
Exhibitions

Goya and Rembrandt highlight Met season

by Nora Hamerman

The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City will open its fall season with two major exhibitions of works by—and in some cases not by—two of the greatest figures in the history of art, Francisco de Goya and Rembrandt van Rijn. Both shows share the feature of *not* being loan exhibitions in which the attraction is bringing together related works of art from collections in many parts of the world. Instead, they will focus on the Met's own extensive holdings of these two European masters.

The shows will also depart from the norm by engaging in an unusually candid dialogue with the public on what Met director Philippe de Montebello called "some of the most vexing and seldom-aired issues confronting curators and conservators, namely authenticity, attribution, and restoration." The public will be brought into the considerations, for example, that caused the museum a few years ago to remove the Goya label from one of its most famous pictures, the "Majas on a Balcony." The painting will be one of the 15 oil paintings exhibited, a few of which have been de-attributed, and others which remain subject to controversy over authorship.

"Goya at the Metropolitan," opening on Sept. 19, will also present 54 figure drawings in ink, wash, and red chalk, including three of artist's self-portraits. Goya's monumental print cycles, *Los Caprichos*, *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, the *Disparates*, and *La Tauromaquia*—will be presented at the Met in their entirety for the first time. The significant difference among the various states of Goya's prints, and how they affect our perception of his art, will be demonstrated by rarely seen working proofs and posthumous impressions.

Goya (1746-1828) is the artist who took the etching, the favorite print medium of Rembrandt—one of the artists he most admired and emulated—to the very limits of its expressiveness and freedom. Then, as he neared his 80th birthday, in exile and in failing health, the artist mastered the brand-new mass medium of lithography.

"Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt," opening Oct. 10, will present more than 40 paintings, of which 17 are acknowledged by most scholars to be by the Dutch master (1606-69), along with another 25 works that raise questions of authorship, condition, or date, and thus invite less certain conclusions. A few years ago, a storm of controversy was

touched off in Berlin when curators and conservators consigned the famous "Man in a Golden Helmet" to a Rembrandt follower. Although this picture had long been questioned by scholars, in part because of its somewhat romantic aura, at least one critic has eloquently argued that over-radical "cleaning" had removed some of the very masterful touches that marked the painting as an authentic Rembrandt.

Not the 'last word'

One of the risks in today's museum world may be the growing authority (some say, arrogance) of the conservation community. Although modern techniques like spectroscopy, infrared photography, and other means of analysis have vastly expanded the means available for judging a picture's authenticity and state, it should always be kept in mind that these means will continue to improve in the future and that the "last word" has not been spoken. Moreover, while many conservators have a deep reverence for the art of the past, they cannot be untouched by contemporary tastes for "Walt Disney" simplicity of color and line, for example—and such tastes sometimes tend to affect the multiple subjective judgments that have to be made when pictures are restored.

Yet the last two decades' controversy over Rembrandt attributions—further whittling down a catalogue which, at the close of the 19th century, included nearly a thousand paintings—has ultimately strengthened, not diminished, our appreciation of Rembrandt, and has the potential to lead to a much more subtle appreciation of his methods and the painting culture in which he worked, on the part of the public.

Among the specific questions that the Metropolitan show will raise are, for example, whether or not one badly damaged canvas allows an attribution to Rembrandt, or whether another picture, probably by a pupil, was improved by Rembrandt himself. We know that during one period in Amsterdam, Rembrandt was running a large shop in which his pupils' work contributed to his profits. Another important facet to consider is the emergence of distinct personalities among his followers and pupils, some of whom produced works of such high quality that they have long been confused with Rembrandt's own hand. The image of Rembrandt as teacher who was able not only to create works of art, but develop new great artists, is surely no detraction from his stature, though it undermines the Romanticist notion of the "lone genius."

The Metropolitan will also host a traveling loan exhibit of 75 pictures by one of the most gifted American painters, portraitist John Singleton Copley (1738-1815), who worked in pre-Revolutionary Boston and New York. Among his famous subjects are the patriots Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and Paul Revere. The show, which opened at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and will be there until Aug. 27, exclusively covers works of 1753-73, after which Copley emigrated to England. It will be at the Met from Sept. 26 until Jan. 7. Then, in 1996, it will travel to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and the Milwaukee Art Museum.