

STATISTICS

If my reckoning is correct, out of the 630 presumed Rembrandt paintings catalogued by Abraham Bredius in 1935, no less than 446 display a signature of one form or another: i.e. some 70.79%. More recently, in the first three volumes of the Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings, 228 out of the 281 paintings catalogued are signed, or 81.1%. Of the paintings accepted as fully autograph works, 85.71% are signed, although many of the signatures are rejected by the Rembrandt Research Project as unauthentic.

By way of comparison, of the 346 presumed paintings by Jan Lievens catalogued by Hans Schneider in 1932, all of 45 present signatures, of which only 12 with dates, for a grand total of 13%. The more recent (1983) and presumably more reliable Sumowski catalogue ascribes 134 paintings to Lievens, 50 of which bear his signature, thus raising his total to 37.31%.

Still based on Sumowski, the noteworthy ratio for Rembrandt pupils and "followers" are (total no. ptgs./no. signed ptgs.): Gerbrand van den Eeckhout with a whopping 82.58% (128/155), Jan Victors with 73.26%, (74/101), Philip Konincks with 70.66% (53/75), Gerrit Dou with 63.23% (43/68), Govert Flinck with 62.38% (68/109), Aert de Gelder with 61.85% (60/97), Nicolaes Maes with 56.71% (76/134), Samuel van Hoogstraten with 52.5% (42/80), and a certain Abraham van Dijck joins Lievens at the bottom of the scale with 37.14% (13/35), second only to J. Ovens with 24.26% (41/169).

Of the 2,171 pictures by over 45 artists catalogued by Werner Sumowski, 1,268 are signed (105 by "Rembrandt"), for a very average total of 58.40%.

This gives us about three main ego profiles, which may be labelled: "modest" (1/3), "middling" (1/2), and "full-blown" (3/4). That these proportions have little to do with actual fame and marketability (with the possible exception of Rembrandt) is proved by the fact that Jan Lievens, although at the bottom of the ladder, achieved a greater measure of success in his lifetime—independently of Rembrandt—than either Eeckhout, Victors or Philip Konincks.

The obvious objection that these percentages do not distinguish between authentic and unauthorized signatures is offset by the consideration that the presence of a signature at all may reflect a demand for it. Whatever else these figures may reflect, we may be fairly certain that not a little personal psychology is involved, as anyone who has spoken with artists about their signing practices would suspect.