

Echoes of the master: *Jacob, Laban and Leah* by Johannes Spilberg

## Lesser stars bask in the master's reflected glory

**I**N THE WAKE of the travelling Rembrandt exhibition, which has trundled from Berlin, to Amsterdam and is now in London, interest in the Dutch master's pupils has also increased. Another stimulus has been the work of the Rembrandt Research Project and the question about many paintings' correct attribution.

At The Hague, the commercial gallery Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder has taken advantage of this unprecedented attention.

It is now exhibiting 42 paintings by Rembrandt's pupils and followers, of which 20 are for sale. With Old Master prices stable or even rising, these paintings could be safe investments. Estimates range from Nfl100,000 to Nfl2,000,000 (Ecu43,500-870,000).

Many 17th-century artists felt Rembrandt's influence as pupils, workshop assistants or as amateur hangers-on. The artistic results were a mixed bag as few managed to combine the master's style with appropriately dramatic subjects. Some notable talents did emerge though and the best are represented in the exhibition.

From the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York comes *Portrait of a Man* by Willem Drost which is

### *Albert Ernrooth on a show of paintings by pupils and associates of Rembrandt*

reunited with its companion piece *Portrait of a Woman* from the Bredius Museum in The Hague. Drost was one of Rembrandt's most talented pupils - he may have painted *The Polish Rider* in the Frick Collection in New York - but little is known about him.

It is thanks to the authoritative catalogue by Werner Sumowski, of Stuttgart University, that we know anything at all about many of these painters.

One of the most interesting paintings for sale is *Christ and the Centurion* by Jan Lievens (1607-1674), which was bought by Hoogsteder at auction outside Paris. An apparently unremarkable work, it emerged that it had been painted over during the 19th century, rendering the original barely recognisable.

Surprisingly, Lievens was long seen as a Rembrandt pupil, but in fact they shared a teacher, Pieter Lastman (1583-1633). They may also have shared a studio in Leiden. There is no doubt

that Lievens was influenced by his companion. A precocious painter, he established himself as an independent artist at the age of 14, and was as famous and respected as Rembrandt. His restored *Christ and the Centurion* is from his less inspired period, but the atmospheric landscape combined with the historical subject is expertly executed in warm "Italian" colours. Hoogsteder refuses to divulge the price, but it is unlikely to be less than Nfl 2m.

One oddity in the sale is the Flemish painter Jacob van Loo (1614-1670). His *Cimon and Iphigenia* is in classical style, but he is recorded as having appeared with the famous Rembrandt pupils Ferdinand Bol (1616-1680) and Govaert Flink (1615-1660) before an Amsterdam notary to declare that a certain lady "had posed stark naked before the witnesses and that they attested to having drawn and painted her".

Rembrandt may have belonged to the same group using the same - often expensive - model, and his influence can be traced in this voyeuristic painting, but there is no other evidence of a connection.

Van Loo was forced to flee to France after killing an innkeeper in a scuffle in Amsterdam. His descendants were court painters in France until the late 18th century, which explains the Louvre's interest in *Cimon and Iphigenia* (estimated price Nfl 1.4 million/Ecu600,000).

Rembrandt's successful followers included the brilliant Carel Fabritius (1622-1654), possibly allowed to carry out portraits commissions in the name of the master. Rembrandt expected his pupils to imitate his style in paintings which he would then sign (and pocket the fees).

Contrary to the popular myth, Rembrandt was not forgotten after his death; he remained highly influential even though his portraits were thought old-fashioned.

Even so, Daniel Koninck (1668-1720) painted so plausible a portrait of Rembrandt in 1716 that it was attributed to the master.

Three paintings by the fine portrait painter Govaert Flink (1615-1660) are on view and *Portrait of a Little Girl Near a Child's Chair* (1640), lent by the Mauritshuis in The Hague), is one of the highlights.

Rembrandt's last pupil, Arent de Gelder (1645-1727), followed the master's style closely, even when it was unfashionable. Being wealthy, however, he did not suffer. Apparently he was cross-eyed and lived well, being a "pleasant man full of witticisms and comic conversation".

But for Rembrandt's extraordinary talent, his followers would remain half-recalled names in art history. Nonetheless, many reaped rich rewards for their work and Hoogsteder can be expected to ride the Rembrandt wave equally comfortably - from a financial point of view.

*Rembrandt's Academy, until 2 May, Hoogsteder, Langer Vijverberg 15, Den Haag (Tel 70 3615575); catalogue Nfl 45*

*Cimon and Iphigenia* by Jacob van Loo - estimate: 1.4m guilders

Admiral Tromp? Rembrandt lookalike (1716) by Daniel Koninck