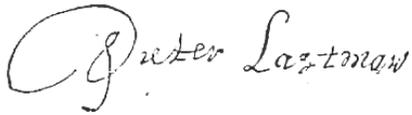
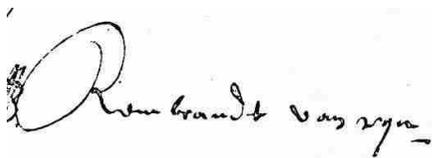
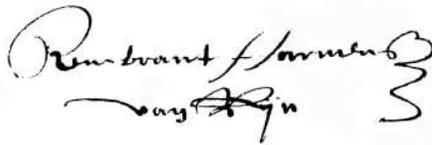
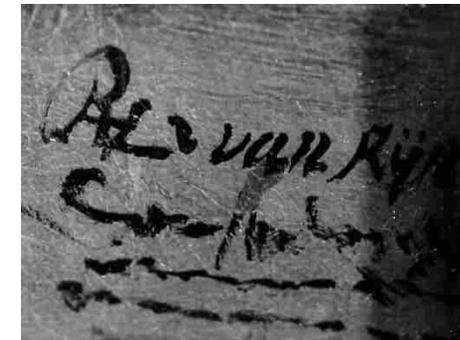


HARD FACTS

There are few enough of these in Rembrandt-Land™, but this is one of them: starting around 1628, Rembrandt started giving his initial "R" the same closed loop form and stuck to it from then on. This observation applies to the signatures made with pen and ink or a needle, and generally to those painted with a brush, regardless of the type of signature used (i.e. monogram, "Rembrant," or "Rembrandt"). This looped form had the distinct advantage of permitting the initial to be drawn in a single stroke.

Most capital "R"s written in Roman (Italic) script were invariably done in two or three strokes, and instead of a closed loop, there is usually a straight stem, as in a "P." That Rembrandt deliberately favored the rounded, spiral form becomes clear when one consults a dictionary of artist monograms and sees that the great majority of "R"s are done with this straight vertical stem. He may have been inspired by certain calligraphic signatures of his master, Pieter Lastman (see entry 38), as well as by the latter's habit of frequently signing his works.

That Rembrandt attached a special meaning to this "flourished" form is suggested by the fact that he usually differentiated between the "R" of his first name and that of his last name, or patronymic, "van Rijn" (see entry 50). When he signed paintings and documents with both first and last names (as in the apprentice receipts of 1630-31, or the paintings from 1632), he usually wrote the initial letter of "Rijn" with a straight stem (or in different script altogether). There are some noteworthy exceptions: the receipt dated May 1, 1630 (four days after his father's funeral, entry 40), the 1632 Glasgow Self-Portrait (bottom right) the Raising of Lazarus etching, B. 73, ca. 1632, entry 6, the inscribed portrait drawing of his father (top right, Ben. 56, see entry 11). The signatures on the apprentice receipts are particularly interesting because, the "R" of "Rijn" displays an old Gothic form (left; see also entries 28 and 40). The signature in the middle on the left shows a simpler variation of this type of "R". These full-name signatures are evidence that Rembrandt signed with a clear awareness of the letters forms he was using.

ADDENDUM

It is amazing how easy it is to overlook the simplest facts. In this case, it occurred to me only now that, until the year 1632, when he started signing his works with his first name written in full, "Rembrant," the initial "R" was the only part of his *own* name that appeared at all in his signatures. Every other part of the monogram or patronymic referred to someone else or to his native Leiden (see entry 40). In a sense, this "R" was Rembrandt in embryo. This observation takes on its full meaning in light of the fact that, after 1632, Rembrandt eliminated all reference to anyone else but himself when he signed his works.

Another interesting piece of evidence is the first apprentice slip of May 1, 1631, which is not signed in the proper sense. Although it is part of a conventional formulation, the first word happens to be "I" (*ick*). "I, Rembrant..." are the first words that we have in Rembrandt's own writing (excepting signatures). The capital "I" is very esthetically formed, clearly displaying Rembrandt's calligraphic skills. The most interesting detail is the circular sweep of the top of the letter, as if the circle were an elementary gesture for Rembrandt: it reappears in the elaborate "sz" abbreviation for *szoon* (son). Yes, both the first and last names have the same "R" (except for the size), but this does not really count as a signature. In the other five slips, Rembrandt dropped the conventional formulation and signed in full (see previous page).



John Rembrandt Juniors Rijer