

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

RYMSDYK, Jan van

Netherlands c.1720/30 – London brd 25.II.1790
Anatomical illustrator active in London from 1750; originally Jan van Riemsdyk but known in London as John Van Rymsdyk. He worked it is said in red chalk and pastel (although examples in the British Museum seem to be in watercolour), providing drawings for anatomical treatises by celebrated anatomists William Hunter (notably his *Gravid Uterus* in 1774), William Smellie (of whom Rymsdyk's portrait was engraved by Charles Grignion) and Charles-Nicolas Jenty.

Shelton 2009 proposed to identify the artist with a schoolteacher from Ochten, but the few biographical facts revealed in the artist's writings do not support this: he was born in Holland (perhaps in or near The Hague), not Gelderland; the signature on a 1757 notarial document is quite different. It has more plausibly been suggested that he may have studied with Jan Wandelaar (*q.v.*) before his arrival in England, although other practitioners included Nicholas Blakey (*q.v.*): before also working in London for William Hunter in 1749, in Paris Blakey knew Le Blon (whose printing technique was developed by the anatomical illustrator Jacques-Fabien Gautier-Dagoty, *q.v.*).

A group of pastels, executed by Rymsdyk for Jenty around 1750–55, were sold to John Fothergill; they were then sent in 1762 to William Shippen, who used them to teach anatomy in Philadelphia; they are now in the Pennsylvania Hospital. Two more, showing the incubation and development of a hen's egg, in the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, were made for lectures in 1755–56 by William Hunter's brother John. They were displayed in John Hunter's museum in Leicester Square in 1816. A pastel portrait of William Hunter by their elder brother, James (*q.v.*, J4104.101) was, according to a later letter in the family, "afterwards copied [medium unspecified] by Remsdike or Pine for Dr Hunter". Rymsdyk made repetitions for the Royal Observatory at Kew which disappeared from 1841. Between 1758 and 1764 he worked as a portraitist and drawing teacher in Bristol, but he failed to make his way and returned to London to continue as an illustrator. Rymsdyk was also a collector of old master drawings.

Rymsdyk's son Andrew was a miniaturist, and assisted his father on Hunter's *Anatomy*, as well as their best known production, the *Museum Britannicum* (1778), containing some 30 plates illustrating a selection of curiosities and antiquities from the British Museum's collections. A watercolour of a boy with a spaniel, sd A Rymsdyk/Delin 1779 (Bath 2002, no. 71) is clearly inspired by Liotard's pastel of Lord Mountstuart, probably known through the 1774 engraving by J. R. Smith. Andrew, who was born c.1754, died 13.XI.1786 and was buried in Weston, Somerset, 18.XI.1786. In 1764 Rymsdyk, described as a bachelor in the allegation, married a widow, Hellen (or Ellen) Jullien of the parish of St James's, Piccadilly, Westminster (a witness was the engraver John Fougeron); she was buried there in 1777. Three years earlier, Rymsdyk had an illegitimate son,

John, by a Mary Griffith (baptised in St James's Piccadilly 8.IX.1774), no doubt the son mentioned in his father's 1790 will; he was later apprenticed to a dancing master but died in 1810, a lunatic. Rymsdyk had a sister Maria also mentioned in his will; she died in the Dutch almshouse in Hackney 1799, aged 67.

Bibliography

Alexander 2021; Stephen Asma, *Stuffed animals and pickled heads*, 2003; Bath 2002, pp. 18, 98; Edwards 1808, as Remsdyke; Oxford DNB; Don Shelton, *The real Mr Frankenstein*, 2009; J. L. Thornton, *Jan Van Rymsdyk: medical artist of the eighteenth century*, 1982; Tonkovich 2005; Tonkovich 2022

Pastels

- J.6426.201 The progress of the egg, pstl/bl. ppr, 54x46, c.1755 (London, Hunterian Museum, inv. RCSSC/P 269a. Don John Hunter) ☐
J.6426.202 The progress of the egg, pstl/bl. ppr, 54x46, c.1755 (London, Hunterian Museum, inv. RCSSC/P 269b. Don John Hunter) ☐
J.6426.251 Sixteen anatomical illustrations, pstl (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Hospital). Exh.: *From pastels to PDAs: medical education from the 18th c. to the 21st c.*, Pennsylvania Hospital, 2009–10

