

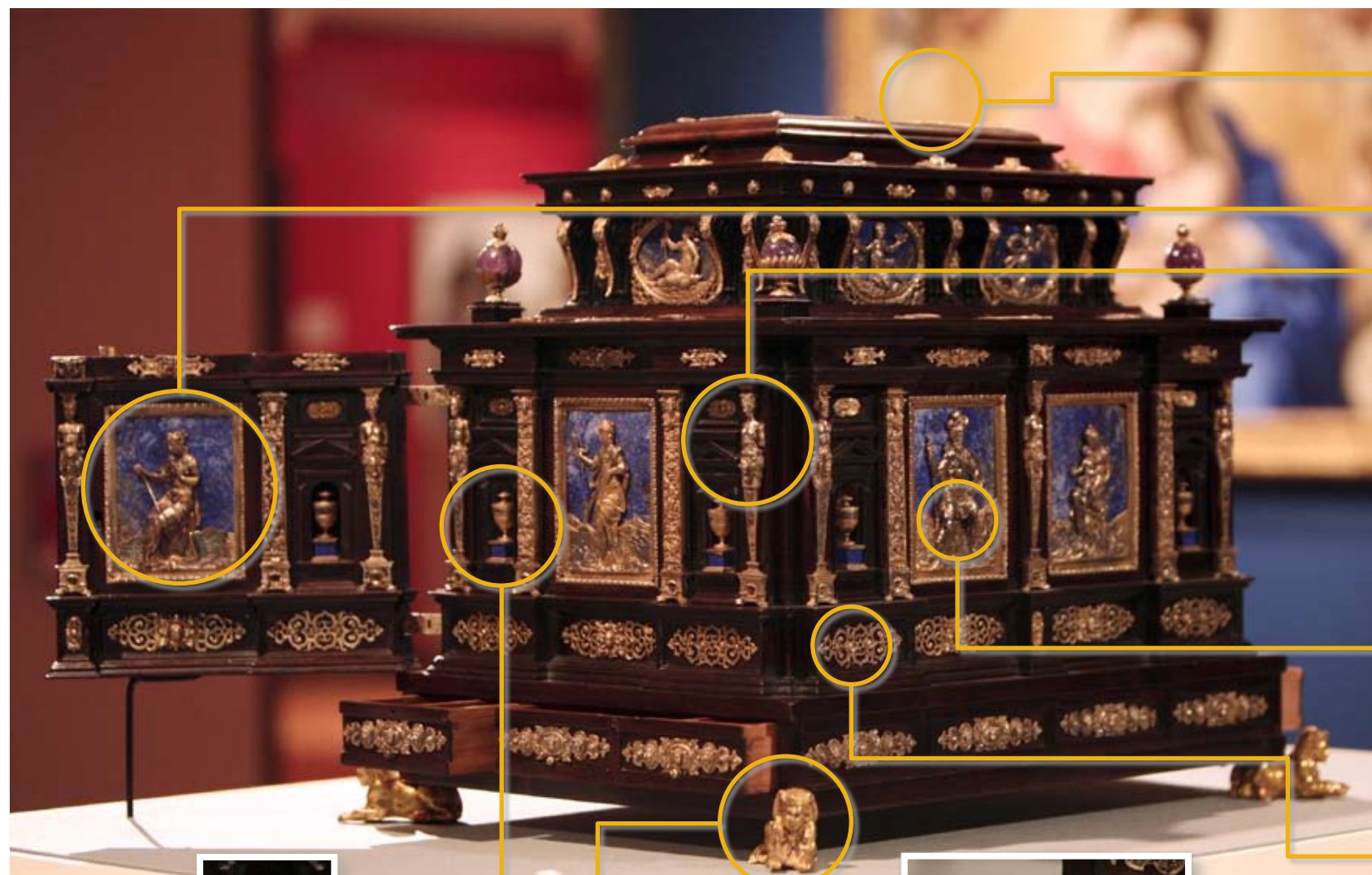
Decoding a work of art

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Works of art frequently display the evidence of their histories. If the evidence can be properly deciphered, it either corroborates or contradicts the written and oral stories that accompany a great work of art.

The *Collector's Chest* at the Loyola University Museum of Art is a case-in-point. It is unique among American collections as the only such chest by the famous 16th-century Mannerist goldsmith Wenzel Jamnitzer of Nuremberg. The story goes that the chest was owned by Queen Christina of Sweden and was taken by her to Rome when she abdicated her throne and converted to Catholicism. After her death, the chest presumably was sold to pay off her many debts. In 1774 the piece was acquired in Rome by John Thorpe, S.J., the agent of the English Lord Arundell. In 1793, it was donated to Stonyhurst College,



16TH-CENTURY MANNERIST ELEMENTS:

Secret compartments, like the one revealed by a small latch in the roof of the chest and the three hidden drawers in the base

Elaborately detailed decoration, including the use of male (terms) and female (caryatids) figures as architectural elements



Imagery based upon Classical mythology: there are 12 gods and goddesses cast in gold, set against a background of lapis lazuli, an expensive blue mineral.



It's hard to make out, but a W and a lion's head on the column upon which Mars sits indicate Wenzel Jamnitzer's authorship. An N to the left signifies that the piece was made in Nuremberg.

Complex strapwork decorations

18TH-CENTURY ROMAN MODIFICATIONS:



Eight small urns with crisp profiles contrast with the more elaborate Mannerist decorations.

Four sphinxes with Egyptian headdresses reflect the increased European interest in and knowledge of Egyptian art in the 18th century.



a Jesuit boarding school in northwestern England, where it was long known as the "Jewel Casket of Queen Christina." The chest remained there for almost 200 years until its acquisition by Donald Rowe, S.J., for the D'Arcy collection.
How much of this story does the *Collector's Chest* itself corroborate? The piece can certainly confirm its date and authorship. Stylistically,

Mannerist art of the late 16th century valued luxury, complexity, and ingenuity. These elements are indicated along the right side of the main photo.
Sadly, there is no physical evidence to prove that the chest was ever owned by Queen Christina of Sweden. There is, however, at least proof that it was in Rome at the end of the 18th century, in the form of modifications made to

the piece. This evidence: simple Classical urns with crisp profiles in contrast to the scale and elaboration of the Mannerist decorations, and four sphinxes with headdresses that reflect the increased European knowledge of and interest in Egyptian art in the 18th century. These elements are indicated along the bottom of the main photo.

In conclusion, I suspect that Queen Christina's name was attached to the chest when its Roman owner sought to sell it to a wealthy English lord. The piece was evidently smartened up with some 18th-century additions. British nobility was notorious for snapping up art across Europe, either while on the Grand Tour, a multi-year trip across the continent, or through art agents, like Father Thorpe.

Ownership by the famous Swedish queen would have offered a plausible explanation as to the Mannerist chest's presence in Rome, and it would have enhanced both its appeal and its price. Regardless, the *Collector's Chest* is one of the most extraordinary pieces in the D'Arcy collection. But don't take my word for it—come and study it yourself at LUMA.

THE COLLECTOR'S CHEST
ca. 1570, Wenzel Jamnitzer, German (Nuremberg)
Silver gilt, ebony, lapis lazuli, feldspar, bloodstone, amethyst, quartz, and gold enamel
Gift of the Abbie Norman Prince Trust, the Frederick Henry Prince Trust, and the Friends of the Martin D'Arcy Gallery