

AUTHENTICATION
IN ART

AiA Art News-service

the guardian

Rembrandt painting featuring artist's 'fingerprints' to go on sale in London

Nearly 400-year-old oil sketch of Christ in prayer expected to fetch £6m
at Sotheby's auction

Mark Brown

Wed 21 Nov 2018 13.18 GMT Last modified on Wed 21 Nov 2018 13.26 GMT



A detail from Rembrandt's rapidly painted Study of the Head and Clasped Hands of a Young Man as Christ in Prayer. Photograph: Sotheby's London/PA

Two fingerprints almost certainly belonging to [Rembrandt](#) have been discovered on a small painting portraying Jesus, which is to be auctioned in London next month.

The artwork, called Study of the Head and Clasped Hands of a Young Man as Christ in Prayer, a rapidly painted oil sketch on an oak panel, is coming to the market for the first time in 60 years and is estimated to fetch about £6m.

George Gordon, the co-chair of Sotheby's old master paintings department, said it was not possible to 100% confirm the fingerprints belonged to Rembrandt because no comparable examples had ever been found. "But the discovery of the marks in the original layer of paint along the lower edge make their connection to the artist highly credible," he said.

Fingerprints are often found in the varnish of artworks – but the prints on the Rembrandt painting are in the original paint, meaning the artist may have picked up the artwork while it was still wet.

The discovery was made before the painting's inclusion at the Louvre's 2011 exhibition Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus, which subsequently went to Philadelphia and Detroit. The fingerprint findings were first published last year.



Rembrandt van Rijn, a self-portrait. Photograph: Antonia Reeve

Michel van de Laar, a conservator who first spotted the fingerprints with Arie Wallert, a scientific researcher, said the painting would have been executed in one sitting, a practice known as *ten eersten opmaken*. It involves additional colours and layers being hastily applied before the underlay dries. The method was prone to smudging and could only be accomplished by the most skilled of painters, he said.

“The discovery of the fingerprints is further testament to the speed with which the work was likely executed, and provides fresh insight into Rembrandt’s complex but swift painting technique,” Van de Laar added.

The artwork was created in about 1655 and the model, likely to be one of the young Jewish men who lived in the artist’s neighbourhood in Amsterdam, would have been chosen for his striking appearance.

It is one of seven similar surviving oil sketches depicting the same man as Christ, though there is debate over how many of works were indisputably by Rembrandt. The sketch for sale, and one at the Gemäldegalerie art museum in Berlin, are accepted as being made by the artist.

The artwork had until this summer been on loan to the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam. Before its display at the Louvre, it was hidden away in a private collection for decades, Sotheby’s said.

Van de Laar will discuss the findings at an event at Sotheby’s London on 30 November. The painting will be auctioned on 5 December.