Among the iconic images produced by the Dutchman Rembrandt van Rijn are his many self portraits. In them, the artist looked at himself through critical eyes while applying his remarkable genius to painting, drawing and printmaking. His *Self Portrait with Saskia*, a rare double portrait etching of 1636, is one such example. Its composition rewards viewers with not only the image of the artist, but also that of his wife Saskia van Uylenburgh. Thanks to the Wanda Hollensteiner Conservation Fund at Beloit College, this important print can be seen to its best advantage following a recent conservation treatment.

Rembrandt completed the *Self Portrait with Saskia* at a time when he was approaching an early summit in popularity, creativity, and wealth. By the middle of the 1630s, the artist was overwhelmed by portrait commissions, had completed a number of important history paintings, and was sharpening his skills in drawing and etching. At the same time, Rembrandt was busy establishing an independent workshop in Amsterdam and taking on pupils. These activities followed his previous employment and collaboration in the painting workshop of Hendrick Uylenburgh, a relative of Saskia. Unfortunately, fame and happiness were short lived for Rembrandt and his wife. In 1642 Saskia died, and the decades to follow saw the artist’s popularity wane and his finances evaporate.

The couple could not have predicted such hardships at the time Rembrandt produced the *Self Portrait with Saskia*. In the etching he employed a unique composition that drew from the tradition of marriage double portraits. The work’s innovative, yet eccentric character centers on the relationship between the two figures. He depicted himself close up, while a smaller Saskia is relegated to the background on the other side of a table. A slightly distorted perspective results, one that does little to interfere in our communication with the young, slightly dour, couple.

In the print Rembrandt lavished greater attention on his own image, picturing himself interrupted from his drawing. Loosely holding a pen or pencil, his hand rests on a sheet of paper. By identifying himself as a draughtsman, it has been suggested he is alluding to drawing as the father of the creative process within the visual arts. Interestingly, Rembrandt wears a historical costume—high white-collared shirt, fur-trimmed cloak, and sixteenth-century hat with notched rim and a feather. Similarly, Saskia wears old fashioned clothing, including a veil on her head.

Each figure seems to exist within their separate world, with neither directly responding to the other. It should be remembered that in depicting Saskia, Rembrandt would have ‘drawn’ her image on the copper etching plate directly from observation. For his own features, however, he required the use of a mirror to capture his reflection (in reverse). He then had to redirect the fall of the light across their faces to achieve consistency. At the same time, and the key to Rembrandt’s genius as a printmaker, he sought to refine the tonal effects of the composition by making changes (or states). Visual evidence suggests *Self Portrait with Saskia* serves as the third and final state of this beautifully conserved print.