, Reijmtge (Remigia) Cornelisdr. North European names often work with native prefixes and suffixes: Gerhard, Gerbrant, Antje, Neeltje...

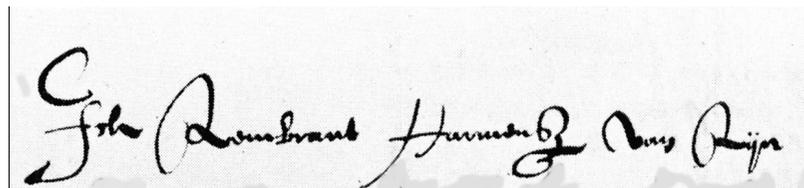
In the small, decentralized world of the United Provinces, at a time when handwriting reigned supreme and few names ever made it into print, the flexibility, not to say freedom, in the assigning and spelling of names was great (see entry 31). One example is the last name "van Rijn," which Rembrandt's father adopted around 1600 and refers to a mill called "De Rijn" in which he had shares (so named because it overlooked a tributary of the Rhine). For the run-of-the-mill citizen, a first name followed by the father's first name and the (abbreviated) mention for "szoon" (son) or "dochter" (daughter) had to suffice, as in, for instance, Jan Lievensz.

It is generally assumed by Rembrandt scholars that the classic monogram—"RHL"—stands for "Rembrant Harmensz. [from] Leiden," as his name is recorded on the University register (opposite, top). Yet, apart from Adriaen de Vries (1556-1626), who added "Hagiensis" to his signature ("from The Hague," thanks Gary!) I know of no other 17th-century Dutch artist who included the name of his hometown in his monogram. The question is: what else could the "L" stand for? André-Charles Coppier (1929) thinks it stood for Lievens, and so for a partnership (see entry 26). But why would Rembrandt still have used this monogram in 1632, when he and Lievens had already split?

The second illustration shows the first line of an apprentice receipt made out by Rembrandt to Isaack Jouderville on 1 May 1630 (Leiden, Municipal Archives). The "R" still has a pronounced vertical orientation associated with Gothic letter forms (see entry 21) that will gradually be phased out. This is the only instance of Rembrandt using the same type of "R" for his patronymic in these six apprentice slips from 1630-31; but even here there are patent differences.. It was written several days after his father's burial. As fate would have it, the first word in Rembrandt's handwriting to have come down to us was the Dutch personal pronoun "Ick", or "I". This may be a mere legal formality, but doesn't the form and content say it all?



Rembrandt's Harmanni Leyden'sis



John Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn