

*Rembrandt's Holland*. Larry Silver.

Renaissance Lives. London: Reaktion Books, 2018. 214 pp. £15.95.

*Rembrandt's Holland*, by Larry Silver, Farquhar Professor Emeritus, University of Pennsylvania, demonstrates that good things can indeed come in (relatively) small packages. In a volume of five chapters and 192 pages, Silver takes on the time-honored art historical tradition of discussing the life, art, and times of Rembrandt van Rijn. When compared to Simon Schama's monumental *Rembrandt's Eyes* (1999), at 750 pages, or even Mariët Westermann's exemplary *Rembrandt* (2000), at 350 pages, Silver's book is a radical departure. As part of the Reaktion Books series Renaissance Lives, *Rembrandt's Holland* was written under several constraints, surely meant to maintain the reasonable price for these hardbound books and to make them attractive to a wider audience. Length was clearly one of these constraints, as was limited inclusion of illustrations. Yet limitation seems to have provided a stimulus for Silver, who met the challenge admirably. The result is a sympathetic text for a general audience, organized thematically rather than chronologically, based on current scholarship (also represented in the helpful bibliography), and consistently offering a strong authorial voice. Examples of Rembrandt's paintings and prints include not only the best-known works but also less-studied ones that are apt and refreshing choices. Indeed, Silver is fearless in turning to several paintings that have in the past been questioned as fully authentic works; his discussions inspire confidence in these choices, and he also wisely avoids the oft-tedious byroad in Rembrandt studies of arguing about authenticity.

Though he is best known as a scholar of sixteenth-century Netherlandish and German art, Silver's bona fides in Rembrandt studies are substantial and outlined in the book's preface. The introduction provides a concise account of Dutch history (political and cultural) from the late sixteenth into the seventeenth century and traces Rembrandt's early career and recognition. Silver fluidly presents the social context of Rembrandt's commissioned portraits in chapter 1, "Representing Amsterdam's Citizens," and introduces subthemes returned to in later chapters. As co-author, with Shelley Perlove, of *Rembrandt's Faith: Church and Temple in the Dutch Golden Age* (2009), the definitive book on Rembrandt and religion for a generation to come, he has authoritative command of the thorny issues around Rembrandt's own religious affiliation and interactions with peers of other faiths, and in the present volume this command is evidenced in chapter 2, "Amsterdam's Religious Stew." Equally compelling is chapter 3, "Rembrandt and the Orange Court." Silver's discussion of the noble court at The Hague of the stadholders (military leaders) of the United Provinces, the princes of Orange, rightly emphasizes the fact that Rembrandt's ambition was not simply to paint the prosperous burghers of Holland. Though Rembrandt's early success with the court and its leading intellectual, Constantine Huygens, promised to lead to further court patronage, Silver makes clear why this did not happen, given Rembrandt's own foibles. He also weighs evidence about Rembrandt as pro- or anti-Orangist in his art at a time

when these political stances mattered a great deal, and concludes judiciously that the artworks themselves could be interpreted as supporting either cause. “Rembrandt’s World,” chapter 4, brings a dual focus: on the place in the world of the Dutch as a nation (including the horrors of Dutch-abetted slavery in the New World) and on Rembrandt’s personal world, including the inner world suggested through his series of self-portraits.

Silver balances discussion of the social context of Rembrandt’s life and art admirably throughout these chapters, and the thematic approach allows him to consider works of art from different aspects, adding to the depth of presentation. The highlights remain those passages where he describes specific paintings and prints (and a few drawings). Here Silver’s lucid prose and engaged eye help bring these works to vivid life, especially important in the many cases where works are discussed but not illustrated. *Rembrandt’s Holland* is a welcome and refreshing addition to the vast scholarly literature on the artist, offering an accessible, well-rounded picture of Rembrandt, his art, and his society.

Catherine B. Scallen, *Case Western Reserve University*  
doi:10.1017/rqx.2018.29

*Das Aachener Rathaus: Ein Bauwerk als Zeugnis europäischer Geschichte, Band 2: Die repräsentative Umgestaltung im Barock und Rokoko.* Georg K. Helg. Scriptorum Carolinum 4.2. Aachen: Geymüller, 2016. 276 pp. €59.

Monographs on town halls have not raised the same attention from architectural historians as those on palaces or church buildings. The book on the town hall of Aachen under review here is the second volume and the first one to appear from a series of three volumes. The book series is the outcome of a collaborative research project on the Aachen town hall, spanning from the times of Charlemagne to the twentieth century, conducted by a group of historians and architects specializing in building research.

This volume focuses on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not much remains from this epoch since the town hall underwent massive rebuilding at the end of the nineteenth century in order to reconstruct the appearance of a Gothic building, and since the middle of the twentieth century, after being damaged in World War II. The book unfolds the history of the building from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, with a special focus on the eighteenth century. The author concentrates first on the outer appearance of the town hall and then on the interior decoration. His starting point is the situation of Aachen after Frankfurt became the coronation place of the German emperors, in 1562. With this historical caesura the city lost its principal event, and the town hall’s largest and most important room, the coronation hall, became obsolete. It first served as a granary and was later divided up into several smaller rooms.