

# AUTHENTICATION IN ART

AiA Art News-service

theguardian



## **Fake news: Queen Victoria's Cranach turns out to be the real thing**

Painting monarch bought for Prince Albert, which experts thought was an imitation, goes on display at Windsor Castle

Portrait of a Lady and Her Son by Lucas Cranach the Elder and his workshop, in the King's Dressing Room, Windsor Castle. Photograph: Todd-White Art Photography/Ben F/Royal Collection Trust

**Mark Brown** Arts correspondent

Tuesday 14 November 2017 14.29 GMT Last modified on Tuesday 14 November 2017 22.00 GMT

For more than a century art historical experts have labelled a painting [Queen Victoria](#) bought as a Christmas present for Prince Albert a 19th-century fake.

But a new generation of art historians has discovered they were wrong. Victoria and her advisers were correct when they bought the painting in 1840. It is a genuine work by the German master [Lucas Cranach the Elder](#) and his workshop.

On Tuesday, the gloriously restored work went on public display at Windsor Castle, taking pride of place in the King's Dressing Room alongside other works by Cranach.

Nicola Christie, the head of paintings conservation at the [Royal Collection Trust](#), welcomed the discovery. "It is an absolute thrill. It doesn't happen very often and it is such a pleasure to know that it has been reattributed."

The painting Portrait of a Lady and Her Son (c 1510-1540) shows an unidentified consort of a prince-elect of the Holy Roman Empire and her son, hand in hand.

Victoria and Albert often gave each other paintings at Christmas and birthdays and Albert, who had a keen interest in early German and Netherlandish art, is likely to have been thrilled to get a genuine Cranach. "Who wouldn't be?" said Christie.

"It was quite a natural thing for Victoria to do and I'm sure when she purchased it she would have considered it a painting by Cranach."

At some point in the early 20th century doubt was cast on its provenance and it was reattributed to Franz Wolfgang Rohrich, an early 19th-century artist and keen Cranach imitator.

"Something in the region of 40 versions of this composition are known to have been produced by him," said Christie. Rohrich sold them as original works and they can still be found in collections all over the world as well as auction rooms. [Christie's sold one](#) in 2014 for £25,000. [The record for a Cranach the Elder](#) painting is £9.3m.

Advertisement

[Art](#) historians assumed that Rohrich had invented the painting in the style of Cranach because no known versions of an original existed. "It wasn't even Rohrich copying a lost painting by Cranach; it was Rohrich's invention."

About a year ago the leading Cranach expert Prof Gunnar Heydenreich, who had seen the painting before and had a hunch visited the Royal Collection.

It was x-rayed and examined using infrared reflectography, revealing two conclusive pieces of evidence that the painting could not be by Rohrich and must be the work of Cranach and his workshop.

The first was the discovery of distinctive fibres on the surface of the panel, under the paint layers, which have been identified as pigeon tendons, often used in the 16th century to counteract the natural warping and splitting of the wood. “It would have been impossible for Rohrich to have prepared his panel in the same way that Cranach and his workshop would have done,” said Christie.

The second was the discovery of a pigment, lead-tin-yellow, widely used in Cranach’s day but not in the 19th century.

Pantone project: a photographer's quest to capture colour

[Read more](#)

Heydenreich, a professor at TH Köln (the University of Applied Sciences, Cologne), was convinced it was the real deal, a work that could be attributed to Cranach the Elder and his workshop.

He asked to loan the painting for an [exhibition at the Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf](#) in spring 2017 and ahead of that the painting was cleaned and conserved to bring out its true beauty.

“It is wonderful,” said Christie. “It has got a very rich, dark background and the figures are set against it in an almost abstract way with these absolutely beautiful, sinuous contours.”

Because the painting was considered a 19th-century copy it has not, until now, been on public display.

Cranach the Elder was court artist to Saxon electors in Wittenberg and is considered one of the most important painters of the German Reformation. He was a particular passion of Prince Albert, who acquired 12 paintings by Cranach and his workshop, many as gifts from the Queen. “It is a wonderful rediscovery,” said Christie. “We are absolutely delighted.”

• *Portrait of a Lady and her Son, c1510–40, can be seen in the King’s Dressing Room at Windsor Castle alongside other works by Cranach and his workshop: Apollo and Diana, c1526, Lucretia, 1530, and The Judgment of Paris, c1530–35.*