

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED

Just for the record: there are at least three known cases of superimposed signatures of two different types. The first, which is clearly visible to the naked eye, presents a "Rembrant f." painted over an "RHL - van Rijn / 1632." It appears on the portrait of a Man with a ruff collar, pointed beard and twirled moustache (Br. 159, opp. left) in Braunschweig and leaves me pensive, because, if it is a posthumous addition, then one supposes that it was meant to enlighten the uninitiated as to the identity of the monogramist: i.e. Rembrandt. If so, then why choose this rare form of signature (see entry 41)? The shape of the "b" bears a resemblance to Rembrandt's earliest first-name signatures from 1632, and nobody has claimed that the signatures were not contemporary (see entries 12 and 36). This provides further evidence of Rembrandt having tampered with his name and signatures in 1632 (see also entries 6, 12 and 36).

The second double signature, on the Portrait of a Couple in an Interior in Boston (Br. 405), is visible only by infrared photography and involves an elaborate "Rembrandt ft.1633" over one of the classic monogram plus patronymic type from 1632. Although it displays a passing resemblance to Rembrandt signatures, it also presents notable deviations (the "b" and the "3"s in the date) and an atypical, finicky script-style. Whether this was a contemporary alteration or a posthumous clarification is a question that awaits analysis of the paint layers to be answered.

The third instance occurs on the Anatomy lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, which, before it was restored in 1951, displayed a fragmentary signature of the "Rembrandt" type (bearing the date 1632); apparently an anachronism (see entry 48). Infra-red photographs indicated the presence of an older, presumably original signature that, upon cleaning, proved to be of the "Rembrandt" type in its first form (i.e. with a straight-stemmed

"b"). The signature covering it was surely not by Rembrandt, for, among other things, the "R" had an open bowl.

Incidentally, I have long been convinced that the Portrait of Albert Cuyper in the Louvre (Br. 165; bottom right), which also sports a signature of the "Rembrant. f / 1632" type, would also reveal a standard 1632 signature if it were cleaned. Although this rare signature is doubted by almost everyone but me, no one is prepared to clean it away and hazard a look at what may, or may not, be revealed underneath.

In light of this evidence, and the possible retro-signing/dating of works from 1631 with the "Rembrant" form (Br. 16 and Br. 430; see entries 11 and 36), it seems that at one critical point in late 1632—early 1633, just after having come up with the "Rembrant" form, Rembrandt went around updating his signatures and trying the new one on for size. This ultimately led to yet another, but this time final formulation later in 1633.

Few paintings—and only one etching—display a signature with Rembrandt's first name in 1632: which of them could have been the first?

