

**STRAND
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presents

MY REMBRANDT

A FILM BY
OEKE HOOGENDIJK

PRESS NOTES

OFFICIAL SELECTION
International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam

Country of Origin: The Netherlands
Format: DCP/2.35/Color
Sound: 5.1 Surround
Running Time: 97 minutes
Genre: Documentary
Not Rated
In Dutch, English, and French with English Subtitles

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SYNOPSIS

Rembrandt, the grandmaster of intimacy, rocks the art world; 350 years after his death, many people, even entire nations are obsessed with his paintings. Aristocrats cherish, experts rule, art dealers investigate, collectors hunt, and museums battle. The epic documentary MY REMBRANDT dives deep into the art world of Old Masters, exploring the motives of its elite.

LONG SYNOPSIS

MY REMBRANDT is set in the world of the Old Masters and offers a mosaic of gripping stories in which unrestrained passion for Rembrandt's paintings leads to dramatic developments and unexpected plot turns. While art collectors such as Eijk and Rose-Marie De Mol van Otterloo, the American Thomas Kaplan and the Scottish Duke of Buccleuch show us their special connection with 'their' Rembrandt, French baron Eric de Rothschild puts two Rembrandts up for sale, triggering a hard political battle between the Rijksmuseum and the Louvre.

The film also follows aristocratic Dutch art dealer Jan Six as he seems to be on the trail of not just one but two 'new' Rembrandt paintings. This nerve-wracking journey of discovery seems to be the realization of his biggest boyhood dream. But when he is accused of having violated an agreement with another art dealer, his world looks about to collapse.

The film MY REMBRANDT allows us a fascinating insight into what makes the work of this Dutch master painter so special and why his work touches so deeply.

Following the success of her award-winning documentary THE NEW RIJKSMUSEUM (2014) film director Oeke Hoogendijk has once again taken on a great subject to tell us a captivating tale of art and art lovers.

PROTAGONISTS

JAN SIX X

Amsterdam's oldest and still thriving aristocratic family is now represented by Jonkheer Jan Six van Hillegom X (1947) and his son Jan Six XI (1978). Jonkheer Jan Six is the 10th descendent in a straight line of the historical Amsterdam art collector of the same name, and he is the present inhabitant of the age-old residence of the Six family. Forever linked with Rembrandt through the portrait which Rembrandt painted of their ancestor Jan Six I, which is still on the wall in their house, he talks about Rembrandt as a family member. In doing so he carries Rembrandt effortlessly from the 17th into the 21st century. It is his mission in life to keep the collection together and accessible to the public. Before long the responsibility will be passed on to his son Jan Six XI. But will the young Six be prepared to devote his life with similar enthusiasm to the time-honored family possessions?

JAN SIX XI

For the youngest descendant of the Six dynasty the bar is set high. Jan Six XI tries to disengage himself from the scenario which family history has prepared him for: *"Nobody wants to be pushed into a corner. All your life you hear that everything you do is in preparation of the following in the Jan Six footsteps. But hey, I'm an individual!"* With love of Rembrandt's art in his DNA, he goes through life as an art dealer and a Rembrandt detective. In *MY REMBRANDT* we follow him as he discovers and buys a painting he is convinced is by Rembrandt: *"This painting will demonstrate that I am more than just my surname."* The spectacular success of his discovery leads to a veritable media coup, but all-important is the judgement of his friend and mentor, Professor Ernst van de Wetering, *the* authority when it comes to identifying

Rembrandts. What if Jan, blinded by his goal, tries to fly too close to the sun like a contemporary Icarus?

PROFESSOR ERNST VAN DE WETERING

Ernst van de Wetering is undoubtedly the greatest Rembrandt expert in the world. He has devoted his whole life to research into Rembrandt's work and nearly every single painting by Rembrandt has passed through his hands. Whether he attributes a given work to the Master is still decisive. Van de Wetering has to assess whether Jan Six's discovery concerns a *real* Rembrandt, knowing full well what is at stake for his friend. When in film, he is face to face with the potentially 'new' Rembrandt, he reels and is literally breathless. Is it because he recognizes the mastery in the brush strokes?

THOMAS S. KAPLAN

The amazement of New York businessman, philanthropist, multimillionaire and art collector Thomas Kaplan was boundless when he discovered, in 2003, that was actually possible to buy a painting by Rembrandt. In 2007 he bought his first: *Minerva*. Ever since then he has been hunting down Rembrandt's paintings. "*There is nothing more lethal than passion and capital.*" Today Kaplan owns fifteen paintings by Rembrandt, which makes him the owner of the largest private collection of Rembrandts in the world. We accompany Kaplan and his wife Daphne to exhibitions of his collection at the Louvre in Paris and Abu Dhabi. It is his mission to transplant Rembrandt's paintings from the private domain to the public domain. He is convinced that Rembrandt's painting can contribute to a better world: *Rembrandt can save the world.*

DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH

The dynasty of the Buccleuchs goes back to 1663, and they are among Europe's richest private landowners. The Buccleuch art collection, built up by the ducal dynasty throughout the centuries, is regarded as one of the finest private art collections in the world, and Rembrandt's *Old woman reading* has a place of honor in it. The painting was bought by an ancestor at the end of the 19th century and is cherished by the present-day Duke as one of the main occupants of the castle. After a burglary at the castle, fifteen years ago, the painting was re-hung in a high place, out of reach. It meant greater safety for the painting but it does not do justice to the portrait. We follow the Duke of Buccleuch in his personal quest of arranging a special room, just for her. "*I want to bring her back to into family life again; I want to live with her*".

WIM PIJBES

"*A diplomatic row? So what? Those Frenchmen are always ready for a row. It's in their DNA. It doesn't matter; they play hard, so what?*" The former director of the Rijksmuseum is someone who believes in getting things done. But he is also a fighter and extremely ambitious; he is prepared to go through walls and has proven that he can do so. But his strength can also be his weakness. Ambitions set too high turns against him. He complicates the acquisition of Rembrandt's wedding portraits of Marten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit by premature publicity and is forced to witness with regret that works are eventually bought jointly by France the

Netherlands. His compelling revelation of the machinations behind the apparent success story of the joint purchase cannot hide his personal, painful disappointment.

TACO DIBBITS

Taco Dibbits, the present director of the Rijksmuseum, is ambitious as well as charming; with his blond hair and classically cut suits he is every inch a gentleman. When the wedding portraits from the De Rothschild collection are put on the market he goes on a secret mission to buy both of the paintings for the Rijksmuseum. *“You realize that something of this importance hasn’t been on the market for the past 40 years and won’t come again. You’ve got one shot.”* But when the Rijksmuseum, having considered the option of a joint purchase together with the Louvre, decides to try and buy two portraits on its own, it pushes the French to the extremes and a political row between the Netherlands and France is on the horizon.

BARON ERIC DE ROTHSCHILD

The sale of Marten and Oopjen literally leaves a void in the life of French Baron Eric de Rothschild. *“They were in my bedroom. Every time I went to bed, Madame was just on the right of my bed and Monsieur on the left.”* The businessman, viniculturist and art collector sells Marten and Oopjen with a degree of sadness, but for a considerable amount. Whether the family considers the sale to two different countries the most ideal construction, Baron de Rothschild keeps that knowledge to himself. He would rather reflect on what Rembrandt means to him: *“You know when you look at Rembrandt’s paintings, the marvel is that there’s a freedom in them; he lets himself go. The older Rembrandt gets the more he becomes a free spirit. In fact his paintings are extraordinary free.”*

EIJK & ROSE-MARIE DE MOL VAN OTTERLOO

The Van Otterloos are Dutch in origin but have lived in Boston (USA) nearly all their lives. That is where they built up their capital; they are passionate art collectors and the possible buyers of a Rembrandt discovered by Jan Six. Willy-nilly they become embroiled in the conflict between Six and the other art dealer, which is covered widely in the media. They are shocked by the feud between the two art dealers and don’t try to hide this fact. At the same time it’s clear that it will not stop them from buying Six’s painting. For the world of the Old Masters, business is business.

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

There is something curious about Rembrandt; it is as if his work has such an extraordinary truthfulness, emotionality and empathy that whoever looks at a Rembrandt painting goes in search of him- or herself. That is what made Rembrandt so special also for the 17th-century residents of Amsterdam who queued up to have their portrait painted by him: Rembrandt looked by beneath the surface and showed who someone really was, Rembrandt looked beneath the surface and showed who someone really was. Rembrandt did not flatter the people whose portrait he painted, he has an eye for the vanity and the finery of the people in the social milieu he painted. Rembrandt applied this method mercilessly to himself, too. His self-portraits, especially the later ones, are breathtakingly honest explorations of the psychological toll we pay

in the course of our lives. In his later portraits, Rembrandt seems to be resigned; *take me as I am*, he seems to want to say. By the way he observes and the way he paints he makes you realize that life is not perfect and that everybody has their flaws, because that is what makes us human. And that is how Rembrandt holds up a mirror to us from the 17th century, a mirror that teases and tickles. As Taco Dibbits so aptly put it: “*Rembrandt is a tribute to humanity*”.

In a way my approach to filmmaking has been greatly inspired by this, I observe and try to get as much as possible under people’s skin, without judging them. There is always love and empathy for the people I film. I work intensively and for a long time on the development of mutual trust; there must be an emotional contract or it won’t work.

The world of the Old Masters fascinates me immensely and it was a great privilege and a joy to be allowed to get so close to Rembrandt’s paintings. The unique access I was given to the picturesque elite who owns paintings like these open up a new world for me, one you don’t normally get a chance to enter. Although this world is largely inhabited by rich, white – and often also elderly – men (I have not been able to find any women who own a Rembrandt anywhere) I found themes that are also universal and of all times. For vanity, ambition, a hunting instinct, money, hubris and passion are in principle recognizable for everyone, for each human being.

In 2016 I started out on my quest into the significance of Rembrandt’s legacy in our times, and I visited people for whom the work of Rembrandt is alive and sometimes even an obsession. Rembrandt’s art may be completely public domain in museums, but it is sometimes entirely hidden behind the closed doors of private possession. It is remarkable how many great works by Old Masters are to be found in the living rooms of collectors.

In our very own Amsterdam I discovered how Jan Six XI, scion of the famous Six dynasty, tries to break free from the pressure of an imposing family history and from his father. As a filmmaker I immediately recognized in him an exciting protagonist with recognizable, universal motives. Jan’s fervent desire, perhaps even need, to prove himself and to be appreciated on his own merits, makes him into a main character of Shakespearean proportions. It was obvious from the start that Six would go all the way and was prepared to risk everything to achieve his goal.

The tussle between the Netherlands and France about the acquisition of Rembrandt’s marriage portraits of Marten and Oopjen in this film embodies almost literally the question of ‘to whom does a Rembrandt belong?’ Can a Rembrandt be French heritage? When French Baron Eric de Rothschild put his two portraits on the market, the director of the Rijksmuseum, Wim Pijbes, started a spirited lobby to meet the asking price of 160 million euros for these items of Dutch heritage. What began as an art deal between the Rijksmuseum and De Rothschild soon turned into a political game of chess with ever wider implications. This storyline in the film shows the dynamics Rembrandt is able to create right up to the highest political level.

With MY REMBRANDT my aim was to make a character- and plot-driven Shakespearean drama by showing main characters with every possible human motive - from the deeply felt love of Rembrandt’s paintings to the struggle for status and national pride - and to construct a narrative different from an educational documentary, but more like a fiction film, where the storytelling keeps you on edge.

I owe a great deal to the trust and the candor of my main characters who - however different their worlds may be - share at least one characteristic which has all of them in its grip:

Rembrandt fever. It is not Rembrandt himself, but their passion that plays the lead part in MY REMBRANDT. The question that lingers after we see the film is not: *What do we do with Rembrandt's legacy?* but rather: *What does Rembrandt's legacy do with us?*

Oeke Hoogendijk, *director*

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Oeke Hoogendijk (1961) is an internationally acclaimed documentary maker. She studied stage direction at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Utrecht (1990) and made her debut with her film documentary *The Saved* (1998), which won the Dutch Academy Award "Het Gouden Beeld" of 1998 and the Comenius Award in Vienna (1999). Her second film, *The Holocaust Experience* (2002), had its premiere during IDFA 2002 and was selected for several festivals in Europe and the US.

Over a period of ten years Hoogendijk followed the large-scale renovation and reorganization of the world-famous Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. She turned this material into a four-episode television series (episode 1&2 in 2008 and episode 3&4 in 2013) and a long film for the big screen (2014). For this film she received a large number of prizes in the Netherlands and abroad, including the Golden Calf at the Netherlands Film Festival, the Prix D'Italia and Best Dutch Documentary at IDFA 2014.

Hoogendijk specializes in documentaries about art. They are often long-running projects with a cinematographic approach that involves capturing the content as much as possible in scenes.

At present Hoogendijk is working on the full-length documentary *Licht[Light]* (Witfilm) about the unique Holland Festival Production during which this megalomaniac opera cycle by Stockhausen was performed under the baton of Pierre Audi; *De Schatten van de Krim* [The treasures of the Crimea] (Zeppers film) about how a centuries-old museum collection of artefacts from long lost civilizations became a focal point in one of the world's major political controversies today; and *Operatie Nachtwacht* [Operation Night Watch] (Discours Film) about the large-scale restoration of *The Night Watch*.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

- 1998** *The Saved*
- 2002** *The Holocaust Experience*
- 2008** *The New Rijksmuseum eps 1 & 2*
- 2013** *The New Rijksmuseum eps 3 & 4*
- 2014** *The New Rijksmuseum—The Film*
- 2019** *Marten & Oopjen, Portrait of a Marriage*
- 2019** *My Rembrandt*

DISCOURS FILM

Discours Film was founded by Oeke Hoogen-dijk and was co-producer of Hoogendijk's award-winning film and TV series The New Rijksmuseum. In 2016 Frank van den Engel (producer/owner Zeppers Film) joined Discours Film and together they produced Hoogendijk's long documentary MY REMBRANDT and the TV film Marten and Oopjen, Portrait of a Marriage. Discours Film is currently producing a documentary in which the restoration of The Night Watch, Rembrandt most famous painting, is being recorded.

CREDITS

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Produced By	Oeke Hoogendijk & Frank van de Engel

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