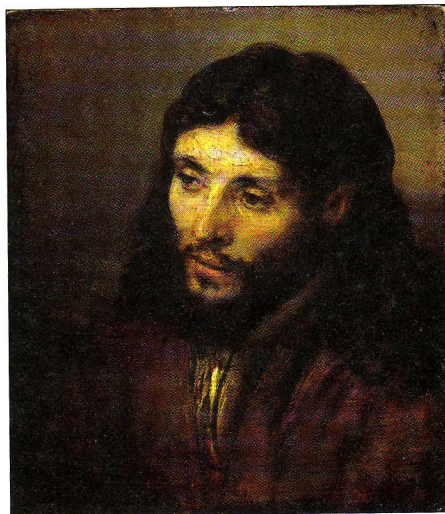


**Exhibit of the week****Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus**

Philadelphia Museum of Art  
Through Oct. 30

For centuries, depictions of Jesus Christ looked decidedly non-Sephardic, said A.D. Amorosi in the *Philadelphia City Paper*. “Regal, lean, and blue-eyed, with gently conditioned, shiny hair and an ever-present nobility,” this Westernized image was the standard until Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) finally imported “an edge of realness” into Christian iconography. With this intriguing exhibit, the Philadelphia Museum of Art makes a compelling case that Rembrandt was a pioneer in depicting Jesus not just as a real human but as an ethnic Jew. “The painter’s smaller, olive-toned Christ looks sullen and beatific, thick-lidded, alert and strong, stoop-shouldered and muscular like the carpenter he was.” Curator Lloyd De Witt goes so far as to suggest that Rembrandt, who lived in Amsterdam’s bustling Jewish quarter, used a neighbor as his primary model.

As you might expect, said Stephan Salisbury in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, “the new Jesus did not sit well with many people at the time.” Jews were seen as heathens, and depicting Christ as a hea-



Head of Christ: Rembrandt’s soulful savior

then was blasphemous. Even Rembrandt’s students were loath to rock the boat, and some reverted quickly to the “sheaves of sandy hair,” the thin lips, and the “capacious round brow” that Byzantine icons had made de rigueur. This show, which began its world tour earlier this year at the Louvre, represents the world’s first opportunity to view all of Rembrandt’s known images of Jesus together since the 1650s,

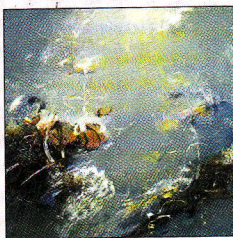
when the artist declared bankruptcy and “many of his precious possessions were sold to satisfy creditors.” To support the notion that Rembrandt purposefully depicted the founder of Christianity as ethnically Jewish, the exhibit displays his Jesus paintings and prints alongside other portraits he created that have been thought to depict Jews.

Too bad there’s not a shred of hard evidence that Rembrandt truly did use a Jewish model for his Jesus portraits, said Robin Cembalest in *TabletMag.org*. For some reason, art historians have long sentimentalized Rembrandt’s supposed pro-Semitic tendencies. Tome after scholarly tome has obsessively parsed the artist’s ethnic lineage, his reasons for moving to a Jewish neighborhood, his relationship with Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel—“whose book Rembrandt might have illustrated, whose portrait he may or may not have painted, and who possibly helped with the Aramaic inscription in the artist’s famous *Belshazzar’s Feast*.” Reading every “soulful, bearded” man in a Rembrandt painting as “crypto-Jewish” propaganda does the Dutch master a disservice. Maybe—just maybe—they’re simply naturalistic depictions of soulful, bearded men.

**Where to buy**

A select exhibition in a private gallery

Like scores of artists before him, **Michael Schultheis** grounds his painterly flights-of-fancy in mathematical principles. The ancient Greeks employed the golden section, and Da Vinci had his Fibonacci sequence, while Georges Seurat drew from new optical theories to meticulously arrange his colored dots. Obsessed with Euclid’s *Optics* and Menelaus’s *Sphaerica*, Schultheis describes his own works as riffs on ideas found in those classical treatises—a “personal narrative” using theoretical geometric forms. Math-fearing connoisseurs needn’t despair, however. As luck would have it, advanced spherical trigonometry is pretty easy on the eyes. At *Froelick Gallery*, 714 NW Davis St., Portland, Ore., (503) 222-1142. Through Aug. 27. Prices range from \$3,500 to \$16,000.



Sphaerica in Blue 04

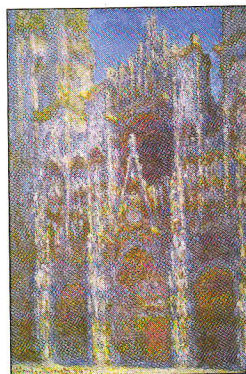
**Monet/Lichtenstein: Rouen Cathedrals**

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
Through Sept. 25

What an unlikely matchup, said Chris Bergeron in the Milford, Mass., *Daily News*. “The founder of French impressionism,” Claude Monet “was infatuated with colors richer than anything found in nature.” Meanwhile, Roy Lichtenstein mashed up “advertising and comic-book imagery to forge a distinctly American style.” Two different worlds, yet Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts has brought them together by focusing on one curious thematic overlap: their depictions of France’s Rouen Cathedral. In the early 1890s, Monet brought his obsession with changing light conditions to bear on this iconic edifice, painting 30 canvases meant to “capture the dance of sunlight across its façade,” from morning to night and in varying weather conditions. Several decades later, Lichtenstein painted a pop-art riff on Monet’s series, “transforming its brilliant

colors into his signature pixel-like dots.” Cleverly, the curators have forged a painterly “face-off” of sorts, with works from both series hung side by side.

The Lichtenstein series has its charms, said Sebastian Smee in *The Boston Globe*. For one thing, the pop artist’s Rouen “has an inbuilt pathos akin to a grinning boy flexing his biceps in front of Muhammad Ali.” But the real thrill here is the chance to stand in front of five of Monet’s greatest canvases, works in which he galvanizes “a veritable orchestra of independent colors to achieve his naturalistic effects.” What struck me most was the emotional complexity Monet attained with these paintings, which are often dismissed as gauzy celebrations of color and light. There’s that too. “But Monet’s light here,



Monet’s Rouen (1894)

more than in any of his other paintings, also has a corrosive, acidic quality, which nibbles away at these medieval monuments, turning their surfaces into encrusted, pockmarked ruins.” Rouen’s towers are colorful, yes. Yet they’re also “harbingers of death.”