

# Rembrandt Van Rijn - An Brilliant Artist

Rembrandt Van Rijn, one of the greatest artists of all time. He has been called "the painter of the soul." It is the spiritual quality of his work that has contributed to his fame. Like the religious works of Caravaggio, Rembrandt's paintings from the scriptures are always made to function on a human level through a stark naturalism. Early in his career in Amsterdam, Rembrandt did come under the influence of the work of Rubens and Dutch Caravaggisti, His early paintings, such as the Supper at Emmaus of 1630, were concerned with an intense drama heightened through extreme contrasts of light and dark. Like Van Honthorst, Rembrandt would hide the light source within the picture, creating a dark figure of Christ strongly contrasted with the bright background. This effect is somewhat artificial, as is the pose and expression of the startled disciple whose eyeballs seem to pop from his head as he recognizes the figure before him as the resurrected Christ.



Rembrandt Van Rijn

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Rembrandt achieved the spiritual quality of his works through his special handling of light—a treatment that is extremely subtle in gradation of color. Light and its motion across surfaces act as a metaphor for emotion, the subtle states of the psyche. In his second Supper at Emmaus painted almost 20 years later, the device of tenebrism used to produce drama in the previous picture is absent. The contrasts of light and dark are no longer extreme, but have been replaced by gentle gradations, forming a symphony of natural and divine light. The concentration of light behind the head of Christ has formed a kind of halo. An air of tranquility pervades the whole painting. The disciples are shown undergoing a quiet realization, gaining greater faith through the miracle they are witnessing. The stillness and the serenity of the depiction help transport the viewer to an internal or spiritual level of understanding, which is very different from

bombastic visions of Italian Baroque, and the brutal frankness of Dutch painting.

The humanistic concerns that underlie Rembrandt's art often translate into sympathy for the suffering. One of the best examples of this can be seen in the *Return of the Prodigal Son* of 1665. The work is a mark of respect to the virtue of clemency, and to the love of a father for his son. The story is one of the parables of Christ that describes a father who divides his fortune between his two sons. The good stays at home and saves his money, leading a respectable life. The bad son, by contrast, wastes his inheritance on the pursuit of morally wrong activities, reduced to a state even worse than his father's servants. In poverty and despair, the prodigal comes home in a state of humility and remorse to be forgiven by his aged father. The story is also a metaphor of the love of God for his children, and Rembrandt's painting, more than a simple illustration of the story, creates an image of this spiritual love. It goes beyond the works of all other Baroque artists in the evocation of religious mood and theme, which may be a commissioned portrait of a couple in the guise of a biblical pair.

As early as the 1650s, Rembrandt's colors became richer and brush strokes more exposed. The end result was a richly varied handling of paint and deeply layered colors. Consequently Rembrandt distanced himself from the current fashion, which inclined toward fine and detailed work. His loose brush work and use of heavy impasto must have been influenced by his familiarity with the late work of Titian.

Consequently accounts sometimes remark disapprovingly of the lack of "finish" or coarseness of Rembrandt's brushwork, and the artist himself was said to have advised visitors against looking too closely at his paintings. But only by looking closely can we see and enjoy the fluctuating quality of the paint, the golden yellows, the delicate blues and olives, the powerful whites and deep blacks, and the vibrations of the tones and the harmonious fusion of the whole. The broad, calm, relief-like life-size figures reveal a touch of Classical

taste, but the use of color is obviously not classical.