

DIGITAL AGNES

Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University
agnes.queensu.ca

Collection Count + Care

Count + Care seeks relationships within and conversations across the collection.

What stories does the collection tell?

2022

SPEAKER

Suzanne van de Meerendonk, Bader Curator of European Art

FEATURED WORKS

Rembrandt van Rijn, *Head of an Old Man in a Cap*, around 1630, oil on panel. Gift of Alfred and Isabel Bader, 2003

Erika DeFreitas, *A Teleplasmic Study with Doilies (A Selection)*, 2010–2011, digital photographs (3). Gift of Allyson Mitchell and Deirdre Logue, 2021

KEYWORDS

Rembrandt, Art Conservation

TRANSCRIPT

Suzanne van de Meerendonk: This conversation is all about what lies hidden underneath the surface. Over the past year, a team of researchers from Agnes and the Art Conservation Program at Queen's has been studying Rembrandt van Rijn's *Head of an Old Man in a Cap*. This includes so-called scanning macro x-ray fluorescence which measures the distribution of specific elements throughout the paint layers. So if a certain paint contains copper or lead or mercury, we can now see or map where the paint has been applied even if the paint layer lies below the painted surface. So that is really helpful to shed new light on the painting process and materials used. During this study, an underlying earlier composition by the artist was identified. In the cobalt map seen here, for instance, a bust in profile emerges. And this makes sense because we know from other examples that the young Rembrandt, who was only around 24 years old when he painted this work, would frequently reuse panels. His painting is paired here with recently acquired work by Toronto-based artist Erika DeFreitas. These three photos on display form part of the larger series that documents the artist performing with her late grandmother's handmade doily. As she unites as it were, these creative processes along a maternal lineage, the piece reflects on loss and grief and breath leaving the body. The fabric configurations that spill from the artist's mouth also recall the 19th century ectoplasm photographs of T.G. Hamilton, who seeking to document the embodied interactions between mediums and the spiritual world, turned to photography which then of course was at the forefront of imaging technology. Brought together, Rembrandt's and Defreitas's work bring into focus an array of tensions between study and portrait, the visible and invisible and loss and creation.