

**REMBRANDT'S EARLIEST MASTERPIECE, *JUDAS RETURNING
THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER*, TO BE EXHIBITED FOR THE
FIRST TIME IN THE U.S. AT THE MORGAN**

Rembrandt's First Masterpiece
June 3 through September 18, 2016

New York, NY, April 20, 2016 — Completed when he was just twenty-three years old, Rembrandt's *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* has long been recognized as the artist's first mature work, his first masterpiece. The painting demonstrates many of the characteristics that would come to define Rembrandt's style: dramatic lighting, a rhythmic harmony of composition, and his exceptional ability to convey the emotional drama of a scene. Long held in a British private collection, the painting will be shown in the United States for the first time at the Morgan beginning June 3 in a new exhibition titled *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*.



Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, 1629. Oil on panel. Private collection. © Private Collection, Photography courtesy of The National Gallery, London, 2016.

Adding to the importance of the presentation, *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* is one of very few Rembrandt works for which several preparatory drawings survive. The exhibition reunites the painting and the drawings for the first time since their creation, offering visitors an unprecedented opportunity to take a glimpse over Rembrandt's shoulder as he worked on this composition.

Among the first to recognize the greatness of Rembrandt's *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* was the famous Dutch diplomat, poet, musician, and art connoisseur Constantijn Huygens. The manuscript of Huygens's autobiography which contains his lyrical account of the painting will be lent by the Royal Library in The Hague and included in the exhibition.

Also on view will be a number of early self-portraits that show the young Rembrandt at the time he painted the panel, and some two dozen etchings and drawings of scenes from the life of Christ that illustrate the development of the artist's narrative style. Many of the items on view are from the Morgan's own collection of Rembrandt prints and drawings, and the exhibition also features loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; the British Museum, London; the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; and the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.

"*Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* is an extraordinary painting that shows Rembrandt at an early age tackling one of the most powerful episodes in the Bible," said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum. "He, like many of his contemporaries, aspired to be a painter of history and looked for inspiration to well-known religious subjects, as well as mythology and Greek and Roman history. The exhibition presents visitors with the opportunity to discover a rarely seen masterpiece and to explore the creative process by which the young artist gave visual form to the dramatic encounter."

THE EXHIBITION

I. *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, 1629

Although the Judas scene is one of the more memorably emotional episodes from the narrative of Christ's life, it was a relatively rare subject for painters when Rembrandt undertook it in 1629. The theatrical staging, bold lighting, and a fascination with exotic costumes seen in the painting are all characteristic of his work. Above all, however, Rembrandt concentrated on the depiction of human emotion, and the central focus of the scene remains the contrast between the haughty priests of the temple and the kneeling Judas, writhing in agony in the foreground.



Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver (recto)*, *Sketch of Figures (verso)*, ca. 1629, Black chalk, pen and ink wash on paper. Private collection.

The artist labored over the preparatory drawings and the composition. Five studies for the painting document Rembrandt's pattern of invention as he devised the scene. Close study of the painting surface and x-ray photographs also reveal that he continued to make changes as he worked.

II. Self-Portraits

During his long career, Rembrandt painted, drew, and etched more self-portraits than almost any other artist. In the years around the time he painted *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*, the young artist used his face to reproduce different expressions and emotions. This intense study of his own features proved an invaluable source for his work. As Rembrandt's student Samuel van Hoogstraten would go on to advise artists in 1678: "[B]enefit can be gained from the depiction of your own passions, especially in front of a mirror, where you are simultaneously the creator and the spectator." Rembrandt also made self-portraits as a means of presenting himself to the outside world. This is especially the case with his prints, which he could distribute in greater numbers than paintings or drawings. The ambitious, up-and-coming artist was conscious of his image, as the group of etchings from this period shows.

In a self-portrait dated ca. 1628-9, Rembrandt has a neutral, if slightly stern, expression. The artist executed the face, hair, and the contours of the clothing with pen and ink. With a brush he then generously applied gray wash to define the clothing and add volume to the already thick curls. This combination of brown ink and gray wash is unusual for Rembrandt, but also appears in another self-portrait, and in one of the *Judas* drawings.

Self-Portrait in a Cap, Wide-Eyed and Open-Mouthed features the artist with his head towards us in a state of utter bewilderment. One of the most iconic of all his self-portrait prints, this work ingeniously demonstrates the impression of sudden surprise by depicting his face close-up, by cutting the image at the top, and by placing us at a slightly lower angle, looking up. The poignant highlights in his eyes increase the immediacy of the work.

III. Rembrandt and the Gospel

The life of Christ remained a subject of perpetual fascination to Rembrandt, and from his earliest etching to his later works, the artist returned to episodes from the gospel narratives. In some cases, he devised wholly new versions of subjects undertaken years earlier; in other cases, he would work and rework a subject on a single copper plate, producing the radically revised etching states for which he is famous. Perhaps unexpectedly, however, Rembrandt did not approach the episode of Judas returning the silver again.

A selection of Rembrandt's gospel scenes is included in the exhibition, allowing a look at the ways in which Rembrandt's narrative style evolved over the course of his career. The *Circumcision*



Top: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1629, Pen and ink and wash on paper. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Bottom: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Self-Portrait in a Cap, Wide-Eyed and Open-Mouthed* (B. 320), 1630, Etching and drypoint on paper. The Morgan Library & Museum, RvR 442.



Left: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *The Circumcision*, ca. 1625, Etching. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Right: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *The Last Supper, after Leonardo da Vinci*, ca. 1634-5, Red chalk on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 1975.1.794 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY

on view in the exhibition, is considered to be the artist's first etching, made while he was working in Leiden alongside Jan Lievens, who had already experimented with printmaking. Its awkward execution, unconvincing spatial setting, and the figures' lack of volume suggest an artist struggling to master a new technique. He would soon adopt a freer, more drawing-like style for his etchings as he developed a more individualized manner.

Surprisingly, Rembrandt never created a painting or print of the Last Supper. However, a series of drawings on view in the exhibition shows the artist's engagement with Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of the subject. Rembrandt never traveled to Italy or saw the original, but instead studied several prints after Leonardo's work.

IV. Rembrandt's Repertoire

The painting's Judas figure has been singled out for special praise by writers, and it would initially seem that the pose was created in response specifically to the gospel text describing Judas's despair. Yet, Rembrandt adapted the same figure for very different means in other works.

In his earliest depiction in print of St. Jerome, Rembrandt employed a variant of the kneeling, praying figure. The humble, devotional pose adapted well to a characterization of the learned hermit holy man.



Left: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* (Detail), 1629. Oil on panel. Private collection. © Private Collection, Photography courtesy of The National Gallery, London, 2016. Right: Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), *Saint Jerome Kneeling: Large Plate*, ca. 1628, Etching, retouched in pen and ink. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Similarly, Rembrandt reused the early adaptations of the Judas figure in his etching of *Saints Peter and Paul healing the Cripple*. In all these compositions, however, it was the expressive potential of the figures that was the key. One of Rembrandt's pupils, Jan van Vliet, would later remove the kneeling man from all narrative context, and produce the print commonly known as *A Man Grieving*, a study of pure human emotion.

V. Praise by Constantijn Huygens

Around 1629, the remarkable Dutch diplomat and art connoisseur Constantijn Huygens saw the *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* in Rembrandt's workshop. He was so impressed that he wrote a lyrical account of this painting in his autobiography: "*The gesture of that one despairing Judas (not to mention all the other impressive figures in the painting), that one maddened Judas, screaming, begging for forgiveness, but devoid of hope, all traces of hope erased from his face; his gaze wild, his hair torn out by the roots, his garments rent, his arms contorted, his hands clenched until they bleed; a blind impulse has brought him to his knees, his whole body writhing in pitiful hideousness. [...] Even as I write these words I am struck with amazement. All honor to thee, Rembrandt!*" The Morgan is delighted that the manuscript of Huygens's autobiography will be lent to the exhibition by the Royal Library in The Hague, where it will be displayed near the painting it so arrestingly describes.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The accompanying exhibition catalogue includes about 55 illustrations and outlines the creative journey of Rembrandt in the making of *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver*. The publication includes essays by Per Rumburg, now Curator of Exhibitions at the Royal Academy, London, and formerly Associate Curator at the Morgan and by Holm Bevers, Chief Curator of Dutch and Flemish Prints and Drawings at the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.

Public Programs

LECTURE

Rembrandt's First Masterpiece

Per Rumburg, Curator, The Royal Academy of Arts

Join Per Rumburg, Curator, The Royal Academy of Arts, for an illustrated talk in celebration of the exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*. Shown in the United States for the first time, *Judas Returning the Thirty Pieces of Silver* has long been recognized as the artist's first mature work. Rumburg will discuss the preparatory drawings for the painting and other works that depict the development of Rembrandt's narrative style.

Friday, June 3, 6:30 pm*

Tickets: Free with museum admission or for students with valid ID. Reservations recommended. Email tickets@themorgan.org to reserve.

*The exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece* will be open for program attendees before the lecture.

FILM

Exhibition on Film: Rembrandt from the National Gallery, London And Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Director: Kat Mansoor
(2015, 95 minutes)

Given exclusive, privileged access to both museums, the film documents this landmark exhibition while interweaving Rembrandt's life story with the behind-the-scenes preparations at these world famous institutions. The exhibition focuses on the highlights from the final years of Rembrandt's life, commonly thought to be his finest years. For many, Rembrandt is the greatest artist who ever lived and this film seeks to explore the truth about the man behind the legend.

Friday, June 10, 7 pm*

Tickets: Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

*The exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece* will be open for program attendees before the screening.

**ADULT
WORKSHOP**

Sketching in the Gallery

Susan Stillman, Artist and Parsons The New School for Design faculty member

Spend two hours sketching, drawing inspiration from the works in the exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*. Professional artists and educators will be available to assist you.

Saturday, June 11, 11 am–1 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission.

This program is limited to 12 people on a first come, first served basis. Stools, boards, a selection of pencils, and drawing paper will be provided. While personal sketchbooks are allowed, ink, paint, markers, charcoal, chalk, pastels, folding stools, and easels are not permitted in the galleries.

**ADULT
WORKSHOP**

Drawing in Preparation for a Composition

Immerse yourself in a day of drawing lead by practicing artists in collaboration with the Royal Drawing School, London. Participants will sketch from clothed models in the Morgan's light-filled Gilbert Court and enjoy private access to the museum as they take inspiration from Rembrandt's preparatory drawings and works in the exhibition, *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*.

Monday, June 13, 10 am–4:30 pm

Tickets: \$35; \$25 for members.

Limited availability, advance reservations recommended. Easels, boards, and drawing paper will be provided. Participants should bring drawing materials. While personal sketchbooks, conte crayons, crayons, pencil, and colored pencil are encouraged, ink, paint, markers, charcoal, chalk, and pastels are not permitted. Participants must be 18 or older.

**GALLERY
TALK**

Rembrandt's First Masterpiece

Ilona van Tuinen, Assistant Curator, Drawings & Prints

Friday, June 17, 6:30 pm

Tickets: All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

**ADULT
WORKSHOP**

Sketching in the Gallery

Susan Stillman, Artist and Parsons The New School for Design faculty member

Spend two hours sketching, drawing inspiration from the works in the exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*. Professional artists and educators will be available to assist you.

Saturday, July 9, 11 am–1 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission.

This program is limited to 12 people on a first come, first served basis. Stools, boards, a selection of pencils, and drawing paper will be provided. While personal sketchbooks are allowed, ink, paint, markers, charcoal, chalk, pastels, folding stools, and easels are not permitted in the galleries.

FILM

Rembrandt

Director: Alexander Korda
(1936, 85 minutes)

This character study joins Rembrandt (Charles Laughton) at the height of his fame in 1642, when his adored wife (Gertrude Lawrence) suddenly dies and his work takes a dark, sardonic turn that offends his patrons. By 1656, he is bankrupt but consoles himself with the company of pretty maid Hendrickje (Elsa Lanchester), whom he's unable to marry. Their relationship brings ostracism but also some measure of happiness. The final scenes find him in his last year, 1669, physically enfeebled but his spirit undimmed.

Friday, July 29, 7 pm*

Tickets: Exhibition-related films are free with museum admission. Advance reservations for members only. Tickets are available at the Admission Desk on the day of the screening.

*The exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece* will be open for program attendees before the screening.

GALLERY TALK

Rembrandt's First Masterpiece

John Marciari, Charles W. Engelhard Curator and Department Head,
Drawings & Prints

Friday, August 5, 1 pm

Tickets: All gallery talks and tours are free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.

ADULT WORKSHOP

Sketching in the Gallery

Simon Levenson, Artist and National Arts Club instructor

Spend two hours sketching, drawing inspiration from the works in the exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*. Professional artists and educators will be available to assist you.

Saturday, August 13, 11 am–1 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission.

This program is limited to 12 people on a first come, first served basis. Stools, boards, a selection of pencils, and drawing paper will be provided. While personal sketchbooks are allowed, ink, paint, markers, charcoal, chalk, pastels, folding stools, and easels are not permitted in the galleries.

ADULT WORKSHOP

Sketching in the Gallery

Simon Levenson, Artist and National Arts Club instructor

Spend two hours sketching, drawing inspiration from the works in the exhibition *Rembrandt's First Masterpiece*. Professional artists and educators will be available to assist you.

Saturday, September 10, 11 am–1 pm

Tickets: Free with museum admission.

This program is limited to 12 people on a first come, first served basis. Stools, boards, a selection of pencils, and drawing paper will be provided. While personal sketchbooks are allowed, ink, paint, markers, charcoal, chalk, pastels, folding stools, and easels are not permitted in the galleries.

Organization and Sponsorship

The exhibition was conceived by Per Rumburg, now Curator of Exhibitions at the Royal Academy, London, and formerly Associate Curator at the Morgan. The installation at the Morgan has been overseen by John Marciari, Charles W. Engelhard Curator and Head of the Department of Drawings and Prints, and by Ilona van Tuinen, Assistant Curator of Drawings and Prints.

Rembrandt's First Masterpiece is made possible in part by S. Parker Gilbert, whose gift prior to his death in 2015 provided early support for the project.

Generous support is also provided by Jean-Marie and Elizabeth Eveillard, the Andrew W. Mellon Fund for Research and Publications, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Parker Gilbert Memorial Fund, and Mr. and Mrs. Clement C. Moore II, with assistance from The Wolfgang Ratjen Foundation, Christie's, the Netherland-America Foundation, and the Rita Markus Fund.

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In partnership with



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The Morgan Library & Museum

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

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