

WHAT JULIET SAID

*What's in a name
A rose by any other
name would smell as sweet."*

Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Act II, scene ii

Famous last words. Juliet's poignant appeal to immediate experience almost makes us forget that it came from the pen of a playwright who did not shrink from setting up his characters for dilemmas of the most tragic kind. Yet he was right: roses come and go, while Juliet, who never existed, lives on.

But would a painting, say a Rembrandt, smell as sweet by any other name? Here is what the Rembrandt Research Project has to say about this:

"It is disturbing to realize that the amount of artistic pleasure the viewer derives from one and the same painting seems liable to considerable variation depending on one's ideas about the authenticity of the work in question; not to mention the change in monetary value. Absurd though this phenomenon may appear at first sight, knowing whether a painting is a derivative product or not is, in itself, of considerable significance when assessing it."

A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings, Vol. II, p. 60



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Does the name, therefore, determine the fragrance of a painting?

NB: Just saw the film "The Name of the Rose" for the first time. It seems that the title refers to a verse by one Robert de Morlais: "*Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus*, which was translated as: "All that remains of a dead rose is its name." Although roses can have the fanciest names, I suppose that the name meant here was just "rose." What is this thing with "roses" and "names"? Marcel Duchamp, we will see (entry 72), took on the pseudonym "Rose Sélavy" in the 1920s, a wry play on words that says it with flowers: "*Eros c'est la vie*." The same idea haunts Gertrude Stein's famous circular "Rose is a Rose is a Rose..." T.S. Eliot, around that time, wrote: "The roses had the look of flowers that are looked at."