

## ASPECTS OF REMBRANDT'S DRAWINGS

Artists with Rembrandt's extraordinarily versatile and original gift as a draftsman are very thin on the ground. That versatility and originality applies to the drawing resources he used and the styles he adopted as well as the functions and subjects of his drawings. It is also the source of one of the great difficulties in assessing the authenticity of his drawings. The great diversity of his output is connected to some extent with the functions of the works. But there is also no doubt that, both as a draftsman and an etcher, he deliberately set out to produce a highly varied, multi-faceted oeuvre in order to assure himself a place in the history of artistic draftsmanship. He no doubt had other collections of artists in mind, like those of Vasari. In his *Vite* of 1550 and 1568, which Rembrandt was familiar with, Vasari often referred to his *libro de' disegni*, a collection of drawings compiled into several albums. This was constructed chronologically, beginning with the earliest Italian pieces from around 1300 and concluding with drawings by his Florentine contemporaries and himself. Rembrandt likewise placed his own works in his collection of drawings along with those of other artists. Yet even though Rembrandt worked on the compilation of his own oeuvre, he was nonetheless unsystematic. In some periods of his life he drew very little or not at all.

Rembrandt used mainly handmade European papers for his drawings, usually obtained from Switzerland, southern Germany, and France, and only very occasionally from Italy as well. Very rarely, he drew on utility paper, for example lined pages from ledgers (cat. 55) or on the back of printed funeral notices (Benesch 1061). He preferred small and medium-sized page formats, large drawings being the exception. The color of the paper was generally white, but from time to time Rembrandt had a phase of using slightly tinted drawing surfaces. The figure studies of the early period around 1630 were for example executed on reddish papers (cat. 1, 4). He obviously often created the tint he wanted by dissolving red chalk in water and brushing the fluid on to the surface of the paper with a wet brush or sponge. It was a working method he had learnt from his teacher Pieter Lastman, by whom comparable sanguine studies on yellowish-red coated papers survive. In the late 1630s, we come across yellowish-brown tinted papers as supports for iron-gall ink drawings (cat. 20–24). Occasionally one finds thick, coarse-grained utility papers with a brownish tint among Rembrandt's drawings, principally landscapes, where the atmos-