



REMBRANDT HARMENSZ. van RIJN
(Leiden 1606-1669 Amsterdam)

“A Scholar in his study ('Faust')”, c. 1652
Also known as ‘Dr. Fautreius’
Original copperplate; 21 x 16 cm, ca. 3 mm thick

In collaboration with Art Gallery Voûte Schiedam & Douwes Fine Art Amsterdam



Literature:

Bartsch 270; Hind 260; White-Boon 270;
"The New Hollstein Dutch' (Hinterding/Rutgers), 2013, no. 270, in its last state (of seven)
with Nowell-Usticke (1967): Copperplates are classified as unobtainably rare.

Provenance:

Rembrandt van Rijn, Amsterdam, c. 1652;
Clement de Jonghe 1679: as '33 practiseerende alchemist';
Unknown owner c. 1700 (two dots added);
Pieter de Haan, auctioned in 1767, lot 63;
Sold for fl. 6 to Fouquet;
Sold to Claude-Henri Watelet 1786, lot 363;
Rembrandt plates en bloc to Basan for 500 Livre, Pierre-Francois Basan (died 1797);
by descent to Henry-Louis Basan (his stock list nr. 1434);
sold c. 1809 to Auguste Jean (his stock list 1810, died 1820);
by descent to his widow, Veuve Jean, auctioned 1846, lot 540;
Bought by Auguste Bernard (retired 1876);
by descent to his son, Michel Bernard;
His Sale in 1906 to Alvin-Beaumont;
who sold it in 1937 to Robert Lee Humber (died 1970);
his heirs, sold in 1993 through Artemis London in association with R.M. Light;
Private collection, The Netherlands.
With Douwes Fine Art, Amsterdam

Exhibitions:

- Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 'Harry Mulisch Zielespiegel' Exhibition, 7 dec t/m 14 feb 1998.

About the Etching

This is one of Rembrandt's most puzzling and intriguing prints, as its exact subject is a mystery. Although it is most often known as **Doctor Fautreius** or **Faust**. It shows an elderly scholar in his study, transfixed by the apparition of a blazing disc of light enclosing a series of letters. The scene may represent an alchemist. Although nicknamed 'Faust', it does not accord with any passage in Marlowe's original 'Dr Faustus' (c. 1587). The shining disc also remains unexplained, although the letters 'INRI' match the inscription placed over Christ's head during the crucifixion (Jesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum). The scene possibly shows an allegory of faith on how Rembrandt interpreted the story of the legend Faust; the letters surrounding the disc are intended to be indecipherable, reminding the learned scholar that human knowledge is limited and ambiguous, in contrast with the clarity of divine wisdom. This makes sense according to the Faust of early books—as well as the ballads, dramas, movies, and puppet-plays which grew out of them—where he is irrevocably damned because he prefers human to divine knowledge: "he laid the Holy Scriptures behind the door and under the bench, refused to be called doctor of theology, but preferred to be styled doctor of medicine" (*Walter Alison Philips, Faust', 1911*).



The Story of Faust

Faust is the protagonist of a classic German legend, based on the historical Johann Georg Faust (c. 1480–1540), who was a German itinerant alchemist, astrologer and magician of the German Renaissance. The erudite Faust is highly successful yet bored and depressed with his life as a scholar. After an attempt to take his own life, he calls on the Devil for further knowledge and magic powers with which to indulge all the pleasure and knowledge of the world. In response, the Devil's representative, Mephistopheles, appears. He makes a bargain with Faust: Mephistopheles will serve Faust with his magic powers for a set number



of years, but at the end of the term, the Devil will claim Faust's soul, and Faust will be eternally enslaved. Mephistopheles is a difficult servant, and Faust is challenged by his tricks, lies, and temptations. Despite their adventures, Faust accomplishes little or nothing of substance, wasting his opportunity with frivolities and indulgences offered up by the demon. Faust tries to revoke his pact under the burden of growing disgrace and damnation, but is dominated by Satan and his own doubts. He is irrevocably corrupted and believes his sins cannot be forgiven; when the term ends, the Devil carries him off to Hell. However in Goethe's later rendition of the story (c. 1790), Faust is saved by God via his constant striving. Today, "Faust" and the adjective "Faustian" imply a situation in which an ambitious person surrenders moral integrity in order to achieve power and success for a limited term.

The History of Rembrandt's Copper Etching Plates

Presented here is a history of the copper plates that Rembrandt used to produce his etchings. Eighty-two are known to still exist in museums, private collections, and galleries. By presenting the history of these plates, we hope collectors will increase their knowledge on the value of Rembrandt's originals and the background of his re-strikes. It is important to keep in mind that the information below is based on the available research of the succession of owners, so it is correct to the best of our knowledge.

With Rembrandt in heavy debt in the late 1650's, his house and possessions were auctioned to pay creditors. Interestingly his copper plates and etching tools were not among the items sold and this absence has spurred a number of theories. The first theory being that Rembrandt sold the plates earlier, and the second being that he passed them to friends to protect. The most probable theory however is that the bankruptcy court excluded them from the sale because they were tools of the artist's trade. Although nothing exists confirming any of this, after Rembrandt's death in 1669, a majority of his plates had been canceled or destroyed. Hendrickje kept the remainders in the Estate of Titus for protection.

The first record of any of the artist's copper plates came in 1677, during an inventory of Rembrandt's friend and print dealer Clement de Jonghe's estate, which cataloged 74 of them. No information is known of how de Jonghe came to possess the plates and no further mention of any plates was made for over 90 years until 1767, when 76 of them came up for auction in the estate of Pieter de Haan. (The Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam holds an original catalog from the auction.) Sometime between 1677 and 1767 de Haan acquired the copper plates, and Pierre Fouquet purchased approximately 53 of them at the de Haan auction. Fouquet then turned around and sold the 53 plates to Claude Henri Watelet (1718-1786) in 1767.



Clement de Jonghe as etched by Rembrandt in 1651

A French engraver, writer, art critic and art collector from Paris who greatly admired Rembrandt, Watelet acquired all of the artist's copper plates available until his death in 1786. In 1786, over 78 of Rembrandt's copper etching plates owned by Watelet, most likely 82, were listed in a catalogue of Watelet's estate and Pierre Francois Basan (1723-1797) purchased the entirety of Watelet's plate collection.

Basan was a French engraver and acquired Rembrandt's copper plates to publish a collection of Rembrandt etchings between 1789 and 1797. With Basan's death in 1797, his son Henri Louis Basan inherited the plates and published a second limited collection. Henri Louis Basan subsequently sold all of the copper etching plates to August Jean between approximately 1805 and 1810. Impressions printed by Basan and his son are commonly referred to as the "Basan impressions".

After purchasing the copper plates between 1805 and 1810, August Jean issued a small edition of some of Rembrandt's etchings. At the time of August Jean's death, his widow, Veuve Jean, inherited Rembrandt's copper plates, and sold them to Auguste Bernard in Paris around 1846.

From 1846 until 1906, Rembrandt's copper etching plates remained in the collection of Auguste Bernard and his son, Michael Bernard. In 1906, Michael Bernard sold the collection of copper plates to Alvin Beaumont, who then published a series of Rembrandt etchings that are known as "Beaumont impressions."



In 1916, Beaumont applied a layer of ink and varnish – a sort of protective coating - to protect Rembrandt's 78 copper etching plates that were in his possession and placed them in green leather mounts with their titles in French in gold letters and set them in 10 large black frames. Before mounting the works, Andre-Charles Coppier examined each plate and published his study under the title *Les Reliques de Rembrandt*. Beaumont even loaned them to the Rijks museum in Amsterdam for seven years in the 1920's during which time he attempted to negotiate the sale of the plates to the Rijksmuseum. The British Museum of Art was also offered the copper plates, but Beaumont was unable to reach an agreement with either of these museums.

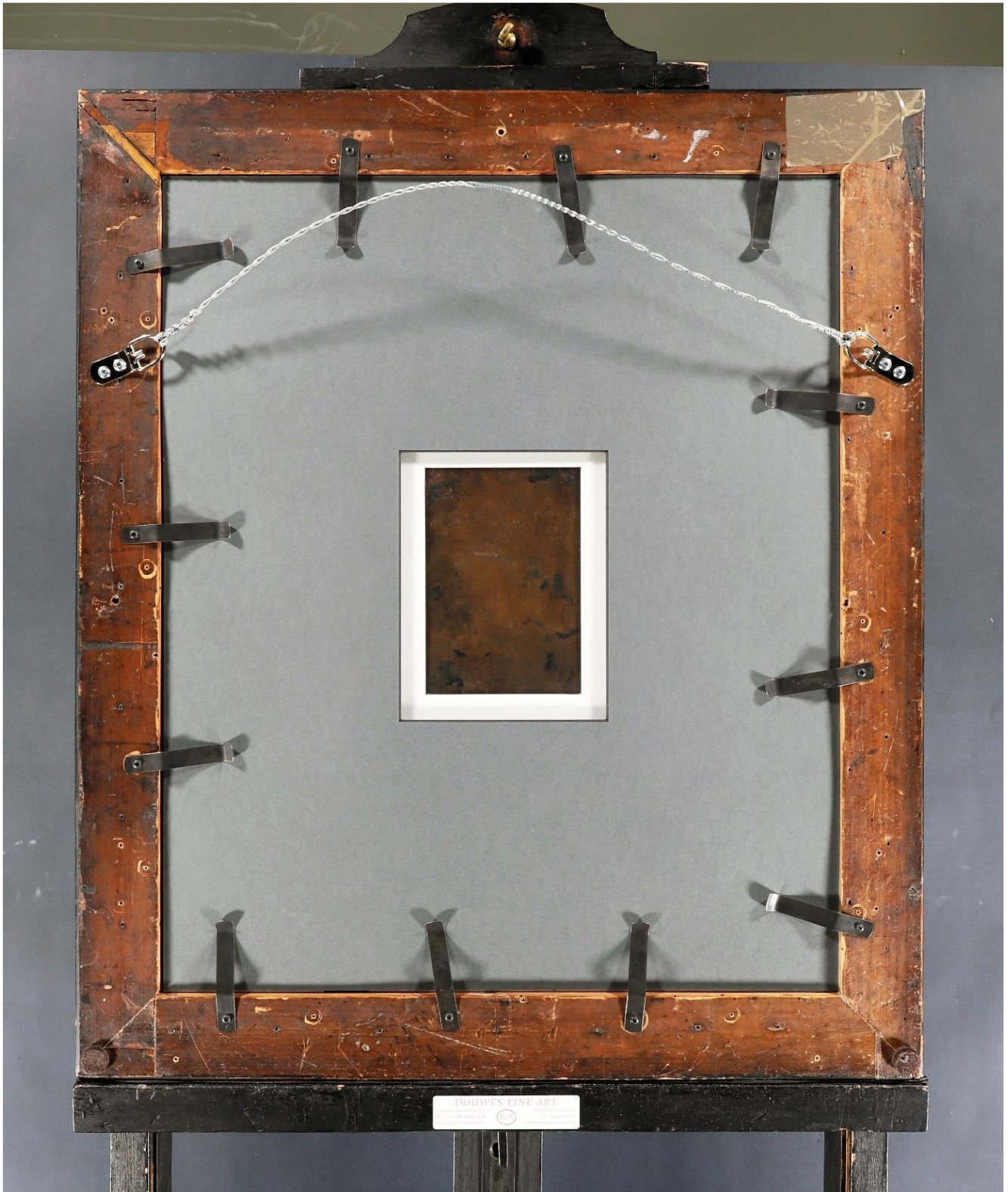


Owning Rembrandt's copper etching plates until 1938, Beaumont sold all 78 of them to his friend Robert Lee Humber, an American then living in Paris. The copper etching plates remained in Robert Lee Humber's collection until approximately the early 1960's. At that time, all 78 of the plates were loaned to the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, North Carolina where they were stored for over thirty years until 1993. With Hubert's death in 1970, his heirs inherited the copper etching plates and enlisted Artemis International in London and R.M. Light, a noted Rembrandt expert and art dealer, to sell them.



In 1993, Rembrandt's copper etching plates were sold to museums throughout the world and a select number of collectors and art dealers. One of those dealers was Howard Berge who commissioned what is known as the "Millennium Impressions" in the early 2000's, the last known printings from eight of the plates that he purchased in 1993. With a storied history much like the artist himself, Rembrandt's 82 copper etching plates have survived centuries of war, natural disasters, and political and social upheaval. They reveal the mastery of an artist whose work transcends time and are works of art in their own right. It is important to understand that these copper plates are rarely offered for sale and that early impressions of this particular plate are also extremely valuable selling between €100.000-€200.000 for an early print. This particular etching Faust inspired Victor Hugo for his novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, in which it is cited to describe Claude Frollo's workshop in chapter IV of the seventh book, entitled *Ἀνάγκη*.





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