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Turns Out That Guy in the Painting Really Is Rembrandt, Analysts Say

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LONDON — After months of cleaning and painstaking scientific investigation, art specialists in Britain have apparently concluded a decadeslong debate over the authenticity of [a self-portrait by Rembrandt](#), saying on Tuesday that it was genuine.

The authorship of the painting, owned by [the National Trust](#), had been disputed since the 1960s, when the Rembrandt specialist Horst Gerson and the Rembrandt Research Project said that some areas of the painting did not reflect Rembrandt's brushwork.

But [the Hamilton Kerr Institute](#), based in Cambridgeshire and which restores easel paintings, has verified that the painting is a real Rembrandt, the National Trust said Tuesday.

“This now famous self-portrait, the original ‘selfie,’ is the first Rembrandt in the National Trust’s collection of 13,500 paintings,” the Trust said in a statement. The National Trust is a charity that works to preserve and protect historic places. It acquired the painting in 2010 as a gift from Lady Samuel of Wych Cross, after changing hands a number of times.

The portrait shows Rembrandt wearing a black velvet cap with two ostrich feathers, a gorget, and a short, decorated velvet cape. It is dated 1635, when the artist was 29 years old, but the work was thought to be at best that of a student.

The Trust sent the work to the institute in 2013 on the advice of Ernst van de Wetering, a prominent Rembrandt expert, who reopened the debate by saying that the painting may well be an original.

The painting underwent a thorough technical examination, said Christine Slottvedd Kimbriel, paintings conservator at the Hamilton Kerr Institute, which included a

series of close visual examinations “under magnification, infrared reflectography, x-radiography, raking light photography and pigment and medium analysis.”

Careful cleaning removed layers of aged and yellowed varnish, revealing the original colors and painting style underneath, she added. “What was revealed was a true depth of color, much more detail and a three-dimensional appearance to the fabric in Rembrandt’s cloak which had previously been obscured and detracted from the quality of the work in the eyes of the Rembrandt Research Project,” she said.

Specialists also closely examined the artist’s signature, considered contentious in previous assessments because the style reflected Rembrandt’s signature from a much later period in his career, not when the portrait was painted. “But, the cross-section analyst left no reason to doubt that the inscription was added at the time of execution of the painting,” Ms. Kimbriel said.

Furthermore, X-ray photography and infrared reflectography, commonly used in art conservation to reveal underlying layers like underdrawings, showed various alterations in the composition that were typical of Rembrandt. For example, changes to the outline of the figure were carried out at a late stage and without much care to match the surrounding paint, Ms. Kimbriel said, as well as the outline of a hand that had been previously included in the composition but later removed.

Experts also identified the wood panel on which the portrait was painted, from the poplar or willow family, which Rembrandt sometimes used instead of his preferred substrate of oak or canvas.

The painting is estimated to be valued at £30 million, about \$50 million, although the National Trust said it would never be sold.

Mr. van de Wetering, who first identified the painting’s authenticity, said: “Although I was pretty certain the painting was a Rembrandt when I saw it in 2013, I wanted to further examine it after cleaning and see the results from the technical analysis as this had never been done before.”

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