

## **Connoisseurship: A Personal View**

*Prof. Dr. Christopher Brown, Professor at the University of Oxford and former Director of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford*

My intention in this talk is to set the scene for the conference theme of Connoisseurship. In order to do so I shall refer to my personal experience as Curator of the Dutch and Flemish collections in the National Gallery, London, from 1971 until 1998, and subsequently as Director of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford from 1998 until 2014. Unsurprisingly my examples will largely be taken from Rembrandt, as there has been such a fascinating and controversial debate about Rembrandt attribution in those years. I shall discuss earlier generations of connoisseurs and reflect on their practice and the limited technical resources available to them. Clearly the technical resources now at our disposal have significantly changed the nature of connoisseurship – yet it is also evident that time-honored methods of approaching questions of attribution continue to be key to the modern practice of connoisseurship. The history of the study of Rembrandt will also be compared to that of Rubens and Van Dyck where, I believe, interesting comparisons can be drawn. The hope is that in this lecture I can outline the central issues in our discussion in the following two days.

### *About Christopher Brown*

Christopher Brown was Curator of the Dutch and Flemish collections at the National Gallery, London, from 1971 until 1998. He was Director of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford from 1998 until 2014. He is now Professor of Netherlandish Art in the University of Oxford. He has published widely on Dutch and Flemish art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and organized several exhibitions, among them *Rubens's Landscapes* (National Gallery, London, 1996) and *Anthony van Dyck* (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, and London, Royal Academy, 1999-2000).