

Framing Rembrandt and his Circle



Drawings
from the Frits Lugt
Collection and their
antique frames

Antique frames in the Frits Lugt Collection

FOR several centuries now collectors have preserved their drawings and prints in albums or portfolios, shielded from the light. Frits Lugt (1884–1970), creator of the Fondation Custodia, adopted this principle for most of his works on paper. However, in his Dutch residence some of them were displayed in antique frames, which he also collected with a lively interest. He believed that authentic frames were essential for fully appreciating art works. In 1957 Frits Lugt presented at the Institut Néerlandais (Dutch Institute) in Paris, just recently opened, his first exhibition of drawings by Rembrandt and his school, in antique frames. At the end of his life, in 1970, his collection featured around 900 frames from different periods from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, and different European countries. The frame collection is actually held in three principal groups corresponding to the main drawing schools kept by the Fondation Custodia: Flemish or Dutch, Italian and French. The Italian frames in the Frits Lugt collection are particularly distinguished.

Presentation of the drawings by Rembrandt and his circle in antique frames

THE drawings are shown in frames which range from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century from the Netherlands but also France, Italy, Spain or Germany. Nine frames featuring in the exhibition were selected and are represented here with the drawings that accompany them. They give an idea of the great variety of materials and techniques utilised for their execution as well as the different decorations, some simple, others highly elaborate, reflecting the evolution of taste among the *amateurs* of graphic works. For this occasion the ensemble of frames on exhibit benefitted by conservative and restoration interventions, so that several of them are shown for the first time. This exhibition booklet is introduced by a short glossary presenting materials which can be observed on the selected examples.

cover illustration
Rembrandt, *The grain mill "De Bok"*
on the bulwark "Het Blauwvoofd",
pen and brown ink, brown wash. -
116 × 198 mm

Materials and techniques used in frame-making

Back frame

POPLAR (Populus): a very lightweight and soft wood, from creamy white to light brown in colour. The grain is elongated, straight and fine. Poplar is often used in Italy for making frames.

Walnut (*Juglans regia*): semi-hard wood, dark grey-brown in colour with black veins. Its grain is thin to medium-thick, homogeneous like its structure. Walnut is appreciated in sculpture.

Oak (*Quercus pedunculata*, *Quercus sessiflora*): hard wood, yellow-brown in colour. Its grain is dense and variable depending on growth; its structure heterogeneous. It has been used quite frequently for frame-making, particularly in the Netherlands and France.

Conifers: this term groups essences like the pine (*Pinus*), the fir-tree (*Abies pectinata*), the spruce (*Picea excelsa*). These wood essences are usually semi-hard, with a variable grain and a homogeneous structure, rather lightweight compared to oak or ebony.



Veneering wood: ebony and substitutes

THE ebony used by the Dutch in the sixteenth century mostly came from Madagascar (*Diospyros perrieri*). By the end of the sixteenth century they obtained their store from Mauritius and sold it all over Europe. It is a hard, heavy wood with brown shades, rather homogeneous; its grain is fine. This costly material was mainly used in veneering.

Pear (*Pyrus communis*) is also a hard wood, pinkish brown in colour. Its grain is fine and homogeneous like its structure. This wood has the characteristic of “taking on colour” well and thus imitating ebony. Pear stained black was utilised quite frequently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Other essences were used as substitutes for ebony, a precious and expensive material.



The decoration of “ripple” or “guilloche” moulding in ebony or ebonised wood is obtained by splitting thin layers of wood, since the seventeenth century with a mechanical tool or “guilloche machine”.

Painted wood and inlaying

DEPENDING on the time and place of fabrication, frames were inlaid with materials including ivory, bone, mother of pearl, stone (marble, semi-precious stones, etc.) and bits of mirror. Some frame decorations are painted to imitate costly natural materials like lapis lazuli. The combination of blackened wood, guilloche moulding and hard stones was used throughout Europe since the Renaissance.



Tortoise-shell

THE shell of sea turtles is used as material for decoration. The most widely utilised are the *hawksbill* turtle (*Chelone imbricate*) and the green turtle (*Chelonian lydas*). The material is rather soft, pliable and thermoplastic. Polishing the shell produces a bright surface. The shell, depending on its nature and thickness, can be quite transparent. The distribution of its brownish-red spots is also appreciated. On the back of the shell the application of paper, red pigment or gold leaf allows to alter the appearance of the material because of its transparency. Similarly to ivory it is no longer used today because these turtles are endangered species. Tortoise shell has been imitated from the beginning either with paint, horn or since 1920 with non-natural materials.



Gilded wood

GOLD LEAVES can be applied using water or a fatty substance like oil; water-gilding known as “distemper” is the most beautiful: it allows to create bright parts contrasting with matt areas.

This process involves a specific preparation for the back frame: the wood is faced with several coats of animal glue mixed with chalk (*gesso*). Then is added a fine clay called bole, often orangey-red, upon which the gold leaf is laid after wetting it once again. It can then be burnished with an agate stone to make it bright. The gilding can present different shades of colour according to the nature of the underlying preparation and the quality of gold employed. The gesso can be incised and engraved or “redecorated” before gilding to obtain different decorative motifs.





Netherlands (?), 17th century,
reverse profile frame

Materials and techniques: ebonised fruitwood reverse profile frame with applied ripple, interrupted wavy and ripple mouldings and a plain *scotia*, on a butt joined conifer wood back frame. The rear-side is coated with a red-coloured pictorial material.

Particularities: it is the nature of these frames that the mouldings are not centred. The right hand back moulding has been replaced previously with a different ripple pattern.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: to give the frame greater stability, the elements of the back frame and the ripple moulding were re-glued; missing veneer was replaced. The polished surface was cleaned and revived.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 387 × 533,
interior 235 × 295, section width 120, depth 63

Provenance: sale Paris, Drouot, 19 February 1971 (to Fondation Custodia); Fondation Custodia, Paris; *inv. no.* 1971-L.1

Drawing: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *The martyrdom of a saint*; pen and brown ink, white wash. – 195 × 256 mm [no. 13; cat. 9]



Germany (?), 17th century,
ebonised wood frame

Materials and techniques: ebonised fruitwood frame with applied ripple mouldings bordering *scotia* and ogee profiles, stepped in at the corners, on a “mortise and tenon” conifer back frame, which is bevelled to give the frame a lighter appearance.

Particularities: veneers are of two different colours (brownish red and black). The frame has probably conserved its original dimensions.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 366 × 392, interior 327 × 252, section width 72, depth 33

Provenance: H. Studer, Vienna; Frits Lugt, Maartensdijk and Paris, purchased 13 March 1923; *inv. no.* 941

Drawing: Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, *Studies of a dog lying down*; point of the brush in brown ink, brown wash. – 293 × 199 mm [no. 31; cat. 70]



Italy, 16th century, *cassetta* frame

Materials and techniques: ebonised mouldings embellished with gold painted filigree ornament, the bevelled frieze inset with shaped panels of *pietra dura* and mother of pearl, on a pine back frame. The back frame presents a “mitre joint” assemblage.

Particularities: frames with this type of ornamentation are typically found around paintings by Corneille de Lyon.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: the structure of the frame was secured and the painted surface and inlays cleaned.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 326 × 353, interior 280 × 209, section width 73, depth 35

Provenance: Eugène Rodrigues (1853-1928), Paris; Frits Lugt, Maartensdijk and Paris, purchased 28 November 1928; *inv. no.* 3773



Drawing: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Seated old man*; pen and brown ink, brown wash, some corrections in white. – 163 × 129 mm [no. 12; cat. 8]

Italy, 17th century, reverse profile frame

Materials and techniques: ebonised fruitwood mouldings with a bevelled inner edge and *scotia* veneered with a tortoise shell laid on a gilded ground surmounted by a gilded brass winged *putto*. The back frame is half lapped pine and is in the original size.

Particularities: the luminosity of the gold accentuates the figuring of the tortoiseshell.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: parts of tortoise shell were glued down and the surface of the frame was cleaned.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 359 × 317, interior 238 × 201, section width 55, depth 30

Provenance: Emile Wauters (1836-1933), Paris; sale Amsterdam, Frederik Muller & Cie, 15-16 June 1926 (to Lugt); Frits Lugt, Maartensdijk and Paris; *inv. no.* 2606

Drawing: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Woman leaning on a window sill*; pen and brown ink, brown wash on light brown prepared paper. – 170 × 125 mm [no. 11, cat. 7]



Spain (?), 17th century,
cassetta frame

Materials and techniques: the *intarsia* frieze of kingwood or purple wood inlaid with panels of tortoise shell veneer on a painted red ground to accentuate the figuring of the tortoiseshell, ebonised wood for the outer moulding. The conifer wood back frame is constructed using a “mortise and tenon” joint.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: the joints and parts of the tortoise shell were secured with glue and the surface cleaned.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 350 × 337,
interior 351 × 235, section width 50, depth 25

Provenance: J. Rotil, Paris; Frits Lugt, Maartensdijk and Paris, purchased 30 March 1927 (a pair); *inv. no.* 2818

Drawing: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *Shah Jahan, standing with a flower and a sword*; pen and brown ink, brown wash, on oriental paper. – 178 × 101 mm [no. 23, cat. 20]



Netherlands, 19th century,
cassetta frame

Materials and techniques: ebony veneer and mouldings with bone bands of geometric ornament bordering a frieze veneered with panels of tortoise shell, with ebony buttons at the corners. The tortoise shell veneer is lined with laid paper by means of translucent animal glue. The back frame is constructed in poplar using a “mortise and tenon” joint.

Particularities: bone was sometimes substituted for ivory; the aspect of the tortoise shell is given by its natural colour and also by the colouring of the glue on the back.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: the joints were secured and areas of tortoise shell veneer were consolidated. A small missing area of bone and ebony fillet was replaced.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 552 × 399,
interior 269 × 221, section width 130, depth 53

Provenance: L. Godefroy, Paris; Frits Lugt, Maartensdijk and Paris, purchased 16 June 1926; *inv. no.* 2499

Remark: Frits Lugt used this frame for the Lievens drawing purchased two years earlier.

Drawing: Jan Lievens, *Portrait of Jan Francken, the servant of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*; pen and brown ink. – 275 × 218 mm
[no. 71, cat. 116]



France, Louis XIII, 17th century,
cushion profile frame

Materials and techniques: carved oak and gilded frame on red bole with acanthus leaf inner edge and a repeating acanthus leaf ornament on a cross hatched gesso ground. The oak back frame has a mitred and keyed construction (see photo “back frame” p. 3).

Particularities: the re-cutting in the gesso is particularly fine and the gilding seems old. The frame doubtless preserved its original dimensions.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: the gilded surface was cleaned.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 503 × 320, interior 361 × 282, section width 70, depth 30

Provenance: J. Petit-Horry, Paris; Fondation Custodia, Paris, purchased 2 May 1972; inv. no. 1972-L.4

Drawing: Philips Koninck, *The mocking of Christ*; pen, brush and brown ink, brown wash. – 175 × 225 mm [no. 83, cat. 105]



Italy, 16th century (Venice),
cassetta frame

Materials and techniques: *cassetta* frame with raised mouldings bordering a frieze with *pastiglia* ornament – a moulded decoration crafted separately and then applied onto the flat of the frame – of *candelabra*, on a punched gold ground with *paterae* at the corners; the pine back frame has a “mortise and tenon” construction.

Particularities: the bole preparation for the gilding, which is visible where the gold is worn, is particularly orange and warm in colour and typical of Venetian frames. The inner moulding is re-gilded.

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: parts damaged by insect infestation on the back of the frame were consolidated; the gilt was consolidated and cleaned.

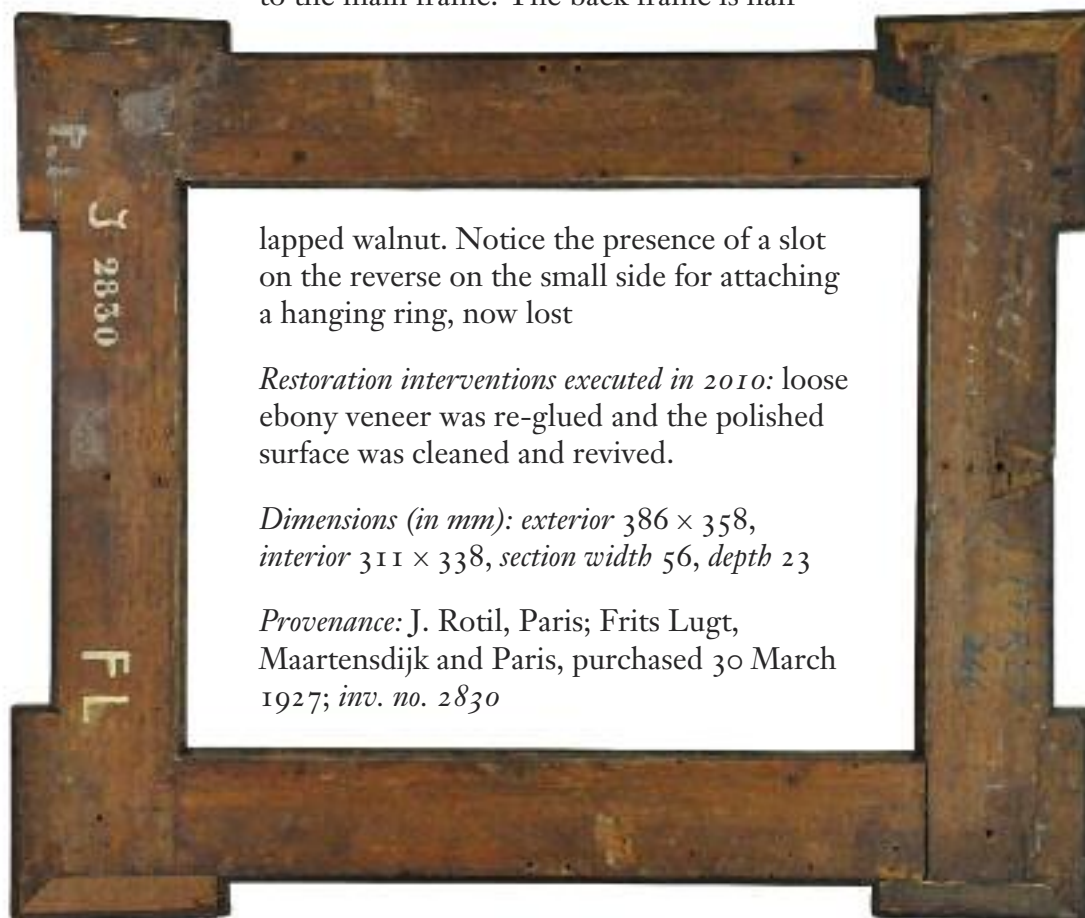
Dimensions (in mm): exterior 313 × 393,
interior 263 × 233, section width 75, depth 30

Provenance: Mrs. Walter Gay, Paris; Frits Lugt, The Hague and Paris, purchased 3 February 1938; *inv. no.* 5356

Drawing: Jacob Pynas, *The descent from the cross*; pen and brown ink, rubbed in places, on light brown paper. – 187 × 190 mm [no. 3, cat. 136]

Netherlands, 17th century,
cassetta frame
Illustration of the front
of the frame: see cover

Materials and techniques: ebony veneered frieze bordered by ripple mouldings (two types), the outset corners executed by adding pieces to the main frame. The back frame is half



lapped walnut. Notice the presence of a slot on the reverse on the small side for attaching a hanging ring, now lost

Restoration interventions executed in 2010: loose ebony veneer was re-glued and the polished surface was cleaned and revived.

Dimensions (in mm): exterior 386 × 358, interior 311 × 338, section width 56, depth 23

Provenance: J. Rotil, Paris; Frits Lugt, Maartensdijk and Paris, purchased 30 March 1927; *inv. no.* 2830

Drawing: Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, *The grain mill "De Bok" on the bulwark "Het Blauwhoofd"*; pen and brown ink, brown wash. – 116 × 198 mm [no. 15, cat. 11]

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