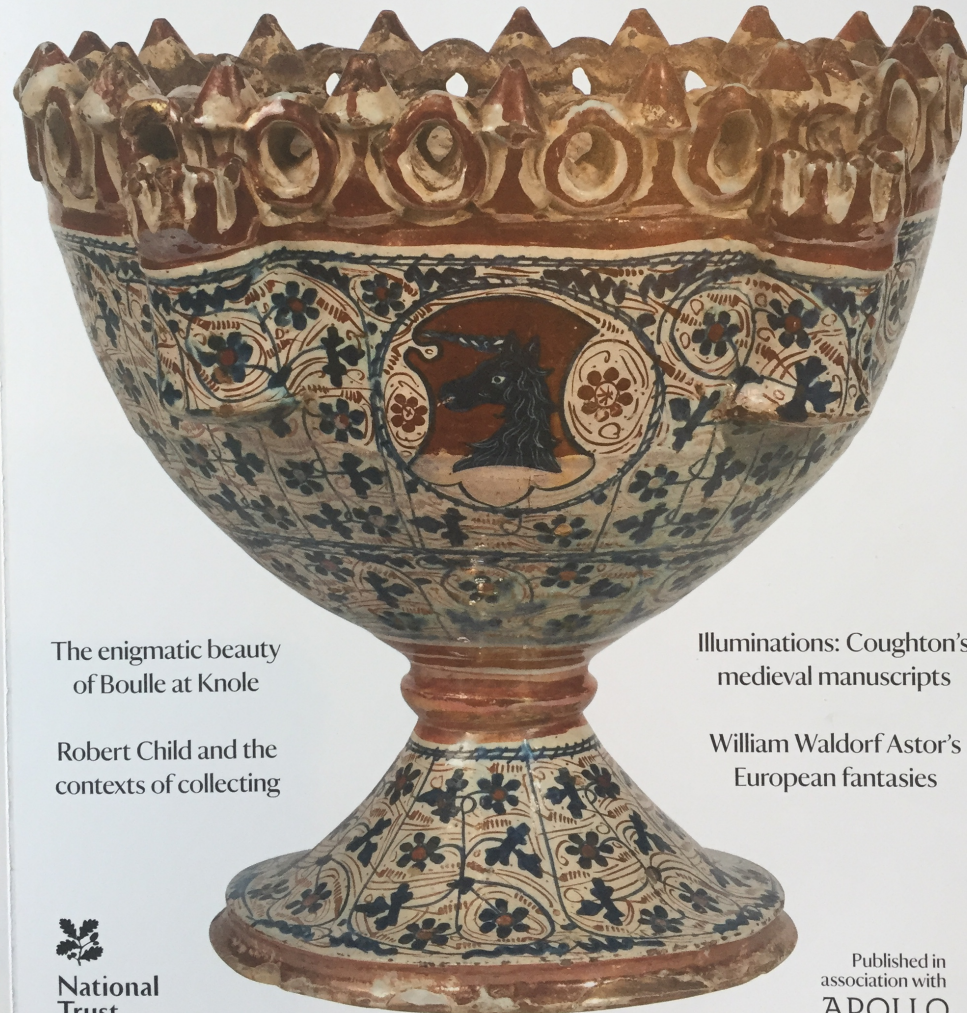


TASTE, TRADE AND EUROPE

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The enigmatic beauty
of Boule at Knoke

Robert Child and the
contexts of collecting

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William Waldorf Astor's
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Conservation in focus

'Close analysis can lead to changes in attribution'

David Taylor reflects on two striking cases

1. *Self-portrait at the age of 22*, c. 1628–29, studio of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), oil on panel, 22.8 x 18.4cm. Knightshayes Court, Devon



Sometimes the identity of the artist to whom a particular picture has long been ascribed is challenged or questioned. Close visual and technical analysis, combining scientific evidence and specialist knowledge, can lead to changes in a picture's attribution. This can on occasion involve even the best-known and most celebrated artists, as was recently the case with two pictures in the National Trust's collections.

We were approached by the art historian Dr Bendor Grosvenor, who thought that two pictures in the Trust's collection – one a portrait of Rembrandt at Knightshayes Court, Devon, the other a work titled *Unknown Cardinal* at Petworth House, West Sussex – would make intriguing studies for his BBC television series *Britain's Lost Masterpieces*. The programmes followed the journeys of the two pictures as they underwent analysis and treatment in the London studio of picture conservator Simon Gillespie. The results have allowed us fundamentally to rethink our understanding of these two intriguing pictures.

The attribution of the portrait of Rembrandt at Knightshayes Court (Fig. 1) has shifted several times over the years. This is not the first time a portrait of Rembrandt in the Trust's collection has undergone reassessment. Tantalisingly, in 2014, after months of technical analysis at the Hamilton Kerr Institute (the picture conservation studio of the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge University), we announced the reattribution of another such work, at Buckland Abbey,

Devon, to the great Dutch master himself. This picture had previously been attributed to 'school of Rembrandt'. The reattribution made headlines around the world.

The tiny picture at Knightshayes Court shows Rembrandt as a young man with medium-length curly hair, his face partly obscured by shadows. It was bought in 1948 by Sir John Heathcoat-Amory from the dealer Edward Speelman, who had purchased it at Agnews earlier that year. When the picture was bought, it was thought to

have been painted by Rembrandt. Subsequently, though, it was reclassified as a straightforward copy of a well-known Rembrandt self-portrait in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Grosvenor, however, wondered if the picture might indeed have been painted by Rembrandt himself, possibly as a study for the picture now in the Rijksmuseum.

The technical analysis undertaken on the picture comprised various treatments and studies. During the process of cleaning, a decision was made to remove the later paint

2. *An Unknown Cardinal*, c. 1550, attrib. to Titian (1488/90–1576), oil on canvas, 97 x 66cm. Petworth House and Park, West Sussex



scheme that made up the rather unsatisfactory grey background of the portrait. This revealed the quality of the original painting. Further examination of the ground layer showed that the work had been painted with the same technique that was used in Rembrandt's studio. Dendrochronology (tree-ring analysis) revealed that the panel the picture is painted on comes from the same oak tree as the panel of another version of the Amsterdam picture, in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Kassel, Germany, and that it dates from the 1620s. As a result it was decided to change the attribution from 'after Rembrandt' to 'studio of Rembrandt'. While some still feel that the picture is by the master himself, the new attribution nonetheless marks an exciting discovery about the production of this little portrait of Rembrandt – a picture that the Dutch artist may not have painted but that he certainly knew.

Another picture in the National Trust collection to have had its attribution questioned over the years is the portrait, titled *An Unknown Cardinal*, at Petworth House of a pensive young man holding a book (Fig. 2). The painting was bought by the third Earl of Egremont (1751–1837) as a Titian, but it was subsequently reclassified as 'manner of Titian'. This work was the subject of the second of Grosvenor's television programmes. It had been badly damaged in the past, having been both cut down and added to. In the cleaning process, discoloured varnish was removed, as were later restorations of historical damage, including a rather clumsy ledge painted across the bottom of the canvas.

Several areas of particularly fine painting emerged: a delicate pattern on the red cloak was revealed, as was the livelier modelling of the subject's hand and the sensitive portrayal of his face, which has many similarities to those found in Titian portraits from the mid 16th century. After the cleaning was completed, and with the help of X-ray and infrared analysis, the Titian scholar Professor Peter Humfrey suggested it should be attributed to Titian and dated to c. 1550. One day we may be able to discover the sitter's identity, but in the meantime visitors to Petworth House can enjoy the picture in its restored condition and share in the excitement that the BBC programme has generated. 🐾

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