



## Art Conservation *and hidden fashions*

*Queen of France at 14 by virtue of her marriage to Louis XIII and later regent for her young son, Louis XIV – often referred to as “le Roi Soleil,” or the “Sun King” – for eight years, Anne of Austria (1601-1666) lived a full life and moved to a convent five years before her death. She was undoubtedly at the height of her beauty when her portrait was painted by Peter Paul Rubens sometime between 1622 and 1625 while he was in Paris fulfilling a commission for the Queen Mother, Marie de’ Medici.*

Two similar portraits of Anne, one now at the Louvre in Paris and the other at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, are both attributed to Rubens and/or his Antwerp workshop. It is not unusual, however, to find copies painted at various times over the past four centuries. These include one that this year became a treatment project for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Isaac Messina. The painting was purchased in Europe in the 1960s by a family member of its current owner.

Based on his initial examination and analysis, Isaac believes the painting may date from the 19th century; it has since undergone many restoration efforts, some more skillful than others. The restorations have resulted in some notable changes from the two 17th-century versions. The most striking example is Anne’s bosom, which in Rubens’s original portraits is exposed beneath a sheer fabric and square neckline. In the copy, the bodice now extends up to her neck ruff, covering all traces of skin. However, the x-radiograph of the copy reveals that this version once conformed more closely to the originals, showing evidence of a square neckline beneath layers of overpaint. While Isaac suspects this change likely happened when a restorer overpainted previous damages, the change may also have been made to conform to later, more modest tastes.

Isaac’s primary treatment goal is to stabilize the widespread network of actively lifting and tenuously attached areas of paint. To do this, he may have to slightly expand the canvas, which has shrunk over time likely due to exposure to elevated moisture levels. Once the painting is stabilized, Isaac will remove discolored varnish layers, reduce distracting areas of overpaint, and discuss with the owner about whether it might be possible or advisable to try to reveal the original appearance of Anne’s bodice. When Isaac’s treatment is complete, the painting will be returned to its owner, with Anne either still modestly covered or restored to her more revealing 17th-century dress.

### ARTC Spotlight—December 2019

*The University of Delaware’s Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at [www.artcons.udel.edu](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).*

*Top: After applying adhesive and locally humidifying the surface to gently relax the paint, WUDPAC Fellow Isaac Messina sets down raised cracks and lifting paint with a heated tacking iron. Inset: Detail of the painting in raking light before treatment, showing lifting and tenting paint. Right: Details comparing Anne of Austria’s current appearance before treatment (left) to the x-radiograph (center), which reveals the shape of a lower, square neckline similar to the original version by Rubens at the Rijksmuseum (right). Images: K. Acuna, I. Messina, and the Rijksmuseum (<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/SK-C-296>).*

