

Rembrandt on Jesus

By [Debra Bendis](#)

June 16, 2011



Traveling to Paris or Philadelphia this summer, or Detroit this fall? You may want to consider taking in the exhibit on "Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus."

While many of the works will be familiar to *Century* readers, the experience of seeing them in one place is rewarding, and it offers the viewer an understanding of Rembrandt's investment in his faith (Protestant) and his art. Rembrandt lived in a time that nourished his personal, creative research of the Christ. The 17th-century Dutch were interested in the biblical past and the ancient Orient. It was a peaceful moment, and the society was tolerant of other religions, including the Jewish immigrants in Amsterdam. All of this nourished and influenced Rembrandt's religious perspective and encouraged artistic experiment.

Rembrandt's rupture with the tradition of painting a formal, glorious Christ occurs one painting at a time. In the sequence of portraits of Christ, for example, Rembrandt paints from a live model, and his Christ changes moods: he is by turns weary, enigmatic, reflective. Then there is the earlier work *Pilgrims at Emmaus*, in which Christ is portrayed in shadow with his profile lighted by an unseen source. Across from him an unnamed table companion is

astounded and frightened as he recognizes Christ.

The exhibition will close

at the Louvre on July 18, then travel to the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Aug. 3-Oct. 30) and the Detroit Institute of Arts (Nov. 20, 2011-Feb. 12, 2012). A fabulous [online tour](#) of the works is available at least through July 18.