



## The Anatomy Lesson

*Nina Siegal*

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## **The Anatomy Lesson** Nina Siegal

Set on a single day in the Dutch Golden Age, this engrossing historical novel brilliantly imagines the complex story behind one of Rembrandt's most famous paintings

Commissioned by the Amsterdam surgeon's guild, "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp" was the first major work by Rembrandt to be proclaimed a masterpiece. The novel opens on the morning of the medical dissection, and, as they prepare for that evening's big event, it follows several characters: a one-handed coat thief called Aris the Kid, who is awaiting his turn at the gallows; Flora, the woman pregnant with his child who hopes to save him from the noose; Jan Fetchet, a curio collector who also moonlights as an acquirer of medical cadavers; René Descartes, who attended the dissection in the course of his quest to understand where the human soul resides; and the 26-year old young master himself, who feels a shade uneasy about his assignment. Then there's Pia, an art restorer who is examining the painting in contemporary times. As the story builds to its dramatic and inevitable conclusion, the events that transpire throughout the day sway Rembrandt to change his initial composition in a fundamental way.

Bringing to life the vivid world of Amsterdam in 1632, *The Anatomy Lesson* offers a rich slice of history and a textured story by a masterful young writer.

## **The Anatomy Lesson Details**

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## From Reader Review The Anatomy Lesson for online ebook

### Elizabeth (Alaska) says

The Author's Note:

I knew Rembrandt's masterpiece *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* as a child, for it hung in my father's study, but I never knew its title or its origins. During an art history seminar in grad school, I was assigned to "read" a painting — i.e., unravel the narrative within it. We were allowed to pick any painting; and as my professor clicked through slides of potential examples, it showed upon the screen and I thought: That one! I'll finally find out the real story behind that painting.

From that unravelling, came her novel *The Anatomy Lesson* and I found it fascinating. I am pretty nearly completely ignorant of art — just not a visual sort of person. I have been interested in the stories behind other paintings when I've stumbled across a TV program. The stories behind such art is probably more interesting to me than the art itself.

The line between fact and fiction is decidedly blurred in this and I don't know enough to have known where that line lay. I did know enough to know that the part that is the love story had to be fiction, if for no other reason than too little is known about the criminal of the lesson to have left such a legacy. But what of Rembrandt's approach to the painting? The prose is better than in many modern novels, the characterizations good enough. If I were lucky enough to stumble across such a story about another piece of art, I would happily pick it up.

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### Ana Ovejero says

A single day in 1632. This is the story behind Rembrandt's famous painting called like the title of the novel, the medical dissection done by Dr. Tulp.

The story is narrated from different perspectives by an omniscient narrator, retelling the lives of the different characters that were touched by the creation of this piece of art.

The chapters are divided into the already mentioned sections. The eyes displays Rembrandt's ideas about the assignment asked by the doctor, which arise doubts and moral issues to the painter.

The hands portrays Dr. Tulp's anticipation towards this event that could change the story of medicine, positioning him in the possibility to become a mastermind in the realm of the sciences.

The body presents the day of Aris The Kid, the petty robber that is condemned to be hanged and whose body is going to be dissected by Dr. Tulp. Although his crimes are not important enough for him being condemned, the necessity of having a body for the event make his death inevitable.

The heart displays Aris The Kid's lover Flora, who is pregnant carrying his baby although they were not

married. Her house is stoned by the neighbourhood children, as the town called her a witch. She is going to try to save Aris, or at least to recover his body to give him Christian burial.

The mouth is the section that portrays the life of Fetchet, the man that is in charge of getting bodies from the doctors of the city. He also tries to get extravagant animals and objects for painters such as Rembrandt, for their paintings.

The mind is the presentation of Descartes's thoughts as the doctor asked him to witness the dissection and to share his ideas with him. Descartes is trying to find where the human soul is, anxiously expecting that Doctor Tulp's work will give him some answers.

This is a novel that the reader has to build following the different lines of the plot, enjoying the complex features of the characters and the astounding display of the city of Amsterdam. This story narrates the behind-the-scenes of the creation of a masterpiece that will be admired through the centuries.

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### **Chris says**

Disclaimer: ARC via Netgalley.

Rembrandt van Rijn. There is something about his work, and when everyone thinks of Rembrandt, they think of Amsterdam and the Night Watch. Famous and special. But Rembrandt's other paintings are great and his house is worth a visit too. For me, Rembrandt's paintings work because of the quiet and mystery that exists in each one. In some ways that is like Amsterdam, where a twist or turn can lead to someplace unexpected – such as the hidden Catholic church almost in the Red Light District.

The Anatomy Lesson is also a famous Rembrandt painting and has that sense of quiet mystery.

Nina Siegal's novel is like a Rembrandt painting.

Siegal's novel is told from several viewpoints, each connected in some way to the painting. There is Dr. Tulp's wife, Rembrandt, Descartes, Kid Aris, Fetchet, and Flora. In the present day, there is a Pia whose restoration and examination of the painting are used in part as a framing device.

Siegal manages to capture different voices for each of these diverse characters. Flora is radically different in style and tone than Kid Aris. More importantly, there is a quiet power in how these stories are interlinked, how paths cross, and how friendships are lost or created.

The sense of Amsterdam as well as the sense of the characters evolves slowly, in many ways like the crafting of paint. A stroke here, a change in color there. Rembrandt becomes more than just the ambitious artist, Fetchet more than just a collector of oddities, Flora more than a woman in love, and Aris more than a simple boy. How these details and back stories are revealed is slight, like the presence of the barking dog or the girl in gold, but the smallest detail is wielded by Siegal like a brush, transporting the slight detail into an item of importance. The book feels like the literary offspring of Vermeer and Rembrandt.

There are a few series that deal with the story behind a painting. One of these, Every Picture Tells a Story, has a half hour episode about this painting. While the show does an interesting job of talking about the origins of the painting, this book is far more touching and wrenching in how one sees the painting. The painting itself is about using the end of life to aid in the continuation of life, but the book too is about life and what the absence of and ending of life means to those left behind.

Crossposted at Booklikes.

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## **Mona says**

### **Fascinating Fictional Backstory of a Famous Rembrandt Painting**

The setting of this novel is similar to that of *The Miniaturist*

See my review of *The Miniaturist* here

That is, they are both set in seventeenth century Amsterdam (although parts of *The Anatomy Lesson* are also set in Leiden and other parts of Holland).

This is a period I find endlessly fascinating.

Both of these novels are written by women and highlight the brutality of the Dutch justice and penal systems of the time, as well as the cruel and Puritanical code of behavior of seventeenth century Holland. Both books feature characters who are in trouble with the law, as well as highlighting artists and artisans.

But there the similarity ends.

Nina Siegal has taken the famous painting, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* and concocted a very believable and compelling fictional backstory for it.

In Amsterdam at the time, anatomy lessons were big social events and entertainments. The attendees had to purchase expensive tickets to enter. These dissections were attended by Amsterdam Guild members and by intellectuals from all over Europe.

(view spoiler)

In the novel, Siegal makes young Aris Kindt (a.k.a. Adriaan Adriaanszoon) and Rembrandt neighbors growing up in Leiden.

The main story takes place on a single day in Amsterdam in 1632.

Other characters include the saintly peasant girl Flora, pregnant with Aris's child; Jan Fetchet, a curio collector and retriever of medical cadavers; French philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes, who is visiting Amsterdam, befriends Rembrandt and writes letters to his friend the French philosopher,

mathematician, and theologian Marin Mersenne; the very ambitious Dr. Tulp himself; his wife, Margaretha, and others. Tulp, by the way, was not the Doctor's real name, but a nickname. It means "Tulip" in Dutch and the tulip had become his "logo".

Siegal makes Aris a surprisingly sympathetic character. He is not an evil man, just an unfortunate one. His father abused him badly and his life went downhill from there as he ran away from his home after his father had already abandoned him to join the military. (view spoiler)

Rembrandt himself is depicted as a man of compassion and kindness.

Fetchet is motivated by money, but he is also kind to Flora, who travels to Amsterdam to try to help Aris.

If you have any interest in Dutch history of that period or in art history, in particular that of the Dutch Masters, you will find this book compelling.

The Chapter subtitles are repeated over and over. There is "The Heart" (usually Flora); "The Eye" (generally voiced by Rembrandt); "The Mind" (usually narrated by Descartes); "The Mouth" (usually Fetchet); and "The Body" (usually told by Aris himself). These are interspersed with sections of "Conservator's Notes" in which contemporary art experts are analyzing the painting, with a particular focus on Rembrandt's pentimenti, or corrections. The whole is bookended by a beginning chapter titled "Hanging Day" and an ending chapter called "A Winter Festival".

The audio is a full cast reading, and is generally excellent, except for the first chapter, badly read by Bruce Mann (bear with the audio, it gets better). Even Mann himself improves after the first chapter. The other readers, Emma Jayne Appleyard, Gildart Jackson, Steve West, Adam Alexi-Malle, Peter Altschuler, and Hannah Curti are all excellent. Author Nina Siegal herself reads the afterword and (if I remember correctly, the foreword as well).

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## **M says**

This novel was heavily researched, and unfortunately the research shows in the diction, over-description, pace--a case of too much scholarship and not enough imagination. The use of a present-day conservator's notes juxtaposed with the 17th-century story is skillfully done, but the notes' foreshadowing of story elements becomes a little too pat. However, the Anatomy Lesson will appeal to those who enjoy historical novels featuring famous artists and thinkers, like those of Tracy Chevalier and Susan Vreeland.

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## **Jane says**

More like 3.5/5. Fascinating look at Rembrandt's first masterwork, "Anatomy lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp" <http://0.tqn.com/d/arthistory/1/S/z/W....> We see the work through subjects of the painting and others connected with it. Each is called by a body part in each chapter about them. We have Rembrandt [The Eyes], Dr. Tulp, president of the Amsterdam Surgeon's Guild [The Hands], Adriaen {the Body}, Flora, his pregnant sweetheart [The Heart] Fletchet, who got the corpse for Rembrandt {The Mouth}, D

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Nina Siegel's *The Anatomy Lesson* is one of those wonderful novels that's as solid in its realization as it is in its conception. The novel tells the back back story of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, that wonderful work commissioned by the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons in 1632. The surgeons and city functionaries are pictured gathered round a corpse, as one of their group explains the anatomy of the forearm. The light in the picture falls downward, illuminating the corpse, while placing the other figures in shadow, making death look like life and life like death.

The novel is written in an array of first-person voices, with occasional third person framing, all of whom are identified in ways suitable to the dissection process. We have "The Body," Adriaen Adriaenszoon, the thief whose execution will provide the corpse for the dissection; "The Hands," Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, who conducts the autopsy; "The Heart," Adriaen's lover Flora, pregnant with his child, who hopes to win his acquittal or, failing that, to claim his remains for burial; "The Mouth," Jan Fetchet, dealer in curiosities and all manner of goods, who also serves as preparator for the Surgeon's Guild, claiming and cleaning the bodies of the executed who will become the focus of dissections; "The Mind," René Descartes, who like Dr. Tulp dreams of finding the location of the soul within the body; and "The Eyes," Rembrandt himself, with connections to every other character in the book from thief to surgeon. We also get occasional excepts from the journal of a conservator working on the painting in the present day.

I can claim no expertise on 17th Century Amsterdam or the practice of science within the city, but it seems clear that the author has done her research carefully. The details of the city, its judicial processes, the dissection, the artistic process, and the later work by the conservator all ring true and are presented in sufficient detail that the reader engages in a kind of historical and professional learning while being carried along on the tide of the narrative.

This is a book that engages the reader on many levels simultaneously, eliciting consideration of scientific ethics, of the physical versus the spiritual self, of politics and self-promotion, of the ways in which lives unroll along clear but unlikely paths. Whether your greatest interest lies in historical fiction, the history of medicine, or the history of art, this novel will offer you a rich, rewarding read.

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### **Lee says**

Psyched to read this novel by a grad school friend immediately after reading her former housemate's essay collection (*The Empathy Exams*). I don't remember them having stuff up on the same day during Ethan Canin's workshop, Fall 2005, but it's good to see their writing again now fully formed in print. In April 2006, somehow eight years ago, there was a party at my place after a Deborah Eisenberg reading, which wound up interrupted as soon as it started by tornado sirens and hail on the auditorium's tin roof -- and then an F2 tornado tearing through Iowa City. The reading was canceled but people still came over for the party -- I'd bought a bottle of champagne to celebrate the author's winning of a Fulbright to study a painting in Amsterdam and write a novel about it. Eight years later, that novel is here. It's always good to see an idea go from conception to publication of a novel I totally enjoyed -- it's one of those bold historical novels that animates the famous dead (Descartes, Rembrandt) and the anonymous. The novel informs us that the Rembrandt painting is structured as a pyramid, with a corpse laid out horizontally and physicians looking on, while the novel itself is structured like an inverted pyramid, beginning with a series of first-person narrators that come into focus, ending with the soul of the thief who serves as the anatomical host. Freytag's pyramid

is also in play -- and this gathers steam as it approaches the anatomy lesson that serves as the basis for Rembrandt's painting. The tone for the most part suggests the 1600s by lightly deploying unobtrusive and flowing inversions of syntax. The tone is also, for the most part, good-natured, and a few times even almost gives into farce, which is maybe the gravitational pull of historical novels featuring famous folks? (There's an awesome 1600s take, for example, on the Monty Python sketch involving the sale of a dead parrot.) The author has some fun with the various first-person narrators (particularly "The Mouth," a curios dealer aptly named Fetchet), but there's also some serious soul animation going on that parallels thematic discussions. Once the structure coheres (Rembrandt's chapters are titled "The Eyes," Descartes' chapters are titled "The Mind," the thief's chapters are titled "The Body" etc), the characters seem alive, as does the setting and era. The way the mind and body and perception and mechanical movements combine to suggest the soul, the narrators combine to produce a vitality that is, in effect, the animated soul of any novel worth reading. Very cool to reanimate the forgotten histories of a painting in which the physicians are searching for the soul. Much research seems to have been done but not too much -- it's not overwhelmed with the facts -- in fact, the historical facts are like the anatomical details of a human body. For the body to live, it needs breath -- the author definitely breathes life into its characters and the era, and it does so in a way that now makes me consider the spirit that animates my hands as I type this.

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## Puck says

Did you ever want to know the real story behind an old painting? So did Nina Siegal, which resulted in **The Anatomy Lesson**: a beautiful, semi-fictionalized story behind one of Rembrandt's most famous paintings.

It's the 31th of January 1632: on this day criminal Aris Kindt - alias Aris the Kid - is going to be hanged in Amsterdam. Unknown to him however, is that afterwards his body shall be used for the yearly public dissection of the Surgeon's Guild, during which all kinds of people can attend and watch. People like the body's preparator Jan Fetchet, the philosopher Rene Descartes, and the future painter of this scene, upcoming artist Rembrandt van Rijn. Still, none of these people care as much for Aris as Flora, Aris' pregnant lover, who on this day is in a mad rush to save her beloved for the dissection table.

You might know the Dutch painter Rembrandt because of his most famous work - *The Nightwatch* - but it was a much earlier painting that brought the young artist his first fame and attention. *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* is a portrayal of an unusual subject - a public dissection of a human body - painted in a highly unusual way: instead of the surgeon and the wealthy elite, the corpse stands at the center.

Why did the artist decide to do this? Who is the dead man lying there, and why is this macabre act even the subject of a painting? As an art-historian these are questions I am trained to ask and research myself, but I was thrilled to find out that Siegal did more than research: she added a whole story to it that brought the painting more alive, in numerous ways.

Because even though I'm very familiar with the real story behind the painting, Siegal's fictional story brought things to my attention that I never considered. Like Rembrandt's possible bond with the criminal (with both men being born in Leiden), or how the addition of Flora added so much more to Aris. Furthermore, Siegal isn't only a master at bringing her characters alive, but also 17th century Amsterdam. Maybe I'm biased because I studied there, but the descriptions of the dirty streets and the crowded canals were so realistic that it felt like I was really there.

But although I very much enjoyed reading this book, at a certain point my own art-historian knowledge got in the way. For I'm so familiar with Rembrandt's career and the real story behind this painting, that a lot of

events in the story weren't a surprise for me; for example, I already knew the mystery of Aris' right hand. Therefore I found the story entertaining, but never surprising.

Still, I would certainly recommend this book to lovers of art-history and people interested in reading about the Netherlands during the Golden Age. Siegal has certainly done her research well, and her charming characterizations and city-descriptions will certainly win readers over. For me, I'll give this book **3,5 stars**.

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## Orsolya says

They say that a “picture is worth a thousand words”. So, how many is a painting worth? What is the story behind a painting? What secrets do the models hold? Nina Siegal explores this theme in, “The Anatomy Lesson” based on “The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp”; a painting by none other than Rembrandt.

Siegal’s premise follows the perspective of several character involved in the end produce of Rembrandt’s painting: the thief whose body is dissected and is the basis of the painting, his lover who is carrying his child, Rene Descarte, Rembrandt himself, and the curio who procures the body. Add in a modern art historian restoring the painting in contemporary times and “The Anatomy Lesson” has quite a cast.

The issue with the novel is Siegal’s decision to alternate each chapter with a different character’s narrative (and even of 1st person and 3rd person views). Although her intention is clearly to build layers and demonstrate the various lives and paths touched by one painting; the story is choppy and somewhat visceral. The reader has difficulties truly “getting into” the story (which can seem pointless, at times) and none of the characters truly resonate with the reader or evoke as much emotion as they potentially could. On the other hand, Siegal successfully delineates the voices, with each character possessing his or her own personality and quirks. There is no fear of confusing the key players.

Siegal marvelously weaves an illustrative story (despite the character jumps) in terms of language and visuals. The text is flowery (but not overly so) and is historically accurate. Often times, the reader will see the plot play out like that of a vivid film. “The Anatomy Lesson” has a special element which can’t be exactly pinpointed but it sure encourages page turning!

With progression, “The Anatomy Lesson” becomes much stronger and more compelling as Siegal finds her way and rides it. The text is more natural and the detective-esque connections between the characters are interesting and answer any questions/loose ends which readers may have. This adds an essence of mystery but without any pent-up tension or dead ends. The negative aspect of this is that the reader just begins to fall deep into one character’s storyline when the chapter ends and bring out about another narrative. This may have been a technique to build the suspense but I found it flighty and inconsistent to the story arc.

Despite any of my complaints, “The Anatomy Lesson” builds depth halfway through and begins to add moral lessons. The reader will contemplate on how much lies in what can’t be seen while being gratified by the story. Siegal’s text is a fast and accessible 1-2 read but it isn’t fluffy and is instead very ‘real’: simple but illuminating, as well.

The climax of the novel is strong and emphasizes the moral and philosophic traits of the tale but without “trying too hard” to prove a point. Again, Siegal leaves the reader in a position to dive deep into personal thoughts. Sadly, the conclusion is a bit rushed and weaker in comparison to the rest of the novel especially with the spiritual-themed ending pages. On a whole, “The Anatomy Lesson” doesn’t round out well or feel

properly “closed”.

The most impressive note of the novel is that the story takes place in one single day but is captivating enough that it feels longer and more carried out. “The Anatomy Lesson” combines elements of a short story or novella but incorporates a strong HF novel format.

An Author’s Note exploring the historical merits of story is absent (there is a slight note in the beginning but more details on historical liberties would have been welcome).

Overall, “The Anatomy Lesson” isn’t perfect but Siegal’s passion for writing and talent is clear (but needs some work). The novel is inconsistent and straddles between a 3 and 4 star rating. At the same time, one can feel what the book ‘could be’ and therefore I would read more from Siegal in the future. “The Anatomy Lesson” is recommended for HF and art history lovers who seek a quick read but without the fluff of many other HF novels.

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### **Audra (Unabridged Chick) says**

This slender novel -- just 288 pages -- is a rich, emotional look at love, ambition, the human soul, the creative impulse, the last immortality of art. And yet, despite the lofty themes, it's a wholly accessible, can't-put-it-down read-able novel with a handful of unforgettable characters and one devastating day.

Inspired by Rembrandt's massive painting, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* , the novel takes place during the day of Dr. Tulp's anatomy lesson. The narrative shifts between seven voices and point of view, but rather than distract and dilute the tension and the story, this serves to provide a dense, captivating experience.

We meet Adriaen 'Aris the Kid' Adriaenszoon, a criminal who, after his hanging, will be used for the anatomy lesson; Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, an ambitious Dutch doctor who conducts the lesson; Flora, the pregnant country girl who hopes to prevent her lover's execution; Jan, a curio collector who also moonlights as an acquirer of medical cadavers; René Descartes, who will attend the dissection in the course of his quest to understand where the human soul resides; and the twenty-six-year-old Dutch master painter himself, who feels a shade uneasy about this assignment. And in the twenty-first century, there is Pia, a contemporary art historian who is examining the painting.

Each voice is so clear, their arc so well delineated, that the myriad of characters doesn't muddy the plot nor lose the reader. In fact, the story is made more rich by the variety of viewpoints. I was unfamiliar with this painting and the circumstances surrounding it, but Siegal articulates the technical aspects of the painting's design and layout as well as the (likely fictional) events leading up to it in such an engrossing way, I couldn't put this book down for anything but work. (It also makes me yearn for more novels about specific works of art!)

Highly recommended -- a really fantastic debut. For those who like novels about art, or historical novels that feature more ordinary people, this is a must read. Fans of lightly literary works will want to pick this up, too. You can read an excerpt at the publisher's website.

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## **Lavonne Weller says**

I really wanted to like this book. I teach college English, and I frequently team-teach with a history teacher. We are always on the lookout for appropriate, engaging books to use in book clubs, and this seemed perfect. After reading the glowing reviews here, I was excited to receive a galley to review. I was, however, disappointed in the book and won't be recommending it to my students.

While the choice to present each chapter from the point of view of one of several characters was intriguing, the author did not do enough to distinguish the voices of these characters from one another. The only concession to personal voice I saw was one character's use of "were" in place of "was"--as in "He were going to do right by me." Even this small bit of personalization was abandoned about half-way through the book. With all of the other characters, the reader can figure out who the speaker is from context, but there is very little opportunity to bond with the characters to the degree one would expect from first person because every character "talks" the same.

Siegal clearly did her research for this book, but, again, the style interfered with the smooth integration of that research. First person is perhaps not the best vehicle for the exposition necessary to explain the philosophical and spiritual intricacies of the characters, particularly since most of the story leans heavily on dialog.

The shift from third person, present tense to first person, past tense and then back again was jarring and seemed unnecessary to me, but that might just be my personal bias. As a composition teacher, I have grown to be very sensitive to such shifts.

Overall, the situation is interesting, and the history is credible, but the gimmicks in the execution of this book are heavy-handed and clumsy.

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## **Patricia Paludanus says**

As a Dutch artist, living in Amsterdam, I often have sighed: "what I'd give to see my city during its golden age, to experience the sights, sounds, and smells - move among its inhabitants, if only for a day!"

Well, I guess I will never shed my wish for timetravel to become a possibility, but reading this book comes very very close to making that epic journey. It has changed the way I walk my home town's streets. The other day, passing one of Amsterdam's oldest buildings, I caught myself thinking: "ah, that's where I attended the anatomy lesson." It only took me a second to realize I was remembering something I had read, not something I experienced myself, but that second was magic.

For an author to be able to do that: implant a memory into someone else's brain, and not just any memory, but the most incredible one, and have it there, alive, fully integrated, popping up when appropriate as if it were my own - that is true magic, that is why we humans started to tell stories.

Believe me, you want to hear this one.

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## **Connie says**

Nina Siegal's novel transports us to 17th Century Amsterdam where Rembrandt has received a commission

to paint members of the Surgeon's Guild observing the anatomist Dr Nicholaes Tulp. There are six important characters who each have chapters named after the part of the body that they represent. "The Body" is Adriaen, a thief who has been condemned to die by hanging. "The Mouth" is Jan Fetchet, a collector of curiosities who also acquires bodies for medical dissection. "The Hands" refers to Dr Tulp who will be dissecting the body. "The Mind" is Rene Descartes, the philosopher who is trying to determine where the soul resides. Flora, the woman who loves the condemned Adriaen and who carries his unborn child, is "The Heart". The artist Rembrandt, the painter of the masterpiece "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicholaes Tulp" represents "The Eyes". There are also a few chapters where a 21st Century art historian/conservator, tells us the secrets that x-rays reveal about the painting.

Scenes from everyday life to the mobs at the hanging seem very real and well researched. Both the novel and Rembrandt's painting show the humanity of Adriaen who had been abused as a child. Adriaen had scars from whippings, brands burned into his skin, and his right hand cut off as punishments for thefts. But Rembrandt painted him with compassion, showing death with dignity, with his scars removed, in the center of the luminous painting. This novel is recommended to art lovers and readers who enjoy historical fiction.

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### **Sheryl says**

How many times have you strolled the corridors of art museums, casually viewing paintings without fully appreciating the stories behind them? Author Nina Siegal breathes fresh life into one of Rembrandt's early paintings, "The Anatomy Lesson," in her forthcoming novel of the same name.

Set in 1632 in Amsterdam, the story opens on the day Adriaen Adriaenszoon (alias Aris the Kid) is to be hanged. A recidivist thief, Adriaen's body bears the scars of a life of abuse and punishment. He has no idea that circumstances are converging to immortalize his sad life.

A local curio dealer, Jan Fetchet, has arranged to bring a body to the Surgeons' Guild that evening, so Dr. Nicolaes Tulp can give his annual autopsy lecture to a distinguished group of physicians. In addition, they have commissioned a young artist, Rembrandt Harmenzoon Van Rijn, to commemorate the occasion.

While most of the city celebrates the day of "Justice" that will lead to the hanging and autopsy, a young woman named Flora struggles to reach Adriaen before it is too late. She is carrying his child, and hopes to convince the judge that his crimes do not merit the death penalty.

The story is told through the prism of each character's perspective, combining to shine a bright light on the genesis of a masterpiece. "The Anatomy Lesson," which will be published on March 11, will be an excellent choice for book discussion groups. And it may inspire you to look at art in a new way!

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