Degas, rediscovered the art, which had fallen out of favor after the era of Rembrandt, the form’s last great master.

"Two Young Artists" assembled a selection of etchings to demonstrate how Degas’s mastery of the medium influenced Rembrandt.

Both artists believed etching allowed for a more fluid line and greater investigation than engraving. In this way, the medium was desirable for exploring understated variations in lighting and mood.

Lees said Degas first came across Rembrandt’s etchings while studying at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Finding the etchings inexhaustible, Degas left to pursue a more liberal course of study in Italy. There, he associated with other French printmakers.

Printmaker Joseph Tourny and painter Gustave Moreau guided Degas to consider Rembrandt’s work.

In his younger years, Rembrandt was inclined to self-portraiture; Degas made direct copies of these etchings in his sketchbooks.

"In those early efforts, Degas studied Rembrandt for technical reasons," Lees said. "He was looking for guidance in his own efforts at etching."

Lees also said Degas’ direct response to Rembrandt is evident in the pairing of two of the show’s works: Rembrandt’s 1637 etching "Young Man in a Velvet Cap" and Degas’ 1857 copy of this etching, entitled “Young Man, Seated, in a Velvet Beret.”

**Learning the avant-garde**

Rembrandt’s approach to self-portraiture was unconventional. He depicted widely varied facial expressions and experimented with costuming and lighting. His approach is evidenced in two paintings, both titled “Self-Portrait as a Young Man.”

The first painting (circa 1628-29, Rijksmuseum) shows Rembrandt simply dressed and so shrouded in shadow that his eyes are barely visible. In 1629 (Alte Pinakothek), Rembrandt depicts himself as being directly engaged with the viewer. He looks surprised, and the elegant lace collar he wears indicates that he was attempting to portray himself as more refined than in the earlier painting.

Rembrandt’s break with tradition would have been appealing to Degas, who felt stifled by the academy’s teachings. Degas’ experience in Italy motivated his exploration of the technical and expressive potential of self-portraiture in painted and graphic forms.

Two for the show

By TELLY HALKIAS

The Clark welcomes Dutch exhibit examining Rembrandt’s influence on Degas

**Clara**

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Rembrandt’s break with tradition would have been appealing to Degas, who felt stifled by the academy’s teachings. Degas’ experience in Italy motivated his exploration of the technical and expressive potential of self-portraiture in painted and graphic forms. Like Rembrandt, he experimented.

"Degas’ use of light and dark, instead of classical images, was particularly dramatic," Lees said.

"He was not afraid to be unconventional in handling representation and self-representation."

Lees added that Rembrandt’s influence is evident in a number of the self-portraits Degas created around this time, including the two paintings presented in "Two Young Artists," the Clark’s "Self-Portrait" (circa 1857) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s "Self-Portrait" (circa 1855-56).

These are more investigational than Degas’ earlier works and reflect Rembrandt’s use of sharply contrasting light and dark. These works signaled Degas’ emerging role as a leader of the French avant-garde.

"Rembrandt and Degas: Two Young Artists" is small, focused and organized in two sections, the first being 16 works, with Reynaud’s directly contrasting examination of Rembrandt and Degas. The second part includes a selection of prints and books from the Clark’s collection that demonstrate the broader French interest in Rembrandt in the 19th century. These include prints that are copied after Rembrandt, and books that catalog and reproduce his work.

“What the public will get from exhibition is in the sense of both artists’ personalities — not just their skill, but their self-image,” Lees said. "They not only will find the work of Degas and Rembrandt, but also how they thought.”

"Rembrandt and Degas: Two Young Artists" was organized by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in association with the Clark Art Institute and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It will be on view at the Clark through Feb. 5. For more information, call 413-458-2083 or visit clarkart.edu.