**Rembrandt and Mughal miniatures:**

**A look into the master artist's interest in Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb**

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Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn — better known simply as Rembrandt — is one of the Netherlands' most important art figures. His work spans across the 17th century, and his subjects vary from landscapes to allegorical and historical scenes, and portraits, with a large number of them being self-portraits. He was also an avid collector of art, which oftentimes came to him rather than him travelling in search of it. In an era when artists from across Europe visited Italy to sharpen their skills and learn about great masters, Rembrandt is known to have made Italy come to him, in the form of sketches and prints.

A little-known fact about him is that he was also deeply interested in Mughal miniature paintings. Trade exchanges between the East India Company and the Dutch meant that along with other goods, art from India — in particular the Mughal empire — also found its way into the homes of art connoisseurs in the Netherlands. Rembrandt too, became enraptured by them; we know this because of the sheer number of paintings he has made inspired by them — 23 to be precise. His copies of Mughal art outnumber the copies he made of paintings by European painters like Raphael and da Vinci. However, it remains unclear whether he actually owned any of them.

Dr. Stephanie Schrader, a curator of drawings with the J Paul Getty Museum who is an expert in Rembrandt’s work, says that it is not surprising that Rembrandt was fascinated by this Indian art form, because he was deeply interested in portraiture and depicting the inner soul of his subjects rather than their physiognomies. He drew Akbar, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, but he seemed most interested in Shah Jahan, who he portrayed in his youth and old age. The opulence and grandeur of these monarchs' clothes and their regal dispositions are evident in the Dutch master's renditions.

He used high quality, expensive Asian paper for his Mughal paintings. Though he does borrow concepts such as the shallow depth of field from Mughal art, he manages to infuse his own learning about movement and perspective into the copies. To an Indian, they may seem very unlike their inspiration, but to a Rembrandt expert, they are a marked deviation from the rest of his work.

Why he chose to portray these subjects, who he had never seen and whose culture was so different from his own, remains a mystery, because he has left no written account about this series of paintings. His copies of Mughal miniatures are a testament not only to how highly Mughal painting was regarded by the Dutch in the 17th century, but also of how the world of art was globalized and inclusive, even 300 years ago.