Hansken the elephant

Anonymous Dutch engraving, Hansken the elephant.

Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabine.

Hansken, an Indian elephant, was imported from East Asia to the Dutch Republic in the middle 17th century. His name most likely derives from the Malayalam word for elephant, ana, with the Dutch diminutive added. In addition to the fame as an extremely exotic beast, Hansken was famous for the tricks he could perform, and for his longevity. This image, the first of several visual representations, was produced while Hansken was appearing at Dutch fairs.

Consulted Sources:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/3780509

By Tyler Ostergaard
Rembrandt, An elephant, 1637 (drawing).
Vienna, Albertina

Rembrandt, Adam and Eve, 1638 (etching).
Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabine

Hansken was sketched by Rembrandt and included in his subsequent depiction of Adam and Eve. In Adam and Eve, Rembrandt juxtaposed the elephant, a symbol of piety, with the insidious snake.

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