



## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE FOR WALTER LIEDTKE

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This special issue of *JHNA* is a tribute to Walter Liedtke, Curator of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from 1980 until his death in 2015. At the time of the tragic accident that took his life, Walter was riding the Metro North train, as he did nearly every day, to his home in Westchester County. Only the front car and the people in it were catastrophically affected when the train crashed into a vehicle that was stuck on the tracks. Walter preferred to sit in the front car because it was quiet and conducive to reading. Often, he was reading the latest scholarly study, in recent years on Spanish art as well as Dutch. His rigorous, independent views on what he read can be discovered in the many reviews, essays, catalogue entries, and books he published. This issue includes a lifetime bibliography that begins even before Walter completed his PhD at the Courtauld in 1974. His interests ranged from architectural painting in Delft to the structure of Rembrandt's workshop and the pictorial genius of artists such as Frans Hals and Anthony van Dyck. His analyses demonstrate perceptive attention to context and meaning as well as a connoisseur's eye for facture.

Prior to joining the Met, Walter taught at Florida State University (1969-71) and Ohio State University (1975-79), and he remained a teacher at heart. In later years he lectured at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts and at Princeton, and he welcomed fellows and interns to join in his research. In sharing ideas with the many colleagues and students who interacted with him over the years, Walter combined intellectual integrity with wit and generosity. He was a founding member of HNA.

In compiling this volume, we issued a call for papers with one central requirement: each study must give attention to a painting from the European collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the focus of Walter's curatorial work for thirty-five years. The results highlight some of Walter's core interests, such as the art of Rembrandt and Vermeer. They also bring attention to less familiar masterpieces in the Met's collection, such as Bartholomeus Breenbergh's *Preaching of John the Baptist* (1634). Examined here by Eric Jan Sluijter, this intriguing example of Amsterdam history painting is one of several brilliant paintings acquired by the Met on Walter's watch.

A shared focus of interest turned out to be Rembrandt's *Aristotle with the Bust Homer* (1653), the work Walter chose to speak about in a [short video filmed for the Met](#) in 2013. In this personal response to a painting he calls "a monument of western culture," Walter finds in Rembrandt's

approach an essential sympathy with the concerns of Aristotle himself. (That Walter's research on the painting had included reading Aristotle's *Poetics* typifies the curiosity and thoroughness informing his catalogues of the Met's Dutch and Flemish collections.) He imagines Aristotle (and Rembrandt) thinking, "Material things, honor, fame – so what? Did I say anything important?" This question is one with which all of us can empathize.

Those who knew Walter will surely be tempted to imagine what he would have thought of this volume. We are confident that he would have approved of *JHNA*'s commitments to peer review and to open access. We hope that the essays presented here will continue the work of illuminating Dutch and Flemish art not only for specialists but also for the broader community for whom the achievements of Rembrandt, Vermeer, and their contemporaries offer endless fascination, as they did for Walter himself.

*[An obituary for Walter Liedtke (1945-2015) appeared in the HNA Newsletter in April 2015.]*