



## Rembrandt's Eyes

By Simon Schama

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### Rembrandt's Eyes By Simon Schama

For Rembrandt as for Shakespeare, all the world was indeed a stage, and he knew in exhaustive detail the tactics of its performance: the strutting and mincing; the wardrobe and the face paint; the full repertoire of gesture and grimace; the flutter of hands and the roll of the eyes; the belly laugh and the half-stifled sob. He knew what it looked like to seduce, to intimidate, to wheedle, and to console; to strike a pose or preach a sermon; to shake a fist or uncover a breast; how to sin and how to atone; how to commit murder and how to commit suicide. No artist had ever been so fascinated by the fashioning of personae, beginning with his own. No painter ever looked with such unsparing intelligence or such bottomless compassion at our entrances and our exits and the whole rowdy show in between.

More than three centuries after his death, Rembrandt remains the most deeply loved of all the great masters of painting, his face so familiar to us from the self-portraits painted at every stage in his life, yet still so mysterious. As with Shakespeare, the facts of his life are hard to come by: the Leiden miller's son who briefly found fame in Amsterdam, whose genius was fitfully recognized by his contemporaries, who fell into bankruptcy and died in poverty. So there is probably no painter whose life has engendered more legends, nor to whom more unlikely pictures have been attributed (a process now undergoing rigorous reversal). **Rembrandt's Eyes**, about which Simon Schama has been thinking for more than twenty years, shows that the true biography of Rembrandt is to be discovered in his pictures. Through a succession of superbly incisive descriptions and interpretations of Rembrandt's paintings threaded into this narrative, he allows us to see Rembrandt's life clearly and to think about it afresh.

But this book moves far beyond the bounds of conventional biography or art history. With extraordinary imaginative sympathy, Schama conjures up the world in which Rembrandt moved -- its sounds, smells, and tastes as well as its politics; the influences on him of the wars of the Protestant United Provinces against Spain, of the extreme Calvinism of his native Leiden, of the demands of patrons and the ambitions of contemporaries; the importance of his beloved Saskia and, after her death (Rembrandt was later forced to sell her grave, so complete was his ruin), of his mistress Hendrickje Stoffels; and, above all, the profound effect on him of the great master of the immediately preceding generation, the Catholic painter from Antwerp, Peter Paul Rubens:

"the prince of painters and the painter of princes" with whom Rembrandt was obsessed for the first part of his life, and whose career was the shaping force that

drove Rembrandt to test the farthest reaches of his own originality.

**Rembrandt's Eyes** shows us why Rembrandt is such a thrilling painter, so revolutionary in his art, so penetrating of the hearts of those who have looked for three hundred years at his pictures. Above all, Schama's understanding of Rembrandt's mind and the dynamic of his life allows him to re-create Rembrandt's life on the page. Through a combination of scholarship and literary skill, Schama allows us to actually see that life through Rembrandt's own eyes. In overcoming the paucity of conventional historical evidence, it is the most intelligently true biography of Rembrandt that has been written, and the most dazzling achievement to date of the art historian whose work has been hailed as "marvelously rich and eloquent" . . . "rare, imaginative" . . . "provocative" . . . "astoundingly learned with verve, humor, and an unflagging sense of delight" . . . that of "a master storyteller . . . and "a master of history."\*

\*From the *New York Times Book Review*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Independent on Sunday*, and *Nature*.

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

The great 17th-century Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn left us so many arresting self-portraits, painted at every stage in his eventful life, that his distinctive face and bearing are a familiar part of the 20th-century cultural landscape, a recognizable presence in galleries across Europe and North America. Nonetheless, the artist himself remains an enigma. Rembrandt was a notoriously difficult man and an inveterate risk taker in life and art: his aspirations to a grandiose Amsterdam lifestyle in the heyday of his popularity as a painter of portraits and large-scale historical works bankrupted him, and he died in relative poverty. His personal effects and treasured collection of paintings and natural rarities were sold off and dispersed, leaving the historian with a tantalizingly scant body of fragmentary records around which to build a convincing biography.

In *Rembrandt's Eyes*, Simon Schama--the leading historical craftsman of our era, with a career-long commitment to Dutch history--succeeds with consummate skill in bringing the heroic painter of such masterpieces as *The Night Watch* and *Portrait of Jan Six* vividly to life. Returning to the bustling Dutch world with which he first made his reputation in the bestselling *Embarrassment of Riches* (1987), Schama re-creates Rembrandt's life and times with all the verve and panache of a historical novelist--while never for an instant losing his scrupulous grip on recorded fact and detail. The telling surviving fragments of archival information about Rembrandt's personal and professional history are skillfully embedded in a rich, dense tapestry of the commercial whirl and political hurly-burly of the 17th-century Low Countries--a divided territory, split between the Catholic and Protestant faiths and the contested powers of the Spanish Hapsburgs and the Dutch Republic--with the tentacles of the tale reaching into the most unexpected shadowy corners of European love and war, aspiration and intrigue.

*Rembrandt's Eyes* is, in fact, two biographies for the price of one. From the outset, Schama contrasts the life of Rembrandt with that of his older, equally talented countryman Peter Paul Rubens, whose meteoric rise and sustained success as a society painter forms a revealing contrast with Rembrandt's unhappier relationship with fame and fortune. The comparison is a telling one. Where Rubens furnishes the wealthy and powerful with glorious reflections of, and visual foils for, their social and political aspirations and glory, Rembrandt can never resist testing the envelope of taste and stylistic acceptability. His challenge to his clients to embrace the shock of his painterly experiments with technique, texture, and composition ultimately produced his downfall. The Amsterdam town council took down his *The Oath-swearing of Claudius Civilis*, rolled it up, and returned his masterpiece to him to be cut down in an attempt to sell it to a suitable buyer.

This is a gorgeous book to own, too. *Rembrandt's Eyes* is printed on heavy, high-gloss paper and lavishly illustrated throughout in full color. The double-page color spreads of the most memorable of Rembrandt's works will take readers' breath away. But above all, this is narrative history at its very best, a page-turner and an adventure story that will make the reader laugh and cry by turns in the time-honored tradition of masterly writing. --Lisa Jardine

### From Library Journal

Schama's baroque writing style may be controversial, but here he delivers something undeniably stunning. As much a study of the times as a biography, this richly rendered book builds detail upon detail--just like a painting. Schama escapes the dreariness of much art historical writing and with forceful, vigorous prose makes us really look at the paintings. (LJ 10/15/99)

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### Review

Impassioned and learned, expansive and discursive, *Rembrandt's Eyes* not only leaves us with a fierce appreciation of the artist's work but also immerses us inexorably in his world. -- *The New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani

Rembrandt is a modern figure to Schama--a genius who personally is a mess, an intellectual caught up in the rough-and-tumble of the day and in the stuff of real life. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, Michael Kimmelman

Schama has the great gift of bringing to life whatever he turns to. This is a matter of creative imagination and creative writing. Together they predispose him to get at art's relationship to life. -- *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Svetlana Alpers

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Teresa Raap:**

With other case, little individuals like to read book Rembrandt's Eyes. You can choose the best book if you appreciate reading a book. Providing we know about how is important a book Rembrandt's Eyes. You can add understanding and of course you can around the world with a book. Absolutely right, since from book you can learn everything! From your country until eventually foreign or abroad you will be known. About simple factor until wonderful thing you can know that. In this era, you can open a book or perhaps searching by internet device. It is called e-book. You should use it when you feel bored to go to the library. Let's read.

#### **Michael Carr:**

The actual book Rembrandt's Eyes has a lot associated with on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of profit. The book was compiled by the very famous author. The author makes some research prior to write this book. This specific book very easy to read you will get the point easily after looking over this book.

#### **Angela Harris:**

This Rembrandt's Eyes is great book for you because the content which can be full of information for you who always deal with world and get to make decision every minute. This particular book reveal it details accurately using great coordinate word or we can say no rambling sentences within it. So if you are read this hurriedly you can have whole data in it. Doesn't mean it only provides you with straight forward sentences but hard core information with wonderful delivering sentences. Having Rembrandt's Eyes in your hand like getting the world in your arm, facts in it is not ridiculous a single. We can say that no publication that offer you world in ten or fifteen small right but this book already do that. So , this can be good reading book. Hey there Mr. and Mrs. active do you still doubt this?

#### **Arlene Farrar:**

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