

REMBRANDT

BRITAIN'S DISCOVERY OF THE MASTER



71 Glenn Brown, *Half-Life (after Rembrandt)*, 2017
 Series of six etchings, each 89.4 x 68.2 cm
 Courtesy the artist and Paragon | Contemporary Editions Ltd [cat.72]



her to the Netherlands to study the work of Rembrandt. Other artists of her generation have viewed Rembrandt in a way that may seem cynical or disrespectful, but which turns out to be the opposite. Glenn Brown (b.1966) has made painted, drawn and etched variants after Rembrandt since 1996 [figs 71 & 73]. He began with *I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper* (Limousin, Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain collection).⁵⁵ The title comes from a 1970s disco classic, but the painting is actually a copy after one formerly attributed to Rembrandt in the Wallace Collection in London.⁵⁶ Brown tackles the surface appearance of the works, highlighting the curious relationship that exists in paintings between style and subject. He replicates the swirling brushwork and coruscated paint with infinite care, yet the authorship of the works he is copying is often in doubt, as scholarly attributions send them yo-yoing in and out of the Rembrandt canon. Rembrandt is often called 'expressive', but if the identity of the artist is unclear, and if fakes abound, who is doing the expression and what is being expressed? The process of replication employed by Brown involves computer technology, and Rembrandt would surely have been interested

in it had he been alive today. It is a backhanded but deeply felt homage. As indeed is Banksy's *Rembrandt* [fig.72] – a copy after Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait at the Age of Sixty-Three*, 1669 (The National Gallery, London), but with 'googly eyes' attached.⁵⁷ It is partly a joke, of course, but it is also partly a jolt. Rembrandt's work is so ubiquitous in terms of reproduction, and so sanctified by talk of his profound humanity and his enormous prices, that it is good to have this all punctured now and again, so that we can look at the works afresh.

72 Banksy, *Rembrandt*, 2009
 Googly eyes and acrylic on canvas, 102.3 x 77 x 9.3 cm
 Private collection

73 Glenn Brown, *Unknown Pleasures*, 2016
 Oil on panel, 164 x 105.5 cm
 Courtesy the artist [cat.71]