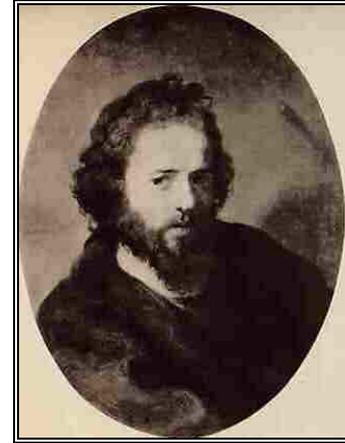


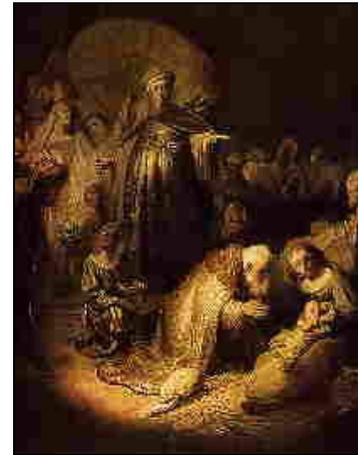
REMBRANDT FAKE IT / 1632

What do Los Angeles and Leningrad have in common? Both have the only two known paintings that are signed "Rembrandt ft / 1632."

The one in the L.A. County Museum of Art is an oval Bust of a Bearded Man (ex-St. John the Baptist, Br. 608), whose signature presents a number of anomalies, the most obvious of which is the appearance of the first name already spelled with a "d" in 1632. The second is the "R," which presents no loop, but only an open, "serifed" stem. The shapes of the numbers and other letters, however, especially the "f," display a familiarity with the standard form of Rembrandt's signature. Although the RRP rejected the whole lot—picture, signature and date—Rembrandt is surely somewhere at the bottom of it. Faking a unique signature was a gutsy thing to do—*but, hey! this is L.A.!*



The other painting is the Hermitage Museum's grisaille of the Adoration of the Magi (not in Bredius), which was painted on paper (then mounted on canvas) and may have been destined for engraving by Jan Jorisz. van Vliet. Although rejected by the RRP (C 46), the composition presents clear analogies with Rembrandt's history paintings of the late Leiden period: compact grouping, a curving dynamic and circular motifs. There are also parallels with the 1631 Simeon in the Temple and the Raising of Lazarus painting (Br. 538) and etching (B. 73), dated around 1630 and 1632 respectively. Whether Rembrandt had a hand in the Hermitage picture or not (there is an unsigned "copy" in Göteborg, Sweden), he was surely not far behind. As for the signature, its author seems to have cast only a cursory glance at a standard signature: here again the "R" has no loop. Yet why 1632, of all years, unless this date was based on evidence of some kind that has since been lost (signature overpainted or cut out)? X-rays of the Hermitage picture reveal that the version in Göteborg in fact records an earlier stage of the grisaille.



Both pictures suggest the possibility of Rembrandt having already begun signing "Rembrandt" in late 1632, a prospect that would make me lose a lot of sleep. If they are fakes, they are indirect evidence of the coherency of Rembrandt's efforts at designing his definitive signature.