

# Rembrandt in Muscat

Exhibition of etchings opens later this month



► (From left) Ashok Suvarna of NPA Events, H E Stefan van Wersch, Shaikh Abdullah al Salmi and Christoph Franzen

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The appearance in Muscat of 100 etchings by the great Dutch artist Rembrandt is a cause for celebration. Never before have etchings from the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam been exhibited in the Middle East. 'Rembrandt in Oman' will dispel the sluggishness of summer and open the new arts season with a bang.

The exhibition was announced last week by Shaikh Abdullah Salem al Salmi, of Al Salmi Library, and H E Stefan van Wersch, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. 'Rembrandt in Oman' will run at the Grand Hyatt Muscat from August 19 to September 19. The Afrah Ballroom will be transformed for the event, according to Christoph Franzen, general manager of the hotel, and there will even be a replica of an old Dutch-style house at the entrance, he said.

The show is exciting on several counts, not the least because



► A self-portrait by Rembrandt

Rembrandt is a towering figure in the history of European art. H E van Wersch drew attention to the fact that Dutch sailors first encountered Oman, another sea-faring nation, in the 17th century, when Rembrandt was alive. He added that the process of etching was invented in the Arab world – it was used to decorate medieval weaponry – and was subsequently developed in Europe to make prints on paper.

"We are no strangers to one another; we have had relationships for centuries that were close and mutually beneficial," he said, adding that this show represents the close

interaction between the Arab world and Europe, as does another exhibition on Oman to be held in Amsterdam from October 15. "This is a great year for Omani-Dutch cultural relations."

'Rembrandt in Oman' will be inaugurated on August 19 by H H Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq al Said, Minister of Heritage and Culture, and thereafter open from 10am until midnight. Managed by NPA Events and organised by Al Salmi Library, it is a non-profit-making exercise, Shaikh Salmi said. Admission to this show, which coincides with Ramadan, will be free.

## REMBRANDT THE PRINTMAKER

Rembrandt (1606-69) is a hugely important figure in the history of European art. His output of paintings and etchings was immense – according to Wallace's 'The Legend and the Man' in *The World of Rembrandt*, some 2,300 of his works survive: 600 paintings, 1,400 drawings and 300 etchings.

The artist's etchings embraced a variety of subject matter and experimented with different techniques. The basic principles of the technique involved first cutting to size a metal plate (Rembrandt liked thin copper). This plate was covered with etching ground, a soft mixture of wax, resin and bitumen. On to this surface the artist drew his composition using an etching needle, each line exposing the metal underneath.

The next stage was to immerse the plate in an acid bath. The acid bit into the metal exposed by the needle but left the etching ground unaffected. The plate was then taken out of the acid and the etching ground removed.

To make a print, ink was applied to the surface of the cleaned, etched plate. The plate was then wiped clean, but ink would remain in the grooves cut by the acid into the metal surface. At that point a sheet of damp paper was laid on top of the plate and the whole was run through a press, so that the ink in the grooves was transferred to the paper. This process printed the composition, which appeared in reverse on the paper. The artist could then continue making changes to the design on the plate using various tools.