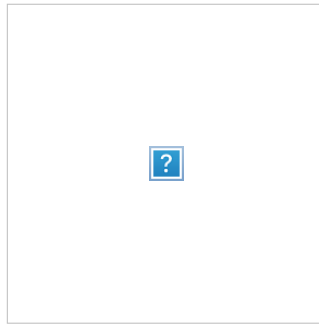


Rare Terracotta Portrait Bust, Owned by the Kimbell Art Museum, Discovered to have been in Nazi Salt Mine During WWII

Posted on [July 6, 2011](#) by [Press Release](#)



Austria: 1945. Nazi War Loot in Altaussee. US army with looted art treasure in Austrian Salt mine. ©Topham / The Image Works

The [Kimbell Art Museum](#) announces the discovery of a photograph confirming that a Renaissance portrait bust in its collection was in the Alt Aussee Salt Mine in Austria, one of many repositories for artwork stolen by the Nazis during World War II. Acquired by the Kimbell in 2004, the bust is traditionally identified as a portrait of Isabella d'Este (1474–1539), one of the most celebrated women in Renaissance Italy. It is attributed to the sculptor Gian Cristoforo Romano.

The photograph was discovered and revealed to the Museum by Robert Edsel, founder and president of the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art, recipient of the National Humanities Medal, and author of the 2009 book *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*. The "Monuments Men" were a group of 345 men and women from thirteen nations who comprised the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives section of the Allied armies during World War II. Many were museum directors, curators, art historians, and

educators. Together they worked to protect monuments and other cultural treasures from the destruction and theft of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

“We were intrigued but also apprehensive to discover that our sculpture was among the looted items in the salt mine,” commented Eric M. Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum. “The Museum has a policy of returning works of art if it is learned that they were improperly sold or looted in continental Europe during the Nazi era, and I was relieved to learn that the Kimbell would not have to do so in this case, since there was documentation to prove that the work had been properly purchased.” (In 2006, the Kimbell returned Joseph Mallord William Turner’s painting *Glaucus and Scylla* (1841) to the heirs of John and Anna Jaffé after an investigation concluded that the painting had been unlawfully seized by the pro-Nazi Vichy regime in France in 1943. The Museum repurchased the painting in 2007 after the family put it up for auction at Christie’s.)

The discovery of the photograph of the bust sparked further investigation into the work’s provenance. The Museum was aware that prior to World War II, it was in the collection of a Swiss doctor, Otto Lanz, who resided in Amsterdam and built a grand house near the Rijksmuseum. The house was filled with over 400 Renaissance treasures that Lanz had been collecting since he was a young man in Switzerland. Toward the end of his life, Lanz sought to sell his collection, and, following his death in 1935, his heirs entrusted it as a long-term loan to the Rijksmuseum. Meanwhile, the Lanz collection attracted Herman Goering and Adolf Hitler, whose agents aggressively tried to buy it. In somewhat protracted and complex negotiations involving Otto’s son G. B. Lanz, who was Swiss Consul in the Netherlands, and the family notary public, the collection was sold to Hitler in April of 1941 for 2 million Swiss francs and 350,000 Dutch guilders. The Kimbell previously believed that the bust of Isabella must have remained with the family, rather than being sold with the rest of the collection, since it was sold by another of Otto Lanz’s sons, Dr. A. B. Lanz, to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1973.

“Provenance research is a very detailed and arduous endeavor which has long been a part of the Museum’s mission,” observes Nancy Edwards, the Kimbell’s curator of European art and head of academic services. “We have researched the ownership histories of the works in our collection, but this is an ongoing process and new discoveries will inevitably unveil gaps not previously recognized. I have to say I was quite surprised when Robert Edsel brought this photo to our attention. I was surprised, but not really concerned that this would be a restitution issue—though clearly we had a gap and needed to trace the bust’s history.”

The sculpture was among thousands of priceless works, many destined for Hitler’s Führer Museum, discovered in the Alt Aussee salt mine by the Monuments Men in early May 1945. The Monuments Men subsequently spent six years documenting and repatriating the works of art to the countries from which they were stolen. Robert Edsel and the Monuments Men Foundation conducted further research on the history of the bust and found the property card that documented its discovery in the salt mines, as well as a document of repatriation that confirmed its return to the Netherlands. After the bust’s arrival in the Netherlands, the Dutch government declared that its sale to Hitler had been legitimate. The Lanz collection then became the property of the Dutch state.

Edwards continued her research and traveled to Amsterdam to confer with colleagues at the Rijksmuseum. She discovered that the bust was, in fact, included in the 1941 sale to Hitler and then taken to the salt mine for safekeeping. Five years after the Lanz collection returned to the Netherlands, some items thought at the time to be of lesser importance were auctioned, and the family was able to buy a number of them back. Otto Lanz’s daughter, Anna Gertud Lanz Kijzer, purchased the bust as a gift to her brother Dr. A. B. Lanz. Because the bust’s authenticity had long been questioned, Kijzer was able to purchase it for only 35 guilders (approximately \$10).

In 1973, John Pope-Hennessy wrote a letter to Dr. A. B. Lanz attributing the work to Gian Cristoforo Romano and expressing an interest in purchasing it for the Victoria and Albert Museum. A 1973 thermoluminescence (carbon test) report conducted at Oxford University established a bracket date of c. 1408–1538 for the firing of the terracotta, affirming its creation during the Renaissance period. It was sold to the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano, Switzerland, that same year. In 2002, the work was purchased by the London dealer Daniel Katz, who sold it to the Kimbell in 2004.

“The Monuments Men Foundation was proud to work with Dr. Lee, Dr. Edwards, and the Kimbell Art Museum to bring to light this important part of history,” remarked Robert Edsel. “This not only honors the legacy of the men and women who served as Monuments officers during World War II, but fulfills a key component of the Mission Statement of the Foundation. The Kimbell Art Museum has once again handled a Nazi-era provenance case in the most exemplary manner.”

The bust of Isabella is currently on view at the Kimbell Art Museum, where admission to the permanent collection is free.

The Sculpture:

Portrait of a Woman, Probably Isabella d'Este is attributed to Gian Cristoforo Romano, Italian (c. 1465–1512), and dates to c. 1500. This rare terracotta portrait bust probably represents Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua. The most celebrated woman of her day, Isabella d'Este (1474–1539) cultivated one of the most illustrious courts in Renaissance Italy. She was a passionate patron who invited the most renowned artists in Italy to decorate her private quarters in the Ducal Palace.

The identity of the figure rests in part on its correspondence to Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of Isabella d'Este in profile (Musée du Louvre, Paris). It also bears comparison with a portrait medal of Isabella by Gian Cristoforo

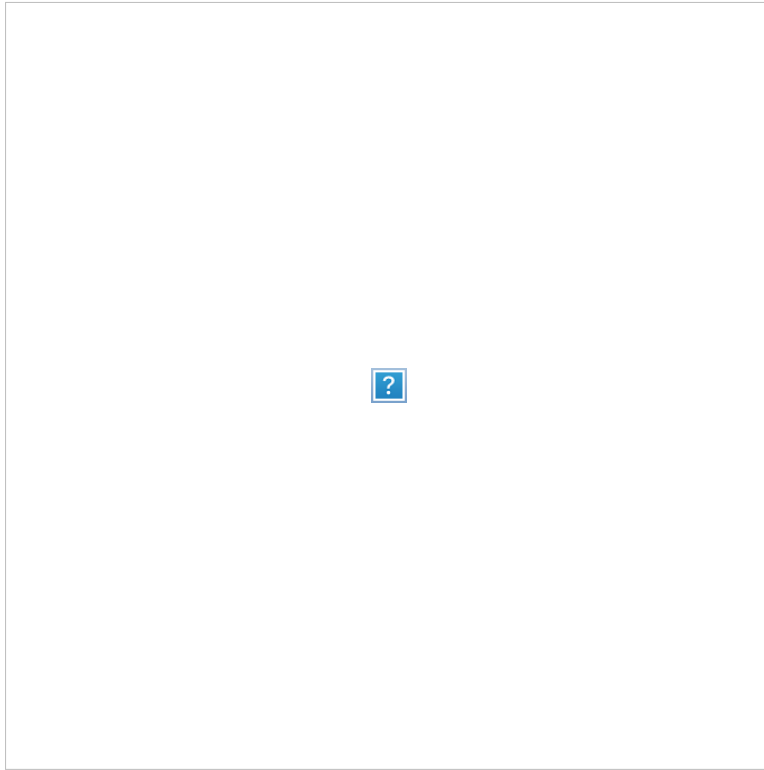
Romano, one of the leading sculptors of his time and an accomplished courtier, singer, poet, and antiquarian, who advised Isabella. As early as 1491, she commissioned him to make a marble portrait bust of her, although no such work by him is known. Isabella was not as attractive as she would have liked, and often complained that her portraits were unflattering. In much Renaissance female portraiture, including that of Isabella, a faithful likeness was less desirable than an idealized beauty that represented the sitter's virtue. If the Kimbell bust indeed represents Isabella, it does so in a highly flattering way, presenting an ideal, classicized "likeness" that would have pleased the most discriminating of patrons.

The bust was originally painted. As with almost all such terracottas, the colors were probably removed in the nineteenth century.

Corrected Provenance:

- (Luigi Grassi, Florence), from about 1910–12, as "Lombard School"
- Dr. Otto Lanz, Amsterdam [1865–1935] by 1931
- His widow, Anna Theresia Willi Lanz, Amsterdam and Lugano, Switzerland
- Sold to Adolf Hitler through Hans Posse in 1941
- Transferred to Kremsmünster and then Alt Aussee, Austria
- Recovered by Allied forces and taken to the Munich Central Collecting Point on June 28, 1945
- Repatriated June 3, 1946, to the Netherlands Art Property Foundation (Stichting Nederlands Kunstbezit), Amsterdam
- (Sale, Frederik Muller & Cie, Amsterdam, 13–19 March 1951, lot no. 312)
- Purchased by Anna Gertrud Lanz Kijzer [1895–?], Amsterdam.
- Given to her brother, Dr. Adrian Berchtold Lanz, Glion-sur-Montreux, Switzerland
- purchased by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Lugano, Switzerland (through Marco Grassi) in 1973;
- purchased by (Daniel Katz, London), 2002

- purchased by Kimbell Art Foundation, Fort Worth, 2004



Austria: 1945. Nazi War Loot in Altaussee. US army with looted art treasure in Austrian Salt mine.
©Topham / The Image Works