



Fashion and Fancy: Dress and Meaning in Rembrandt's Paintings

Marieke de Winkel

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Until now dress has played only a subordinate role in the research of Rembrandt's paintings, despite the fact that few artists are as intensively studied as this Dutch master. The lacuna is all the more surprising since Rembrandt obviously delighted in rendering clothes, which, for him, not only communicated the character and social status of his sitters but also clarified his narratives and heightened the drama in his historical pieces. Here, Marieke de Winkel offers a fascinating and much-needed study of dress and costume in the works of Rembrandt.

De Winkel shows us how focusing on apparel opens a new line of inquiry into Rembrandt's paintings, one which is symbolically and iconographically richer than previously imagined. This approach, which has not been fully acknowledged by art historians nor developed by dress historians, deepens our understanding of Rembrandt's expression as well as the cultural and historical context of the Dutch seventeenth century. De Winkel proves the merits of the approach here with her close readings of Rembrandt's paintings and the contemporaneous connotations of the clothes he depicted. She demonstrates convincingly that clothes do much more than help date the paintings; they are instead integral to the program of representation.

No longer ancillary to art history, dress and costume here receive their full due in this study, leaving us with not only a better understanding of Rembrandt but of his wider world as well.

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