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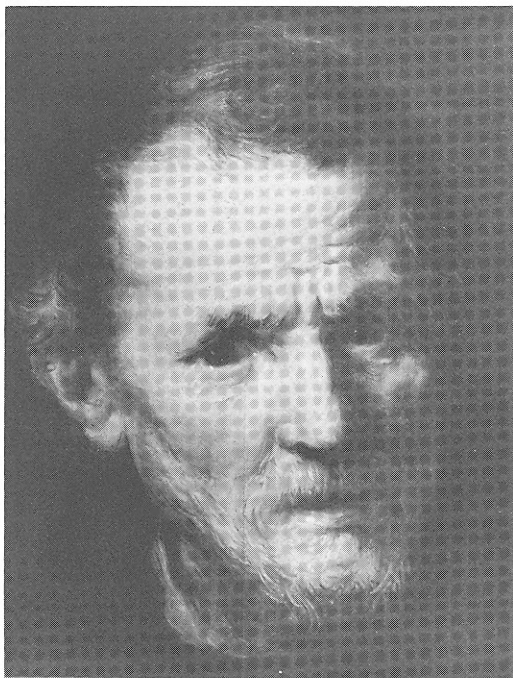
# NEWS BULLETIN

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Rembrandt (detail) 1958.35

## ST. BARTHOLOMEW BY REMBRANDT

A powerful early Rembrandt, a painting of Saint Bartholomew,<sup>1</sup> has just been added to the collection through the Charlotte E. W. Buffington Fund. It depicts the Saint in half-length, holding in his right hand a knife, symbol of his martyrdom, and is notable for the intense and tragic expression of the face.

Assigned to the year 1631, the picture shows the young precocious artist (he was twenty-five years old) already a master in his ability to create an unforgettable image of old age. By this time Rembrandt has passed through the somewhat Baroque beginnings of his career. Gone

### COVER

*St. Bartholomew by Rembrandt van Rijn, oil on oak panel, recently purchased through the Charlotte E. W. Buffington Fund*

is the heavy pigment and over-stressed dramatics of a style learned from Peter Lastman and the Italianate painters of Utrecht. Though the theme of a spot-lighted head looming from shadow goes back to the startling innovations of Caravaggio, Rembrandt here shows his inherent gifts of vigorous modeling and penetrating psychology which lie at the very basis of his art.

Here the artist's scrutiny is focused on the head which he renders with an almost painful realism. The shrunken cheeks, the wispy beard, the hectic, veined skin of an old man are depicted with uncanny verisimilitude. Even more notable is the interior spirit which shines through these ravages of age and is characteristically centered in the haunting expression of the dark and deep-set eyes.

It is probable that Rembrandt used his own father, a miller of Leyden, as his model, for in this early period the same figure frequently appears, sometimes in the guise of a saint or a richly dressed Oriental. Already Rembrandt was fascinated by scenes and types from the Bible, but where an Italian painter would have been apt to treat one of the Apostles with a more impersonal grandeur, Rembrandt, a northern artist and a man soon to come under the sway of a somewhat mystic sect of Protestantism, saw him wholly as an individual. This power to summon a particular face and endow it with striking emotional overtones belongs to Rembrandt alone.

Not that the young artist was unaware of the structure and design of his picture. Though seemingly simple, the picture is built with great skill. A scheme of broad curves (repeated in the shoulders, the line of the fur collar, and inverted in the oval of the face) dominates the picture. A sense of movement is given to the surface by flickering brush strokes which not only model the head deeply in dark and light but starting at the broad base of the hand, follow the curved blade of the knife, leading the eye once more up to the face.

Here the carmines and greens and warm browns and whites are brushed on, sometimes thin as water color, again thickened, in an illu-

sion of relief, to stress the solidity of the head which comes forth strongly from its background of soft, pervasive darkness. To avoid flatness, Rembrandt has slightly turned the figure in space with light flooding the right side of the Saint's head and introducing occasional dark accents of shadow to increase the plasticity.

Where many of Rembrandt's early pictures are cast in a chord of silvery-golds, cool blues and greyish greens, he here used a ruddier, warmer palette, the area of the robe and background echoing, in much darker tones, the high color of the features. Could he have been thinking of Rubens when he used so full a coloristic range?

There is a further significance in this early work. Soon Rembrandt would put by such intensities. When he came to Amsterdam from Leyden during the second half of the year 1631, he entered into the life of a successful portrait painter. Commissions came pouring in upon him and during this time he painted many of the rich merchants and their wives with a rather exterior realism. But later, after he somewhat lost his popularity, he returned with deepened feeling to create late, great introspective figures and again he summoned the image of Saint Bartholomew. The almost expressionist version, long in Downton Castle (called by a whimsical eighteenth century "Rembrandt's Cook," because he holds the knife) and the splendid, monumental canvas of 1657 today on loan from the Putnam Foundation to the National Gallery in Washington, show even a greater sense of the tragedy of this Apostle who after Christ's death was flayed alive as a missionary in Armenia. But though Rembrandt in his own saddened old age spiritualized and broadened his conception, the beginnings are to be found in the Worcester painting. It foretells clearly this last phase of the artist and as the first of the three, holds the germs of his final—and greatest—style.

DANIEL CATTON RICH

<sup>1</sup> Acc. no. 1958.35, oil on oak panel, 24<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. by 18<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. Signed (on blade of the knife): Rembrandt. Formerly in the collections of Fossard, Paris (about 1800) and Count Guy de Leusse, Anet (1920).

Purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Woods Bliss, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D. C. Given by them to Harvard University, 1940. Dumbarton Oaks, specializing in Byzantine and Early Christian Art was permitted to sell it in 1958. Exhibited: San Francisco, "Golden Gate International Exposition," February 18–December 2, 1939, no. 88, reproduced in the catalogue. Published by Jakob Rosenberg, *Rembrandt*, Harvard University Press, 1948, vol. I, p. 204, and vol. II, fig. 267.

Another version, identified as a pupil's copy by Rosenberg, though formerly accepted as the original by Valentiner and Bredius, was left to the Metropolitan Museum by Michael Friedsam and returned by the Metropolitan Museum to the Friedsam Estate which, in turn, presented it to Saint Bonaventure University, near Olean, New York.

Our newly acquired "Saint Bartholomew" has been put on view in gallery 201, the gallery of seventeenth-century Dutch painting.

## THE BUFFINGTON BEQUEST

The St. Bartholomew by Rembrandt was purchased from the accumulated income of a fund created by the will of Charlotte E. W. Buffington, a former Trustee of the museum. In her will, Mrs. Buffington placed no restrictions on the kind of works of art that should be purchased from her bequest but expressed the hope that it might be utilized to acquire paintings of the Barbizon or early Dutch schools. Furthermore, she told Thomas Hovey Gage, who was both the president of the museum and her lawyer, that she would very much like, if possible, to have a Rembrandt painting bought from it. For some years the Trustees have been saving most of the income received from the fund in order to carry out this wish.



*Rococo Ensemble*