in the rush to embrace his father; his bare foot is at once humanly vulnerable and a "none-too-subliminal image of the stripping of the spirit."

Paintings once revered as the essence of Rembrandt, such as *The Man With the Golden Helmet* (c. 1650), are now widely regarded as the work of others. Today debate swirls around *The Polish Rider* (c. 1653), which hangs in New York's Frick Collection. "To imagine Rembrandt without *The Polish Rider*," writes Hughes, "is rather like trying to imagine Wagner without *Parsifal*."

Rembrandt left only the barest explanations of how he viewed his art. Hughes sees his conception of himself as artist embodied in the Kenwood House self-portrait of 1661–62. Rembrandt sits before a canvas on which two arcs are painted. The half-circles allude to the ancient Greek story of the painter Apelles, who, upon visiting the studio of a fellow master painter and finding him absent, drew a perfect freehand circle on the studio wall, letting his artistic skill serve as his calling card. Rembrandt couches the allusion in a scene from his daily painterly life; he provides both a glimpse of his humanity and an "incontrovertible, utterly simple proof of mastery." Realism becomes a conduit for the power of the sublime.

OTHER NATIONS

What Killed Angkor?

THE SOURCE: "The End of Angkor" by Richard Stone, in ***Science*** (March 10, 2006).

Located in modern-day Cambodia, the once-sprawling city of Angkor was the center of a powerful Khmer kingdom whose rule in Southeast Asia lasted from the ninth to 15th centuries. At its height, Angkor boasted a population of several hundred thousand, an extensive system of reservoirs and waterways, and many elaborate Hindu temples such as the immense, gilded Angkor Wat. Thai armies encroached on the area in the mid-15th century, and by the 16th century the city lay abandoned for reasons unclear, *Science*'s Asia news editor, Richard Stone, writes. Among the theories offered for Angkor's demise are the shift of trade southward toward the sea and the ascension of Theraveda Buddhism in the area.

Thirty years ago French researchers proposed an alternate catalyst, a sharp decline in crop yields possibly caused by the silting of irrigation channels sped by deforestation. Then the rule of the Khmer Rouge from 1975–79 and subsequent chaos halted archaeological efforts in Angkor for nearly 20 years. Recent discoveries made by the Australian-led Greater Angkor Project reveal that a combination of bad engineering and geological uplift of the area's riverbeds centuries ago may have hindered the functioning of Angkor's engineered water system and left the city vulnerable to food shortages.

The team used satellite imagery and ground surveys to reveal a city that was far larger than previously thought. The canals, water tanks, and three large reservoirs formed the basis of a water management system that completely altered the natural landscape. Around the canal system grew a "vast low-density patchwork of homes, temples, and rice paddies" scattered over a thousand square kilometers.

One mystery of Angkor's watercourses is a spillway branching off from one of the canals that seems to have been purposely destroyed. Archaeologist Roland Fletcher hypothesizes that Angkor engineers tried in vain to remedy a flow problem, then tore apart the spillway to prevent it from causing further disruptions. According to Fletcher, Angkor's water infrastructure "became so inflexible, convoluted, and huge that it could neither be replaced nor avoided, and had become both too elaborate and too piecemeal." As a result, it became less able to accommodate events such as drought or flood. Future research into the changing climate conditions of the area will reveal whether erratic monsoons between 1300 and 1600, leading to drier

weather, exacerbated Angkor's water troubles.

The destructive combination of changing environmental conditions and poor infrastructure is not peculiar to Angkor. Archaeologists also attribute the downfall of the Mayan Empire, by AD 900, to a series of droughts coupled with overpopulation. "Angkor's downfall," says Stone, "may be a cautionary tale for modern societies on the knife edge of sustainability."

OTHER NATIONS

Fidel's African Adventures

THE SOURCE: "Moscow's Proxy? Cuba and Africa 1975–1988" by Piero Gleijeses, in ***Journal of Cold War Studies***, Spring 2006.

Americans watched in alarm during the 1970s as Fidel Castro upped the ante on a forgotten front of the Cold War by sending thousands of Cuban troops and aid workers to Africa. The arrival of 36,000 Cuban troops in Angola beginning in November 1975 was followed in late 1977 by deployment of another 16,000 troops to war-torn Ethiopia. Many observers were persuaded that Cuba was simply doing the Soviet Union's bidding.

Using U.S. and Soviet archives and unreleased Cuban documents to which he has access, Piero Gleijeses, a professor of American foreign policy at Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies, concludes that Cuba was not playing the Kremlin's pawn, at least in Angola. A 1978 U.S. interagency study concluded that Cuba was not involved in Africa "solely or even primarily" because of the Soviets but was motivated by "its activist revolutionary ethos and its determination to expand its own political influence in the Third World at the expense of the West."

Following the 1974 collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola, Agostinho Neto's left-wing Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) emerged as the likely successors, prompting covert U.S. opposition and, eventually, an invasion by South African troops. Neto appealed to Cuba for help and Castro agreed, writes Gleijeses, because defeat for the MPLA would mean "the victory of apartheid and the reinforcement of white domination of the black majority in southern Africa." Cuban aid and technical workers also poured into Angola, reaching a peak of 5,000 and staying through the mid-1980s. Cuba eventually sent aid and technical workers to 11 other African countries and military missions to five others, including Mozambique and Benin.

The Soviet Union eventually accepted Cuba's Angola intervention, but the two countries "repeatedly clashed" over strategy there and throughout southern Africa. But the Soviet leadership commended Castro for his foray into the Horn of Africa in 1977, when he sent 16,000 troops to support Mengistu Haile Mariam's Ethiopian junta against a Somali attack. That support allowed Mengistu to unleash a "war of terror" against Eritrean rebels in the north.

Castro was willing to shoulder substantial costs in pursuit of his goals, including a possible breach in relations with the Soviet Union, whose leader, Leonid Brezhnev, "opposed the dispatch of Cuban troops to Angola," says Gleijeses. And Castro's adventures ended President Jimmy Carter's talk of normalizing relations with Havana. The Cubans lost more than 2,000 troops in Africa, not to mention the services of the tens of thousands of Cuban soldiers and aid workers whose labor could have helped Cuba's ailing economy. The Soviet Union supplied Cuba's weapons, and Soviet economic aid increased over the years, but "clear evidence" of a link between the aid and Cuba's actions "may lie in sealed boxes in the Cuban and Soviet archives." The linkage, says Gleijeses, "should not be exaggerated," though Cuba could not have done what it did without Soviet support.

Castro was willing to shoulder substantial costs, including Soviet disapproval, in pursuit of his goals.

What did Cuba achieve? By coming to Ethiopia's defense, Castro upheld the principle of inviolable borders but also propped up a brutal regime. "Call it bias," writes Gleijeses, "but although I cannot condemn the Cuban role, I cannot applaud it either." In Angola, the MPLA regime became repressive and corrupt, but the alternatives were still worse. Above all, Gleijeses argues, Cuba saved Angola from white South Africa's intervention, ended the myth of South African invincibility, and ensured by its presence that Pretoria would later accept the independence of Namibia, furthering the historic transition that would lead to the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa.