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THE “WARSAW MONA LISA”. THE HISTORY OF THE REMBRANDT PAINTINGS FROM THE ROYAL CASTLE IN WARSAW – MUSEUM

The “Warsaw Mona Lisa” is the name given by Prof. Ernst van de Wetering¹, the leading Rembrandt expert of our time, to the portrait by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn from the Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum properly titled *Girl in a Picture Frame*.² The painting, most likely executed in 1641, was acquired for the Polish royal collection together with its pendant panel *Scholar at His Writing Table*³ at the end of the eighteenth century, then left the country for almost two centuries. Furthermore, in the second half of the twentieth century both paintings were considered lost and Rembrandt’s authorship was called into question. Bringing great joy to the world of art, and yet more to Poland, in 1994 the paintings unexpectedly returned home as part of the Lanckoroński Family Gift.⁴

1] Professor Ernst van de Wetering, head of the Dutch research foundation Rembrandt Research Project (RRP) established in 1968, whose works have been published in *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*.

2] *Girl in a picture frame*, oil on panel, 104.5 (105.1) x 76.1 (76.0) cm, signed bottom left: Rembrandt f/1641, Royal Castle in Warsaw, inv. no. ZKW/3906, D. Juszcak, H. Malachowicz, *Malarstwo do 1900. Katalog zbiorów, Zamek Królewski w Warszawie*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 408–411, no. 262.

3] *Scholar at His Writing Table*, oil on panel, 104.5 (105.1) x 76.0 (76.1) cm, signed on the right-hand side of the panel: Rembrandt/1641, Royal Castle in Warsaw, inv. ZKW/3905, D. Juszcak, H. Malachowicz, op. cit., pp. 411–415, no. 263.

4] An art collection donated by the Lanckoroński family to the Royal Castle in Warsaw and Wawel Royal Castle.



Rembrandt van Rijn: *Girl in a Picture Frame*, *Scholar at His Writing Table*, 1641, oil on panel, 104.5 x 76 cm, The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum.

There are no written records regarding the early history of these paintings. At that time it was customary for clients themselves to order the painting support – either canvas or panel; if they did not, the purchase was made by the artist and documented in the commission documentation. This did not happen in the case of these Warsaw panels. They are probably not portraits of specific people but generic depictions of unknown models in a type referred to by the Dutch term *tronies*. They were painted as study models for students, possibly also with the intention of their subsequent sale. At his home, alongside his studio where he worked with his apprentices, Rembrandt also had a sort of gallery room, where his paintings were on display for potential clients and buyers to view.

The painter naturally had to use models for his *tronies*, but often depicted them in mythological, oriental or biblical costumes with con-fabulated names reflecting the art market vogue of the moment. Both the models here are picturesquely depicted in historical costumes, a frequent feature of Rembrandt paintings. The girl wears a dark red fur-lined dress, gold necklaces, and a wide, richly decorated belt. Her young face, adorned with precious pearl earrings, is cast into deep

shadow by her soft black beret. Her long, red hair is let down, in the manner customary for a Jewish bride, and thus for some time the painting was known as *The Jewish Bride*. The model for *Scholar at His Writing Table* is a bearded old man wearing a soft black beret and a dark fur coat, and sporting a gold necklace and ring. He is shown sitting at a table with a writing box and an open book on it before him. Holding a quill, he gazes before him with nostalgia, as if he had fallen into a reverie while writing, and thus in the past this painting was sometimes called *The Father of the Jewish Bride* or similar.

Evidence of the existence of paintings corresponding to these descriptions and attributed to Rembrandt leads to the collection of the Polish king Jan III Sobieski; a copy of the portrait of the girl ordered by him in 1687 for his residence in Żółkiew (now Zhovkva, Ukraine) is listed in the 1696 inventory of that castle.⁵ However, a 1711 inventory of the property of Jan van Lennep in Amsterdam also mentions the possession of a pair of works with a similar description, also attributed to Rembrandt.⁶ These records might equally well refer to original works or copies, which were often made soon after the originals and often proved hard for contemporary art vendors to distinguish from them.

The Warsaw panels were copied several times, as both paintings and prints. To date there are records of seven painted and three engraved copies of *Girl* and three in each technique of *Scholar*. The oldest extant copy of *Girl*, which is very faithful to the original, is the canvas in the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen.⁷ This was painted over an existing landscape painting, which is why its dimensions and proportions differ from those of the original; it is smaller and narrower. This affected the composition: the model is positioned higher, her arms are shorter, her hands set wider apart, and the top side of the frame is missing. This copy might have been made during a restoration of the original.

The earliest print version of *Girl* was made in 1749 by Valentin Daniel Preissler (1717–1765) and Jean-Martin Preissler (1715–1794), after the original Rembrandt painting in the Danish royal collection,

5] W. Drecka, 'Na tropach obrazów ze zbiorów Jana III', *Studia Wilanowskie*, vol. I, Warszawa 1997, pp. 130–132, fig. 2.

6] D. Juszczyk, H. Malachowicz, op.cit., p. 413.

7] *Young Woman with Her Hands on the Picture Frame*, artist unknown, after 1641, oil on canvas, 97.2 x 81 cm, The Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen, inv. KMSp406.

according to the description on it.⁸ It was a mezzotint probably made after the painted copy described above, which was indeed believed, until recent decades, to be by Rembrandt himself. The image of the figure is well depicted but there are some differences in her dress and the background. One curious variance is that the black wooden frame has been replaced by a light stone niche with an inscription in French beneath it.



Young Woman with Her Hands on the Picture Frame, after 1641, oil on canvas, 97.2 x 81 cm, The Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen



Portrait of a Young Girl, after Rembrandt, first half of the 18th c., oil on panel, 104.4 x 79 cm, private collection (Christie's auction, 2011)

The only known panel copy of *Girl in a Picture Frame*, of nearly identical dimensions to the original, was one that went on sale at a Christie's auction in 2011.⁹ The whole image and the facial expression are reproduced well (comparison made on the basis of the

8] *Girl in a Picture Frame*, Valentin Daniel Preissler (1717–1765), Jean-Martin Preissler (1715–1794), 1749, mezzotint, paper, 40.3 x 30.6 cm, The Royal Łazienki Museum in Warsaw, inv. no. ŁKr 1440.

9] *Portrait of a Young Girl*, after Rembrandt van Rijn, first half of the 18th c. (1729?), oil on panel, 104.4 x 79 cm, Christie's Auction no. 6025, 13.04.2011, London, South Kensington: Old Masters & 19th Century Art, lot 34. No historical interpretation of the note on the reverse, which reads: "Rem. La belle juive de Metz. Maitresse de L'Evesque Duc de Valentinois 1729", was made in the catalogue.

auction catalogue photograph). The only noticeable difference is the dark, vertical shadow in the top right corner in place of the column suggested on the original. This detail may be an illustration of changes which might have been made to the original painting in the past. This, privately owned copy is not signed.

The two panels are first described as pendants in sources dating from 1769, when they were part of the collection of Friedrich Paul von Kamecke in Berlin.¹⁰ Pairs of pictures were always more sought after on the art market than single works. It is believed, however, that the two portraits were not painted as pendants. They do not follow the artist's own rules, however: in such pairs the man's portrait was the piece on the left, the models faced each other, and both the scale and the dimensions were the same or similar. Nonetheless, sometimes his pendants were similarly framed. One such example is the *Portrait of Agatha Bas*, held in the Queen's Gallery in London, and its companion piece, the *Portrait of Nicolaes Bambeck*, in the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels. This means that our pictures were most likely linked by their correspondent titles, *The Jewish Bride* and *The Father of the Jewish Bride*, and by the fact that the panels were similar in size. It is now thought that these portraits have been considered a pair for most of their history. The presence of the paintings in Kamecke's collection is documented by two excellent prints, executed in 1769 and 1770 by Georg Friedrich Schmidt. These small images, titled *The Jewish Bride* and *The Bride's Father Saves the Dowry* were furnished with appropriate inscriptions in French: "d'après le tableau original de Rembrandt".¹¹ Both etchings are reversed in relation to the original paintings and are very well executed.

In 1777 the Polish king Stanislaw August Poniatowski bought the Rembrandt pendants from Kamecke's daughter, Elizabeth Henrietta Marie Golovkin, for his Warsaw collection.¹² From 1795 the panels

10] G.K. Nagler, *Neues allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, vol. 15, 1845, p. 323, no. 156, 157.

11] G.F. Schmidt fec. 1769, reading: *La fiancée Juive, grave d'après le tableau original de Rembrandt tiré du cabinet de Mr. Le Comte de Kamke et dédié au dit Seigneur etc.*, and G.F. Schmidt fec. *Auqua forti* 1770, inscribed: *Le Père de la Fiancée reglant sa dot, d'après le tableau original de Rembrandt tiré du cabinet de Mr. Le Comte de Kamke. Rembrandt pinx. 1641*. Both prints are in the collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco: inv. no. 1093.30.33949 and 1093.30.33950; dimensions respectively: 23.1 x 18.3 cm and 23.3 x 18.3 cm.

12] Listed in the king's gallery under the numbers: *Girl in a Picture Frame* no. 207, and *Scholar at His Writing Table* no. 208, after: D. Juszczak, H. Malachowicz, pp. 408, 411.



G.F. Schmidt, *La fiancée Juive*, etching, 23.1 x 18.3 cm



G.F. Schmidt, *Le Père de la Fiancée reglant sa dot*, 1770, etching, 23.3 x 18.3 cm

were displayed at the Painting Gallery in the king's summer palace, Łazienki, in Warsaw. In the subsequent years Vincent Lesseur, the royal miniaturist, executed two excellent watercolour copies, which now belong to the Polish Museum in Rapperswil, Switzerland.¹³ These diminutive images are highly accurate reproductions of the larger paintings, with only a few variances in the image of the girl. The unfortunate shape of the column is altered. Lesseur also titled his miniatures with different names: *Portrait of a Young Woman with Her Hands on the Sill*, and *Scholar at His Writing Table*, and signed them with his own initials: W.L. /1797.¹⁴ On the scholar's portrait he has placed his signature in exactly the same place as Rembrandt's in the original, while on the girl's miniature for some reason it is on the opposite side

13] Miniatury Wincentego Lesseura i Walerii Tarnowskiej z dawnej kolekcji Tarnowskich z Dzikowa w zbiorach Muzeum Polskiego w Rapperswilu, Zamek Królewski w Warszawie i Muzeum Polskie w Rapperswilu, exh. cat., ed. H. Kamińska-Krassowska, Warszawa 1994, p. 5, no. 50 and 51. Both miniatures are watercolour and gouache on ivory, and they have similar dimensions: 124 x 84 mm and 125 x 93 mm.

14] The notes on the reverse read: inv. 701: 61 / La Juive de la/ Collection du Roy/ de Pologne/ de Rembrandt/ VII5/104/ N. 93, and inv. 702, 60/ VII3/102 No. 91/ Żyd czytający/ z Rembrandta. N. 92.



Lesueur, *Portrait of a Young Woman with Her Hands on the Sill*, *Scholar at His Writing Table*, 1797, watercolor and gouache on ivory, 124 x 84 mm and 125 x 93 mm, Polish Museum in Rapperswil, Rapperswil.

of the background. This may have been due to an issue with the original signature that is now unclear.

A pair of canvas copies, relatively close to the originals, painted by an unknown artist possibly from Bacciarelli's *Malarnia*¹⁵ is preserved in the Wawel Castle Museum in Kraków.¹⁶ Another pair of nineteenth-century copies of both tronies, previously at the Lubomirski Museum (in existence until 1939) in Lwów (now Lviv, Ukraine), is held by Lviv Art Gallery and is now on display at Zlochiv Castle.¹⁷ It is difficult to estimate their artistic value due to the poor, long unrestored condition they are in, but they seem largely to repeat the original compositions. Copies of the *Girl* only are held in two other Polish collections: the Museum Palace in Wilanów and Łańcut Castle Museum. In the Wilanów copy the girl is resting her hands on an armchair, not on the frame.¹⁸

15] The king's private art studio at the castle, headed by royal painter Marcello Bacciarelli.

16] Wawel inv. no.: PZS Wawel: dep. 161 and dep. 162, dimensions of both paintings: 89.5 x 71 cm.

17] Inv. no: Z 1735 and Z 1736, 102.5 x 78 cm.

18] This copy may be the one commissioned by the Polish king Jan III Sobieski in 1687 for his residence in Żółkiew.

The Łańcut version¹⁹, despite having come from the Potocki family's collection, or possibly from Princess Lubomirska, is the weakest copy of them all, and heavily overpainted – here the model is depicted without hands and in a painted oval surround. In this case the copyist might have been working on the basis of a print source. A similar impression is given by the etching of *Scholar* probably executed by Johan Friedrich Frantz Bruder in Nuremberg in 1804, which seems to be closer to that by Schmidt than to the original painting itself.²⁰

The most significant differences occur in copies of the *Girl*. In most cases her arms are painted shorter, and some of the copies differ in their depiction of the frame and the signature. This might be evidence of changes to the appearance of the original painting due to renovations, and it is also possible that some copyists used one or two “prototype” copies which already featured these alterations.

After King Stanislaw August Poniatowski's death in 1798, the Warsaw panels were inherited by his nephew, Prince Jozef Poniatowski and subsequently, in 1813, by Jozef's sister Maria Teresa Tyszkiewicz. Two years later she sold over 30 paintings from the king's gallery to Kazimierz Rzewuski, the court scribe. On 7 October 1815 he bought the man's portrait for 140 ducats, and five days later he decided to buy the girl's portrait for a further 210 ducats. Shortly thereafter, Rzewuski moved to Vienna and took his collection with him. Some time later the royal paintings came into the hands of Karol Lanckoroński and his family.²¹ Count Lanckoroński, a Polish landowner and Vienna court official, was also a famous art collector. His collection was recognized as the most significant private collection in Europe.²²

19] Oil on canvas, 91 x 75 cm, inv. S 234 MŁ. See J. Piotrowski, *Zamek w Łańcutcie. Zwięzły opis dziejów i zbiorów*, Lwów 1935; Katalog Zabytków Sztuki w Polsce, vol. III, no. 5, *Łańcut i okolice*, ed. J. Sito, Warszawa 1994.

20] *Scholar at His Writing Table*, Johan Friedrich Frantz Bruder (1782–1838) (?), after Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), 1804, etching, paper, 26.5 x 21.5 cm, inscriptions: on the left *Rembrandt pinx 1641*, on the right *Fr.Br. fec 1804*, The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum, inv. no. 5693. The author was in Warsaw at the time when the print was made, but it is not mentioned in his oeuvre. These etchings were acquired for the museum's collection in 2019, shortly before this text was published.

21] Karol Lanckoroński (1848–1933) was a hereditary member of the Chamber of Nobles in Austria, a Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece, and Grand Chamberlain at the Viennese Court. He won international fame for his passion as a collector, and for his academic interests, archeological expeditions, and scholarly travels. Many objects from his collection are now major treasures in many of the world's leading museums.

22] To read more about the history of Lanckoroński's collection see: J. Winiewicz-Wolska, *Karol Lanckoroński i jego wiedeńskie zbiory*, Kraków 2010; J. Winiewicz-Wolska, “Wiedeńskie

While in the count's collection, around 1876, the Rembrandt pendants were engraved by William Unger, a professor at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. These are the most recent copies known and are relatively free interpretations of the originals.²³



Karol Lanckoroński, The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum, Archive.

Lanckoroński's private residences were filled with oriental and 14th–16th-century Italian art, fruits of the collector's travels.²⁴ In order to accommodate his growing collection, in 1896 he built a huge neo-baroque palace at Jacquingasse 18, near the royal Belvedere, which became known as a Viennese art lovers' museum. The Rembrandt pictures were displayed there in the Dutch Hall.

zbiory Karola Lanckorońskiego sprzed stu laty", *Folia Historiae Artium*, vol. VIII-IX, 2002–2003, pp. 107–160, J. Winiewicz-Wolska, "Dzieje kolekcji Lanckorońskich w latach 1939–1946", *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, vol. XXVIII, 2003, pp. 19–45.

23] M.C. Le Blanc, *Manuel de l'amateur d'estampes contenant le dictionnaire des graveurs de tout nations...*, vol. 4, Paris 1890, no. 28 and 29.

24] A picture by Rudolf von Alt dated 1892 shows that in the count's house at Wasagasse 6, pictures from his collection were hung on both sides of the room door due to lack of space.



The Lanckoroński Palace, early years of the 20th c. Photo: The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum, Archive.



The Dutch Hall in the Lanckoroński Palace, postcard, early years of the 20th c., The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum, Archive.

In January 1902 the palace, opened up to the public for the events collectively known as the *Wiener Kunstwanderungen*, received more visitors than any other aristocratic residence in the city.

After World War I, when Poland regained its independence following 123 years under the partitions, the Lanckoroński family planned to move their collection to their native land. After much effort they finally obtained the necessary permission from the Austrian authorities, but before the works could be moved, World War II broke out. The core of the collection, including the two Rembrandts, was confiscated by the Germans in 1943–1944 and impounded in a mine in Altaussee near Salzburg, which was used as a storage depot for art plundered from across Europe.²⁵ On 8 May 1945 the panels were taken from the mine by American troops and on 24–26 May they were deposited at the Central Art Collecting Point in Munich.²⁶ They were returned to their rightful owners in 1947, but because the Vienna palace had been destroyed near the end of the war, the collection was housed in Hohenems castle, near Vaduz, in Vorarlberg. In 1950 a fire broke out in the castle and many of the paintings were lost. The collection was widely believed



Ruins of the Lanckoroński Palace, photo, c. 1960, Vienna, after J. Winiewicz-Wolska

25] The Rembrandt panels were held under the numbers 257 and 258.

26] At the Central Art Collecting Point the two paintings were listed under the numbers 566 and 567.

to have been destroyed, but the most important pieces, the Rembrandts among them, survived and were taken to Switzerland for safe keeping.

Throughout the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth the Rembrandt literature recognized both *Girl in a Picture Frame* and *Scholar at His Writing Table* as original works by the great artist. After 1950 they were no longer available for scholars to study, with the result that in 1969 their authorship was called into question by Horst Gerson, who only knew them only from photographs and had never examined them.²⁷ Thus the panels were not included in the third volume of *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*²⁸ concerning the period of Rembrandt's activity spanning the years 1635–1642, issued just a few years before they resurfaced in 1994. In that year Karolina Lanckorońska²⁹, on behalf of her family, established a foundation and donated the



Karolina Lanckorońska, 1945, photo P. Boissonnas, AN PAN I PAU, file no. K.III – 150, photo 339. Source: www.pauart.pl

- 27] A. Bredius, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of the Paintings*, revised by H. Gerson, London 1969.
- 28] E. van de Wetering, J. Bruyn, B. Haak, S.H. Levie, P.J.J. van Thiel, *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, vol. 3, 1989.
- 29] Karolina Lanckorońska (1896–2002), historian, PhD scholar at Jan Casimir University in Lwów (until 1939), lieutenant in the Polish Home Army, prisoner in Ravensbruck, head of the Polish Historical Institute in Rome (1976–1993), founder of the Lanckoroński Foundation.

works to the Royal Castle in Warsaw “as a tribute to a free and independent Poland”.³⁰

Both Polish Royal Castles were endowed: the Royal Castle in Warsaw received 15 paintings from northern schools from the former gallery of Stanisław August Poniatowski: the two Rembrandts”, landscapes by Cornelis Decker and Frederik de Moucheron, paintings by David Teniers The Younger, Philip de Wouwermans, and Adriaen van Ostade, and French paintings including a rare portrait by Corneille de Lyon. The gift also included portraits of Lanckoroński and Rzewuski family members by Marcello Bacciarelli, Anton von Maron, Andrea Appiani, Josef Grassi, Louis de Silvestre, and Heinrich Fuger, and some furniture. The Wawel Royal Castle received 78 Italian paintings, as well as Spanish, German, and other pieces.

The Rembrandt paintings and most of the other items forming part of the donation were displayed in the castle for about a decade, while the museum commenced studies which led to a project devoted to examining³¹, conserving, and re-attributing the two “Rembrandts”. Between 2004 and 2006 the paintings were duly examined, treated, and reattributed thanks to the cooperation of Polish scientists, conservators, and art historians under the guidance of Professor Ernst van de Wetering and his colleagues from the Rembrandt Research Project (RRP).³²

Both Rembrandt paintings were executed on poplar panels. This species of wood was not typically used by Rembrandt, who mostly painted on oak boards, with a few exceptions for oriental species. The RRP has records of just three other Rembrandt pictures on poplar panels of similar dimensions, all executed within the same period of time as this pair: *Portrait of Marie Trip*, 1639, 107 x 82 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, *Girl in a Veil*, c. 1640 (or 1643), 62.2 x 48.9 cm, National

30] Words taken from the letter of Prof. Karolina Lanckorońska to the President of Poland, Rome, 8 Sept. 1994, cited in: D. Juszcak, H. Małachowicz *Galeria Lanckorońskich. Obrazy z daru profesor Karoliny Lanckorońskiej dla Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie*, Warszawa 1998, p. 6.

31] The following examinations were carried out: observation in normal, raking, and reflected visible (day) light; macro photography; IR examination; UV-induced luminescence; x-ray examination; identification of the wooden panels; stratigraphic analysis and examination of pigments, fillers, and binders; microscopic and microchemical analysis; cross-section analysis using the SEM-EDS method; and examination of the paint layer binders with GC-MS and FT-IR

32] For details of the examination and conservation see: J. Czernichowska, R. Dmowska, A. Nowicka “Two paintings: *Girl in a picture frame* and *Scholar at his writing table* from the collection of the Royal Castle in Warsaw – history, examination and conservation”, in: *Opuscula Musealia* 19, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Krakow 2012.

Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and *Portrait of Anna Wijmer*, 1641, 99.5 x 81.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. It is possible that ca. 1639 or 1640 Rembrandt, under the influence of his fascination with Venetian portraits, bought some poplar panels, which were the type in most widespread use in Italy. Thus the poplar supports also speak in support of Rembrandt's authorship of the Warsaw portraits.

The panels are single boards with a vertical wood grain, their backs bevelled along all four sides and later trimmed to create pendants. They are very similar in thickness, which varies from 1.5 cm to 2 cm. The panels are very well preserved considering that they are single boards, which is rather rare in the case of such large dimensions; they are only slightly warped. On the reverse of the panels several collection seals, numbers, and inscriptions have been preserved. The supports were sized and grounded. The two paintings differ in the quality and thickness of the ground. In the woman's portrait a thick, double layer of ground covers the rough surface of the wood panel thoroughly. The first layer contains chalk as a filler, the second, thinner one mainly lead white. The binder in both layers is an animal-based glue and oil mixture. The board on which the man's portrait is painted is covered with a very thin ground layer, which is rubbed into the board; the texture of the wood is visible through both this and the paint layers. The binder for the ground, an animal glue with the addition of walnut oil, is mixed with a lead white and a small amount of calcium carbonate.

On both panels the grounds are covered with an ochre-colored *imprimatur* layer (Dutch *primuersel*). There are no drawings or preliminary sketches prior to the present *tronies*. The paint composition of both pictures is dominated by lead white, earth pigments (yellow ochre, red lake, cinnabar or vermilion, green earth), bone black, bituminous brown, and calcium carbonate. There is often an admixture of chalk, which was typically added to lead white to enhance its transparency and most often in order to increase volume in impastos. One difference between the paintings is the use of lead-tin yellow, smalt, and malachite in the portrait of the *Scholar*. In both paintings the medium was walnut oil, and linseed oil in the female portrait. The paint layers are relatively thin and the *primuersel* is often visible through them. The paint on the *Girl* portrait was applied much more thickly in several places, probably to cover the black sketch of the first portrait. The portraits are executed freely, with thick impasto reserved mostly for the manuscript, the jewellery, and the flesh tones. Of particular note is the

masterful rendition of the scholar's quill, half-painted and half-drawn into the fresh paint with the shank of the brush.

IR and X-ray examinations of the *Girl* revealed the sketch of another portrait beneath the present image. This abandoned work depicted a woman in three-quarter profile, possibly in a white ruff and coif. The silhouette is delineated with dark brushstrokes; its outline was slightly visible even to the naked eye prior to the treatment owing to the naturally increased transparency of the upper paint layers. In the *Scholar* only minor *pentimenti* were detected, in the lower part of the outline of the cap and along the right profile of the figure.



Girl in a picture frame, IR image, Warsaw Royal Castle – Museum



Girl in a picture frame, overpainting on the dress, Warsaw Royal Castle – Museum

From the earliest decades the pictures were restored many times. The original varnishes were removed, possibly even during Rembrandt's lifetime. The frequent relocations, reframings, and changes of format inevitably caused damage, which thus required restoration. During the early renovations the originals were partially overcleaned and thereafter overpainted. Fortunately, the paint layers in most areas of both portraits are well preserved, with the exception of the red dress in the girl's portrait. Here the paint layer developed a prominent,

raised craquelure; in many areas it was poorly attached to the panel, creating some tents of paint, some of them flaking off. In the past, to halt this process, the painting was coated with extremely thick layers of varnish in order to bond the loose paint.

The main aim of the conservation was to clean the surface of the paintings, which had progressively been obscured by dirt, darkened varnishes, and discoloured retouching. Furthermore, the woman's portrait evidently needed structural treatment in the red dress area. Here the varnish underneath the blistered layers of paint had to be removed and replaced with consolidant. The cleaning of the painting's surface revealed extensive repaints on both the figure and the background. It was probably the visibility of the first sketch that necessitated these overpaintings, damages, and restorations. The extensive overpaintings in the upper background, including the added column, and the heaviest layers on the dress, were removed. Several much smaller overpaintings on the face, ears, right earring, hair, necklaces, and belt also needed to be removed. Some overpaints had to be left due to damage to the original paint, or to the impossibility of distinguishing them from the original or of removing them. The surface of the *Scholar* portrait, which was covered with two layers of old varnish, a number of



Scholar at His Writing Table, varnish removal
 Warsaw Royal Castle – Museum



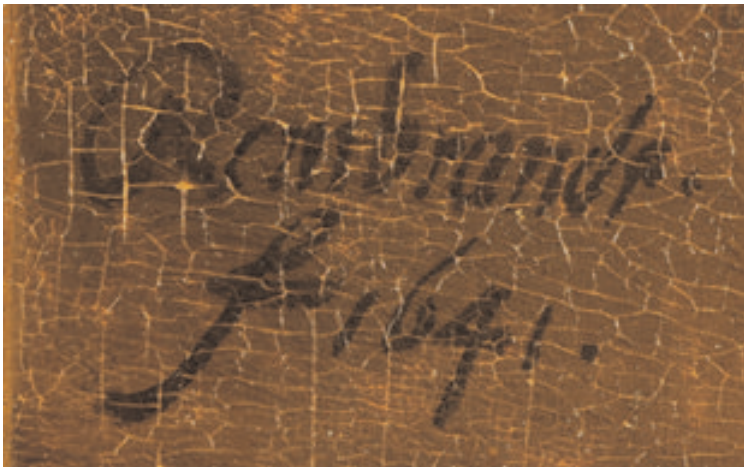
Girl in a Picture Frame, varnish removal
 Warsaw Royal Castle – Museum

overpaints, retouches, and sloppy fills obscuring large areas of the original, was cleaned; most of these sites were located near the upper right edge of the board, on the beret, and in the background of the image.

After this treatment the paintings were restored; ground losses were filled, and they were revarnished and retouched. New frames modelled on seventeenth-century examples were designed.

Both paintings bear the artist's signatures, but they are not of the same quality. The *Scholar at His Writing Table* signature: Rembrandt /f 1641, located on the side of the tabletop, is executed in the wet paint of the under layer, which means it is solid and not subject to doubt. The signature of *Girl in a Picture Frame*: Rembrandt /f 1641, on the left side of the background 35 cm from the bottom edge, is partially damaged and most likely added later, but this does not preclude Rembrandt's authorship by any means.³³

The pigments, ground components, and binding media, as well as



Rembrandt's signature on *Scholar at His Writing Table*, Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum.

the painter's working methods revealed in the examinations and during the treatment, are typical of Rembrandt's practice. They evince numerous technical and technological similarities with other Rembrandt

33] *A Corpus of Rembrandt Paintings*, published by the RRP, recognizes numerous original works with no original signatures as Rembrandt's; non-signature was quite a common practice both in the artist's own time and thereafter.

paintings described in the subject literature. The project³⁴ enabled the art historians to confirm Rembrandt's authorship of both pieces, and the portrait of the girl in the verisimilar picture frame was deemed by Prof. van de Wetering to be the most sublime *trompe l'oeil* depiction in Rembrandt's entire oeuvre.³⁵ In his view, in this work Rembrandt created a very subtle sense of petrified movement: the girl is about to touch the frame, while her torso is still twisted.

After the successful conclusion of the project, both portraits were exhibited at two venues during the Rembrandt Year exhibition in 2006: *Rembrandt. Quest of Genius* in the Rembrandthuis, Amsterdam, and *Rembrandt. Genie auf der Suche* in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. In this way the pictures regained their rightful place in the art world and became widely known, especially *Girl in a Picture Frame*, which was selected as the catalogue cover image for the Dutch venue. A Dutch television documentary revisiting the process of the examination and conservation of the painting bears the title *The Mona Lisa of Warsaw*.³⁶ Standing in front of the painting in Warsaw, and during the vernissage of the exhibition in Amsterdam, Professor van de Wetering said: "...He depicts her in her enchanting and very realistic beauty.... That's why I think this painting will become the new Mona Lisa in Warsaw." Over the following years the pendants received great public attention during the exhibitions "Treasures of Poland. Rembrandt and the Precious Royal Collection" in Japan: Tokyo Fuji Art Museum (29.08–26.09.2010), Suntory Museum Osaka (6–31.10. 2010), Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art (10.11–5.12. 2010), and Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum (15.12.2010–12.01.2011), and subsequently "L'Aigle Blanc. Stanislas Auguste, dernier roi de Pologne, collectionneur et mécène au siècle des Lumières" in France, at the Palais Impérial de Compiègne (8.04–18.07.2011), and "The golden age of Poland" in Spain at the Palaco Real, Madrid (01.06–04.09.2011).

After their *tournée* the portraits went on show at their old home, the Royal Łazienki Museum in Warsaw, as part of the exhibition 'The Stanisław August Collection of Paintings at the Royal Łazienki' (19.07–16.10.2011). Now back at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, they are

34] The Royal Castle in Warsaw – Museum was awarded the *Sybilla 2006 – Museum Event of the Year*.

35] E. van de Wetering, *Rembrandt. Quest of a Genius*, exh. cat., ed. B. van den Boogert, Amsterdam 2006, p. 115.

36] *The Mona Lisa of Warsaw*, dir. Melinde Kassens, prod. Jessica Stan, RRP / *De Mona Lisa von Warschau*, 2006.



Prof. Ernst van de Wetering at work in the Warsaw Royal Castle – Museum, 2006



Poster for the Japan exhibition, Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, 2010

at the heart of a new permanent display, “The Lanckoroński Collection – Rembrandt’s Paintings”.

The return of these Rembrandt paintings to Poland, a country which lost so much of its cultural heritage during the period of the partitions and the two world wars, is of inestimable significance for the Polish nation.



Ruins of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, 1948, photo: Museum History of Warsaw



The reconstructed Royal Castle in Warsaw, 2008, photo: A. Ring