

Artist: Rembrandt

Title: Self Portraits

Dates: 1627-1669

Location: Netherlands

Most scholars up till about twenty years ago interpreted Rembrandt's remarkable series of self-portraits as a sort of visual diary, a forty-year exercise in self-examination. In a 1961 book, art historian Manuel Gasser wrote, "Over the years, Rembrandt's self-portraits increasingly became a means for gaining self-knowledge, and in the end took the form of an interior dialogue: a lonely old man communicating with himself while he painted." Many of these traditional studies focused particularly on Rembrandt's late self-portraits, as they reveal this rigorous self-reflection most profoundly. In an influential 1948 monograph on the artist, Jacob Rosenberg wrote of the ceaseless and unsparing observation which [Rembrandt's self-portraits] reflect, showing a gradual change from outward description and characterization of self-analysis and self-contemplation. ... Rembrandt seems to have felt that he had to know himself if he wished to address the problem of man's inner life.

