



Rembrandt Exhibit at Stetson University's Hand Art Center Examines Authenticity of Legendary Artist's Etchings

“Rembrandt Etchings: States, Fakes and Restrikes” provides an opportunity to spot a forgery. Dutch artist Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, known collectively as Rembrandt, is one of the most influential printmakers in art history. He created copper plate etchings that featured a wide range of subjects — from self-portraits to studies of street life. His etched prints showcase comedic expression and sober social commentary that have inspired innumerable printmakers for centuries.

“Rembrandt Etchings: States, Fakes and Restrikes” features more than 40 of the master artist's etchings and is on display at Stetson University's Homer and Dolly Hand Art Center through March 1.

The exhibition, which is on loan from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, examines the issues with authenticating Rembrandt's etchings and how to determine if an etching is a forgery by showing how copper plate etching prints are created. The display also includes first-state pulls from the artist's lifetime, restrike prints from the 17th to 20th centuries and fakes that are highlighted in red.

A first-state pull means that Rembrandt etched the copper plate and pulled it through the press and then onto the paper. Restrikes are etchings that were from Rembrandt's original copper plate that he etched, but were pulled by someone else after his death. The fakes were created from a counterfeit plate and not Rembrandt's copper plate etching.

Tonya Curran, director of the Hand Art Center, believes this exhibit may provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see Rembrandt's copper plate etchings.

"Rembrandt was an incredible printmaker who was using copper plate etching, which was a newer medium at the time," said Curran. "This method of printmaking allowed a diversity of lines and greater depth of value. It differed from engraving in that it is a chemical process rather than a physical process. The acid in copper plate etching allowed more curvature in the lines and a softness not often seen in engravings."

"The Rembrandt Etchings exhibit exposes students and the community to art history in the world and educates them about fakes," said Curran. "Art has value, but you want to know what is original or counterfeit. This exhibit is very special because not everyone has an opportunity to see an original Rembrandt, and it's nice to have this prestigious display at the Hand Art Center on Stetson University's historic campus in DeLand, Florida."

Challenges with Attributing Rembrandt's Artwork

"Attributing Rembrandt's artwork has been a difficult process because the master artist employed many assistants, which was a standard

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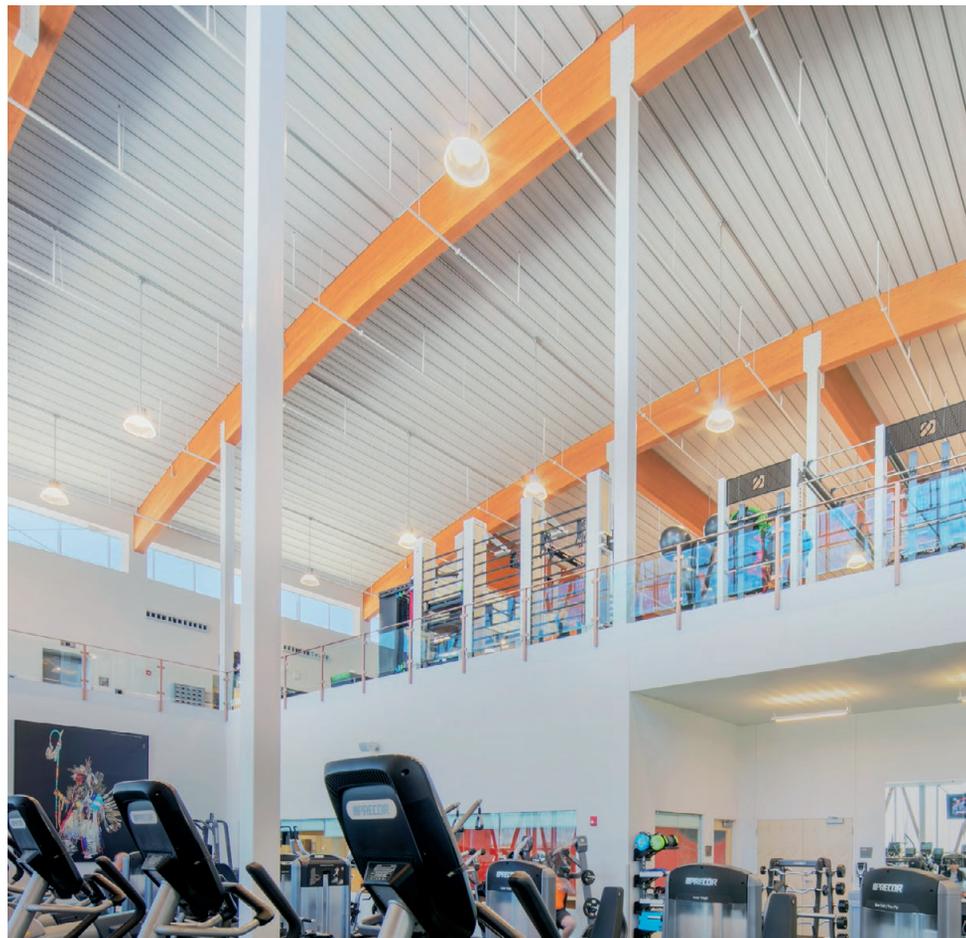
practice at the time, and if the artwork was from his workshop, then it is difficult to know with certainty whether the work was done by Rembrandt or his assistants," explained Katya Kudryavtseva, Ph.D., assistant professor of art history at Stetson University.

Kudryavtseva discussed the difficulties of attributing Rembrandt's artwork in a presentation "The Pains of Attributions in the Visual Arts: The Rembrandt Project" at Stetson University's duPont-Ball Library in February.

"Scientific methods, as effective as they are, have their limitations," said Kudryavtseva. "In other words, the scientific methods can help us exclude the works from Rembrandt's oeuvre, for example, later forgeries, but they cannot be

used in determining the authorship of the work. We have to rely on connoisseurship, a method based on expert knowledge."

The Rembrandt Etchings exhibit educates attendees about forgeries and provides them with an opportunity to become art detectives. "It is a rather unique opportunity to see the works of such a prominent artist at a college gallery along with making the audience aware of the forgery issues and allows them to look for differences in a side-by-side comparison between the original and fake," said Kudryavtseva. "The exhibit challenges spectators to assume the role of art experts, which is an amazing way to engage the audience and invite the public to think critically about art."



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Another educational element in February included a printmaking demonstration by Rembrandt fan and copper plate etching printmaking fine artist Chelsea Smith. Faculty, students, staff and the public had a chance to learn and see how Rembrandt created his copper plate etchings.

Equal Passion for Printmaking and Painting

“As you look at the variety of works in the exhibit, it is clear to me that Rembrandt spent a significant amount of time on each copper plate, drawing and perfecting the images we see today,” said Curran. “The copper plate prints were not quickly rendered, but rather laboriously created. To me, this indicates the importance of the prints in relation to his paintings.”

Rembrandt Etchings Exhibit Embraces Stetson’s Core Values

“As a liberal arts institution, it is at the very core of our mission and values to expose our students to unique opportunities and increase knowledge about a diversity of academic disciplines, to value creativity and to prepare students to be informed, active and engaged citizens of both local communities and the world,” said Curran.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sandra Carr is an award-winning journalist and freelance editor, writer and public relations professional in Orlando, Florida. Carr earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in radio-TV from the University of Central Florida. Her clients include Stetson University and the Orlando Sentinel.

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