

artnet®

## Stolen Cini Foundation “Rembrandt” Found after 35 Years

Alexander Forbes, Thursday, July 31, 2014



The Castello Cini di Monselice, formerly owned by the Cini Foundation  
Photo: via BlogdiPadova

A stolen painting of Saint Luke the Evangelist signed “Rembrandt,” which previously belonged to the Giorgio Cini Foundation, has been recovered after 35 years, [La Nuova de Venezia reports](#). The work dates from the 17th century and was stolen from the Castello Cini di Monselice on the night of December 12, 1979. It was recovered following a joint effort by Venice cultural heritage police and French authorities.

The painting was among 10 works stolen from the Castello Cini di Monselice on that night. At the time, the castle was owned by the Cini Foundation. In 1981, it became the property of the state of Veneto. The whereabouts of other paintings taken from its halls 35 years ago remains unclear.

According to the paper, the painting of St. Luke was initially located using the *Banca Dati dei beni culturali illecitamente sottratti* (Database of illegally removed objects of cultural heritage), the largest catalogue of stolen art and artifacts worldwide, when a French collector attempted to put it up for auction at Artcurial in Paris in 2009. The collector claimed to be unaware that the painting was stolen and refused to return it until police could prove that it was originally from an illegal source.



Return of "Rembrandt" to Cini Foundation on Wednesday  
Photo: via Gente Veneta

Over the subsequent five years, police were able to determine that the work was sold on the black market several times before reaching the possession of the consigning French collector. However, that wasn't the most astounding fact. Though signed "Rembrandt," the painting is actually by Pietro Bellotti, according to *La Nuova*. Experts examining the painting were immediately tipped off by its fairly strange depiction of St. Luke the Evangelist. They presume it may actually have been a portrait of its owner rather than the saint. According to the paper, the signature was most likely added in the

1990s during the painting's time on the black market, presumably in order to increase its value. Experts estimate the painting is worth in the realm of €150,000 (\$200,000) rather than the millions a Rembrandt of a similar size might fetch.

Nonetheless the Cini Foundation plans to put the painting back on view this September at its building on the island of San Giorgio in Venice. It is currently evaluating whether the work requires restoration.