

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Golahny, Amy. Rembrandt: Studies in His Varied Approaches to Italian Art**

Jacquelyn N. Coutré

Volume 44, Number 2, Spring 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082717ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37546>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Coutré, J. (2021). Review of [Golahny, Amy. Rembrandt: Studies in His Varied Approaches to Italian Art]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(2), 248–250. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37546>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2021

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**é**rudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

**Golahny, Amy.**

***Rembrandt: Studies in His Varied Approaches to Italian Art.***

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History / Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History 317/48. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. xxx, 258 + 138 ill. ISBN 978-90-04-38266-4 (hardcover) €129.

In one of the most illuminating passages written about Rembrandt van Rijn during his lifetime, the secretary to the Dutch stadholder and connoisseur Constantijn Huygens faults the young artist for refusing to travel to Italy. (Rembrandt would never, in fact, leave the Dutch Republic.) Huygens claims that “feasting [his] eyes on the creations of such gigantic spirits” (40) as Michelangelo and Raphael would ultimately perfect the youth’s abilities. Fortunately for later admirers of the painter-printmaker, Huygens records Rembrandt’s reasoning: not only did he not have time to travel, but the Italian paintings most prized by northern collectors were already to be found in Holland. It is thus from the earliest days of Rembrandt’s career—around 1630—that his connection to Italy (or lack thereof) has been of interest. Amy Golahny’s volume, which originated in her dissertation on Rembrandt and the Venetian tradition, is an extensive and highly original study from this perspective.

Though Huygens wanted Rembrandt to be inspired by the great achievements of the Renaissance, Golahny considers the artist’s relationship with Italy writ large, from the diverse ways he appropriated solutions from visual sources to responses to the Dutch master. Chapter 1 provides a useful overview of the Italian experience of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish artists, including the motivations for and challenges of the trans-Alpine journey, the availability of Italian art in Amsterdam collections, and, most important, Rembrandt’s access to the Italian tradition through paintings and paper art. Golahny humbly advises that those familiar with this history skip this chapter, but that does the reader a great disservice: one would miss, for example, the highly informative travel account of the Dutch-English sculptor Nicholas Stone Junior, resurrected from a 1918 article in *The Walpole Society*, which outlines his purchases and the works he elected to see on his journey. Such fascinating and often overlooked historical evidence remains invaluable for scholars working on the circulation of artists and ideas during this period. Chapter 2 gathers seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentaries on Rembrandt and measures

the arc of his evolving creative choices against developments in Amsterdam's theatrical and intellectual circles. Chapters 3 through 6 offer discrete analyses of Rembrandt's oeuvre in relation to Italian art, qualifying his use according to the categories of pragmatic solutions, critical commentary, and conceptual rivalry. Here, Golahny teases apart transformations of figural and spatial arrangements, as well as landscape motifs, taken from the models of Titian, Tintoretto, Jacopo Bassano, and Caravaggio. A few unexpected names appear in these pages, such as Giovan Battista Moroni, whose portraits, Golahny argues, may have inspired the subtle movement of Nicolaes Ruts's shoulders and his placement against a modulated, shaded background in Rembrandt's dignified portrait (1631, New York, The Frick Collection). Alternatively, familiar names appear in new contexts: in the fifth chapter, titled "Appropriating for Commentary," the reader encounters Titian recast as the chief banker in Rembrandt's *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple* (fig. 87; 1626, Moscow, Pushkin Museum) as a reflection of the sixteenth-century painter's reputation for financial greed. Golahny's associations in these chapters are often fresh and provocative. Finally, chapter 7 explores the ways in which Italian artists and collectors perceived Rembrandt, from the etched heads by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione to the Rembrandtesque self-portrait by Giovan Battista Gaulli (fig. 138; ca. 1667, Florence, Uffizi).

One of the author's indispensable contributions to the field is her ability to mine and synthesize literary passages from dozens of sources. As one would expect, this book copiously assembles the appropriate references to art theory and the classicizing critiques of Rembrandt's work. The considerable exploration of *la maniera gagliarda*, known most famously from Guercino's reply of 13 June 1660 to collector Don Antonio Ruffo's request for a pendant to Rembrandt's *Aristotle and the Bust of Homer* (fig. 81; 1653, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art), is particularly enlightening.

Given that three of the seven chapters concentrate on visual analysis, it is disappointing that some of the illustrations (figs. 26, 67, and 101, for example) are extremely dark. Thankfully, the prints and drawings, of which there are many, are legibly reproduced.

This volume sits aptly in two Brill series, *Studies in Intellectual History* and *Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History*. Golahny's interpretation of the diverse ways in which Rembrandt availed himself of the

Italian tradition extends beyond mere source-hunting to address the larger philosophical challenge of translating textual narratives into the visual medium in the seventeenth century. As such, this publication is sure to be a necessary resource for any scholar looking to understand one of the most fertile and creative minds of the seventeenth century and the numerous influences that contributed to his endlessly compelling oeuvre.

JACQUELYN N. COUTRÉ

Art Institute of Chicago

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37546>

**Grafton, Anthony.**

***Inky Fingers: The Making of Books in Early Modern Europe.***

Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. Pp. 392 + 6 ill. ISBN 978-0-674-23717-9 (hardcover) \$39.95.

Anthony Grafton has made many books on the making of books. His brilliant work has ranged from the footnote to ink. Here, the reader shares in inky fingers, the experience of making and reading, inking and blotting.

Grafton begins with the way of humanists: more specifically, in 1517, with a German humanist, Joannes Boemus, who was making an ethnography of Europe, Africa, and Asia, which employed the best sources, “the deft use of scissors and paste” (2), a traditional and bookish method rather than the apparent eyewitnessing that recent travel writers had claimed (3, see also 1). Knowledge by travel and by systematic reading vied. In his own book, Grafton uses Boemus as a frame for his “nine studies in the forms of scholarly authorship in Western Europe between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century” that “recreate lost ways of writing and publishing, tracing the ways in which the material worlds of reading, writing, and printing affected texts and their reception” (4). Grafton explores how humanists read, researched, and wrote; how they made and disseminated books; and how aspects of humanist scholarship connected.

The nine chapters set out an arc of Grafton’s work. The first three chapters describe printers and scribes and their effect on scholars and knowledge: the first analyzes textual criticism, what Grafton calls “the humanist art of arts” (26);