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Rembrandt Toothpaste

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REMBRANDT TOOTHPASTE



If you've ever wondered why no one smiles in Rembrandt's paintings you're not alone. That's because the subjects all had horrible teeth. This void preoccupied Rembrandt for a number of years, but it was only after painting *Night Watch* (1642) that he began contemplating how he could alter that situation since he was deeply depressed over the fact none of his subjects (including himself as in *Self-Portrait*) (1634) ever smiled and his few Dutch art patrons were pressing him to paint something "more lively." It was also at that time that Rembrandt was suffering from severe financial problems and the threat of bankruptcy loomed on the horizon. The answer to solving both problems came in a most extraordinary way.

With creditors clamoring for money owed them, Rembrandt was at a financial crisis. He had attempted a number of scams to avoid bankruptcy and to pay off his creditors, but nothing worked. He had his possessions sold, his paintings auctioned and, finally, had his house repossessed even though he tried unsuccessfully to put the deed in his son's name. At the end of his tether, Rembrandt came upon the ingenious idea of creating toothpaste. The same night he finished the master portrait of his son Titus (1655) and was preparing him for bed he asked his son why he didn't smile much. The young boy said it was because "[his] teeth were yellow." Always imaginative, Rembrandt found some paint and, mixing the appropriate colors only the way he could, dabbed a bit on the child's teeth. Miraculously the paint adhered and the boy's smile returned. Flushed with success, Rembrandt searched for other ingredients to add to the concoction until he finally came up with a formula that made his toothpaste the most popular in the Netherlands and, eventually, all of Western Europe (England was not included here since owning yellow teeth was considered traditional).

Though Rembrandt did not live long enough to reap any of the financial rewards of the product, Titus continued the R&D of the product

through the 18th century passing it along to his daughter, Titia. The family continued the business until it was eventually sold to a Dutch conglomerate in 1968 which sold off part of its assets to Japanese and American interests in 1987. A vestige of the original company, now called DenMat, operates out of Santa Maria, California.

CERVANTES INSTITUTE



After the initial publishing of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes fell into a kind of post-partum despondency. After all it was Cervantes' life's work which suddenly was lost to him. One could not blame the depression on the publication of *Don Quixote* since the novel met with popular success. Perhaps it was due to the book's lack of financial success, for even though it was critically well-received, *Don Quixote* was not going to make Cervantes enough money to dock a yacht in Mallorca. Most believe the depression was due to an accumulation of so many minor tragedies in his life: his physical disability, his enslavement, his imprisonment, his bungled financial condition, the rejection of his plays.

By 1611 it was clear no one wanted to stage Cervantes' plays and his financial situation had deteriorated to the point the family moved into