After the Interpretation Changes

Correction, Completion, and the Circulation of Museum Titles

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Simon Maris, *Isabella*, around 1906 · Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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Abstract

This study distinguishes two changes in the Rijksmuseum's presentation of Simon Maris's portrait now titled *Isabella*: the withdrawal of a racialized catalogue title in 2015, and the fulfilment in 2020 of an announced intention to adopt a name when one became known. The second change does not, by itself, demonstrate revision of the rule governing the first. The records examined at Europeana and Wikimedia Commons reveal different afterlives of the later decision. Europeana retains the descriptive title and an account in which identification remains unfinished. Commons preserves the older wording in the name of its image file while identifying the work as *Isabella* in the accompanying description. Drawing on my correspondence with Alexander V. Markov, the study follows what these descriptions do, rather than treating their survival as evidence of continuing authority. It finds uneven presentation of the later naming decision, not a demonstrated restoration of the rejected title. Its contribution to Post-Interpretive Criticism is a documentary distinction among correction, completion and circulation.

The finding and the question

The survival of a title does not settle the survival of its authority. A painting can appear under a later name in one account and an earlier descriptive title in another without the original correction having been reversed. Withdrawing an objectionable designation, fulfilling an intention to identify the sitter, and carrying that later decision into another record are different events. The history becomes clearer when they are followed separately.[1–3,9–10]

The case concerns one painting, catalogued as SK-A-2931, rather than the Rijksmuseum as a whole. The replacement of its title in 2015 and the adoption of *Isabella* in 2020 answer different questions. Their later appearances also differ: Europeana retains the provisional account, whereas Commons combines the name of an older image file with a description that gives the later title. Neither the survival of earlier wording nor a declaration of correction is enough to establish what now governs the work's presentation.

The question belongs to Post-Interpretive Criticism because a title is among the accounts that may meet a viewer before the work does. PIC asks what authority such language acquires, what it makes possible and what it makes difficult to notice. Here I follow that concern into catalogues and later descriptions. The study does not ask what *Isabella* finally means. It asks when a preserved account remains historical evidence and when it continues to determine how the work is presented. Restraint concerns the claims made from these records as much as the claims made about the painting.[11]

This is a documentary inquiry into public records. It does not recover the sitter's full identity or reconstruct what viewers experienced. The original research was conducted from 7 to 9 October 2026. The source check for this edition, undertaken on 17 October, is recorded separately in the notes; it does not turn earlier observations into a continuous history. An account published at a known date, a page consulted later, and a date stated by the institution are different kinds of evidence.[12]

The vocabulary and the burden of reasons

The inquiry grew from my correspondence with Alexander V. Markov. I distinguished the preservation of criticism from the preservation of its jurisdiction; Markov clarified deactivation as the loss of default authority, after which an interpretation must again justify its use. Our exchange also distinguished historical documentation from present endorsement. I bring these distinctions to the museum case. Their origins and subsequent development are recorded in the acknowledgment and provenance below.[11]

Table 1. Preservation, authority and present use.

Distinction	What must be examined
Preservation and authority	Whether earlier wording serves as a present title, records a former title, or identifies an image file.
Declared standing and practical force	Whether the role assigned to a description agrees with what it is being used to determine.
Deactivation and erasure	Whether a governing use has been withdrawn, without requiring the historical account itself to disappear.

The use under examination is specific: the earlier racialized catalogue descriptor serving as the painting's unqualified current title. Quoting it to document the museum's earlier decision is not the same use. This limit prevents a claim about one title from becoming a claim about every racial classification surrounding the work. It also constrains the conclusion: replacing those words with different words cannot, on its own, establish a new account of how correction works. A later phrase might reproduce the same classificatory function, but demonstrating that would require a further argument.

The objection to the earlier title is that its historical occurrence supplies no sufficient reason to renew a diminishing racial classification as the work's unqualified present name. The museum can preserve the record without repeating the designation as its own current account. This is my reconstruction of the objection, informed by the terminology policy and Lisa Lambrechts's discussion, rather than the wording of a recovered institutional judgment. I treat the objection as sound for the argument that follows, while leaving its premises open to challenge. The museum's acceptance is not what makes it sound.[2-3]

In my letter of 24 September, I proposed that restoring a use previously withdrawn on justified grounds requires reasons responsive to the objection that limited it. Answering that objection is necessary, though other objections may remain. Evidence supporting the name *Isabella* addresses a different claim. It does not show how the museum would respond to a proposal to restore the rejected descriptor. Nor does a later title consistent with the original objection have to overturn that objection before it can be adopted. It needs adequate support for what it now claims.[11]

Correction and completion

The correction: the 1976 title and its withdrawal in 2015

The painting entered the collection through the Van Wezel bequest in 1922. The museum's explanatory account and Lambrechts's article trace an acquisition-era typological description and the racialized diminutive assigned in the 1976 collection catalogue. During the terminology debate of 2015, the title was replaced by *Young Woman with a Fan*. The museum also preserved earlier nomenclature rather than deleting the record of its own descriptions. These sources establish the reasons advanced and the reported change; no original 2015 decision file was examined.[1,2,3,5,6]

This is the correction to which the objection applies. In the museum entry examined, the earlier descriptor is marked as former and does not occupy the heading. Taken with the account of its withdrawal, that supports deactivation in this particular naming role. It does not establish the disappearance of every effect the earlier framing may have had in teaching, collection searches or later viewing. Nor does it establish that a proposal to restore the old title would receive a substantive answer. The finding concerns a specified use, not the institution's answerability in every respect.[1–3]

The completion: the provisional title and the name adopted in 2020

The former label reproduced in Lambrechts's note 9 states: "Until her name is known, the painting will bear a neutral title." Replacement of the descriptive title was therefore anticipated. The adoption of *Isabella*, supported by archival research and reported by the museum as in use from February 2020, is best understood here as fulfilment of that conditional intention. The change had no fixed date and did not resolve every uncertainty about the sitter. It fulfilled the announced naming intention to the extent that the evidence supported a name.[2–3]

Both retitlings changed what the museum said. Only the first withdrew the racialized descriptor; the second could take place under the condition already attached to the provisional title. It neither restored the rejected designation nor demonstrated that the rule governing naming had itself been reconsidered. I initially asked whether the later change showed a correction being maintained through modification. The earlier label gives a sufficient alternative explanation: an intention was carried out. The stronger claim must therefore be withheld.

To establish that a correction had been revised while its justified purpose survived, the inquiry would need evidence that an arrangement was reconsidered, not merely followed. It would also need to show that the relevant limit remained effective through that reconsideration. Simple fulfilment of the earlier condition would not establish this. Restoration of the rejected use without adequate grounds would be a lapse instead. The existence of another title cannot decide between these histories.

The correction and completion in circulation

Europeana: the provisional account in circulation

The Dutch Europeana entry for this painting was consulted on 9 October 2026 under *Jonge vrouw met waaier*, rendered in English as *Young Woman with a Fan*. The record names the Rijksmuseum as its contributor and carries the same collection number and persistent reference as the museum entry. Its description discusses earlier derogatory titles and continues an account in which the sitter's name has not yet been established. The English address did not yield a usable page during the original research; the comparison concerns the Dutch entry.[9]

Europeana gives 16 March 2018 as the date of first publication and 17 March 2018 as the last update supplied by the contributing organisation. These are dates reported by Europeana, not an independently established history of every sentence. They locate a museum-derived account within the intervening years, but do not preserve the museum's own page for those dates. The retrieved description is abbreviated. Its provisional account is legible, while the complete English sentence about a neutral title is supplied by Lambrechts's note 9.[3,9]

This dated Europeana record can be read alongside Leiden's report of a curator's lecture in 2019, which also uses the descriptive title. The intervening years are consequently represented by more than retrospective scholarship. Even so, neither source records every alteration to the museum's presentation. A stated update date is not a complete history of preservation, and a page consulted in October 2026 does not establish that its contents had remained continuously visible since 2018.[8–9]

The comparison establishes a difference in the public presentation of the later naming decision. The museum uses *Isabella*; the Europeana account retains the descriptive heading and unfinished identification. The earlier withdrawal is nevertheless reflected in Europeana: the racialized words appear as previous, derogatory designations rather than as its heading. What is missing there is the later completion, not the earlier correction. Calling this a reversal would confuse the two changes.[1,9]

The reason for the discrepancy remains unknown. An earlier contribution may not have been replaced; a previous version may have been deliberately retained; or the arrangements for sharing revisions may have left the account unchanged. The public pages do not assign responsibility among these possibilities. Europeana also displays the contribution's date, giving the reader a reason to recognise its age. No correspondence about an objection to this account has been recovered. The difference between records is established; misconduct or a refusal of reconsideration is not.

Commons: an older file name beside the later title

The Commons record offers a revealing contrast. The name of its image file still contains *Jonge vrouw met waaier*, but the accompanying description names the painting *Isabella* and recounts the change made in 2020. Its history records the addition of the file on 30 March 2024. The older words identify the image file; they do not replace the later title in the description of the work. To infer an unchanged naming account from the file name alone would be to mistake one role for another.[10]

Europeana and Commons are therefore not equivalent examples of an account falling behind. Europeana presents the provisional title as its heading. Commons preserves that wording for a different purpose while giving the later name in its account of the painting. The date on which the image was added also does not date every subsequent change to its description. This comparison follows the roles visible in the consulted records, not an uninterrupted history of either website.[9–10]

Table 2. The earlier descriptive title in three settings.

Place of publication	Role of the earlier descriptive wording	Finding
Rijksmuseum	Listed among former titles; *Isabella* heads the entry.	The later name governs this presentation.
Europeana	Heads the consulted Dutch record; the provisional identification remains.	The later naming completion is not reflected in this account.
Wikimedia Commons	Identifies the image file; the accompanying description gives *Isabella* as the painting's title.	Surviving words do not establish an unchanged account of the work.

Five responsibilities of contestability

I proposed five responsibilities of contestability in the correspondence, which Markov restated and examined. They provide questions for the evidence, not a numerical score of institutional openness. Preserving a reason, making a restriction effective, and keeping the restriction itself open to challenge are separate achievements. Evidence of one cannot simply stand for the others.[11]

Table 3. Five responsibilities and the evidence available. An untested responsibility is not a demonstrated failure.

Responsibility	Evidence	Limit
Preserve provenance	The museum identifies earlier naming stages. Europeana names its contributor and gives dates. Commons names its museum source.	These links do not establish every later decision or alteration.
Retain qualifications that matter	The museum acknowledges a possible alias and a missing surname. The related portrait's wording identifies a title without asserting a complete civil identity.	Different claims may require different qualifications; their transfer has not been followed through every use.
Keep competing accounts accessible	Earlier descriptions and some reasons for change remain available.	Successive titles are not equivalent to accessible competing arguments about what a title ought to establish.
Distinguish documentation from endorsement	The museum marks former titles. Commons distinguishes the name of an image file from the work's title.	Europeana reflects the earlier correction but not the later completion. That difference is not restored authority for the rejected designation.
Require fresh justification for restored authority	No proposal to reinstate the rejected naming use and no decision on such a proposal have been found.	This responsibility remains untested. Evidence supporting *Isabella* cannot settle it.

The restraint I described as "claim less from the record," subsequently restated by Markov, has a particular instance here. The museum notes that *Isabella* may have been an assumed name, and its explanatory account continues to seek a surname. These qualifications limit the identification being asserted. Their presence does not settle what every shortened label says, but their absence elsewhere must also be judged against the claim actually made there. Fidelity does not require every account to repeat the same words.[1,11]

A related portrait, acquired in 2022 and catalogued as SK-A-5103, is described as *Portret van model, getiteld Isabella* (a portrait of a model, titled *Isabella*). This wording may qualify the name's role: it identifies the title without asserting a complete civil identity for the sitter. It should not be judged deficient merely because it does not repeat the possible-alias qualification. That is a reading of the wording, not proof of the museum's intention. The second portrait permits a limited comparison of naming and attribution, not an assumption that the same restriction governs a different object.[7]

The related portrait's entry cites figure 12 in Lambrechts's article, but the material and measurements do not agree with the published caption. The entry describes oil on panel, measuring 43.3 by 35.8 centimetres; the caption describes oil on canvas, measuring 61 by 43.2 centimetres. This discrepancy remains unresolved. The cross-reference is reported, not used to establish that the two descriptions identify the same physical object. A shared citation cannot establish that every qualification, or every reason for a naming decision, has travelled with it.[3,7]

A former-title label could still be merely ceremonial if the withdrawn designation continued to govern another present use. That possibility requires evidence of what happens elsewhere. It cannot be inferred from the label's existence. Europeana establishes a difference concerning the later descriptive title, not the reinstatement of the rejected racialized one. Commons shows why older wording in the name of an image file is not such reinstatement either. The comparison gives the inquiry greater precision without licensing a wider accusation.

What the temporal sequence can and cannot test

Markov constructed a hypothetical history in which a correction takes effect, later lapses, and is then cited as though it remained effective. In response, I distinguished that history from a correction that never reached the practice it was meant to change. The museum case allows a comparison across records but does not establish the full sequence he proposed. Successive calendar dates are not enough: the inquiry must find evidence of the particular events and their relations.[11]

Table 4. Markov's hypothetical sequence and the limits of the museum comparison.

Moment in the hypothetical history	Evidence in the case	What remains unknown
The challenged use	The catalogue title and the reasons advanced for withdrawing it are described in the museum's record and scholarship.	No original decision file has been examined.
An effective correction	The reported retitling, Europeana's dated contribution, the Leiden account and the museum's later entry support particular changes.	There is no continuous history covering every naming use.
A subsequent lapse	Europeana retains the provisional account; the museum gives the later name.	No return of the rejected title is shown. The later completion may never have reached the Europeana record.
A renewed challenge treated as settled	No corresponding objection and response have been recovered.	A later observation of a page is not evidence of such an exchange.

A correction's effectiveness at an earlier moment cannot, by itself, establish its effectiveness later. Nor is the absence of the rejected title sufficient: an omission might be incidental rather than the result of a considered withdrawal. The evidence must concern the actual change and the use it was intended to limit. These were the purposes of the temporal distinction proposed in my letter of 24 September. They do not require a numerical measure of authority.[11]

An account still displaying an earlier stage may never have received the later revision. Alternatively, it may have received that revision and subsequently lost it. Both histories are compatible with the present comparison. Europeana's stated contribution date makes the first possible, but does not describe every intervening act. The distinction between a change that never arrived and one that was later lost is already part of the correspondence. This case shows why the distinction matters to the evidence.

What could decide between those histories? Earlier and later versions of the same entry surrounding a documented revision would help, as would a request for correction and the response to it, or a statement of what the later presentation was intended to preserve. The original archive searches covered the earlier English and Dutch museum addresses and its persistent reference. They yielded no usable historical page. Europeana partly fills the documentary interval; it does not supply the missing history of the museum's own page or evidence of a renewed objection being dismissed. The access note records that limit.[9,12]

Structural claims and their limits

The terminology policy and the separation of current from former titles are possible sites of structural change. Yet seeing them in operation does not establish when they began, how widely they govern, or how far they are open to challenge. The distinction between semantic and structural revision asks whether what changes is an answer or the authority under which answers are given. A museum may fulfil a naming condition for good reasons without reconsidering what that condition is entitled to determine.[1–2,11]

Successional authority remains a competing explanation. Typology, descriptive wording and a personal name may offer successive answers to an unchanged demand that the title classify or identify the sitter. Their novelty might renew the authority of that demand. Persistence of a question, however, is not automatically insulation from criticism. To establish the latter, the inquiry would need a pertinent objection to the question's relevance and evidence of how it was received. These sources do not decide whether that naming criterion is compulsory beyond examination or demonstrably answerable.[11]

A further possibility raised in my letter of 24 September runs in the other direction. A justified restriction can survive by habit after the reasons for it cease to inform decisions. Public access to those reasons does not establish that every custodian consults them. Their absence from each individual entry does not establish that they have been forgotten. A defensible limit may coexist with an arrangement that is hard to question. The adequacy of a particular decision and the answerability of the practice supporting it are different matters.[2–3,11]

The findings must remain open to contrary evidence. A documented return of the rejected title would qualify the claim of deactivation for the use and period concerned. A later Europeana version giving the completed naming account would change what could be said about that version, not erase the earlier observation. Evidence of a deliberate decision to preserve an older account solely as historical documentation would change the assessment of its present role. Evidence that the adoption of *Isabella* required reconsideration of the naming rule would weaken the explanation of anticipated completion. None of these histories follows simply from a missing record.

The study also inherits the limits of its sources. Most substantive accounts come from the museum: the collection entry, the policy, the Bulletin article and the library record. Europeana republishes museum material, the Leiden report recounts a curator's lecture, and Commons identifies a museum source. Different places of publication reveal circulation, but do not thereby supply independent accounts of every objection that might have been excluded. Treating their agreement as proof that no challenge exists would repeat the recognition closure under examination. Nothing in these records permits the researcher to assign assent, resistance or a completed experience to the viewer.[1–4,8–11]

Conclusion

The evidence distinguishes correction, completion and their later circulation. The racialized designation was withdrawn from the naming role examined. The adoption of *Isabella* fulfilled a stated intention attached to the provisional title. Europeana retains an earlier account, while Commons preserves an older name for the image file alongside the later title of the painting. The difference concerns the presentation of the naming completion, not a demonstrated restoration of the use that the earlier correction rejected.[1–3,9–10]

For PIC and the continuing inquiry with Markov, the question becomes which decision has travelled, into which use, and with what qualifications. An account may reflect an earlier correction without reflecting a later completion. Why this happened, and whether a later change never arrived or was subsequently lost, remains to be established. The contribution is not a new mechanism inferred from a sequence of titles. It is a clearer account of what the documents permit us to say and where they require us to stop.

Sources and notes

The notes distinguish the original research of 7–9 October 2026 from the check made for this edition on 17 October. A source reopened at the later date is not treated as a historical capture of the earlier one. The museum entries, terminology policy, Lambrechts's paginated text, Europeana's Dutch account, the Leiden report and the available Commons description continue to support the distinctions made here. The remaining limits of access are recorded below.

1. Rijksmuseum, "*Isabella*," collection no. SK-A-2931. The heading, former titles, possible-alias qualification and missing surname are read together with the explanatory history. Consulted during the research of 7–9 October 2026; cited passages checked on 17 October. Collection record · Persistent reference

2. Rijksmuseum, "Terminology." The policy describes the review of earlier language, preservation of former descriptions, and the successive naming decisions. Consulted during the original research; cited passages checked on 17 October 2026. Terminology policy

3. Lisa Lambrechts, “From *Young Woman with a Fan* to *Isabella*: A Rediscovered Identity,” *The Rijksmuseum Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (2020), pp. 157–165. The reasons for withdrawal are discussed on pp. 157–158; the rediscovered name on pp. 158–159; the former label is quoted in note 9 on p. 164. The caption to figure 12 is on p. 163. The publisher’s paginated text was checked on 17 October 2026. Reproductions of the pages could not be retrieved for visual comparison; neither an examination of the original painting nor a fresh inspection of the family archive is claimed. Publisher’s text · DOI: 10.52476/trb.9685

4. Rijksmuseum Research Library, bibliographic entry for Lambrechts’s article. Recorded in the original research on 7 October 2026. The link could not be reopened during the final check. It is retained as bibliographic context, not as independent evidence of the naming practice. Library entry

5. NL Times, “Rijksmuseum stripping insensitive words from artwork titles, descriptions,” 9 December 2015. Contemporary reporting on the terminology initiative; consulted in the original research and reopened on 17 October 2026. Report

6. Jonathan Jones, “Young Negro Girl: should artworks with offensive names get an update?” The Guardian, 15 December 2015. The historical wording is retained here only to identify the publication. Its English variation is not treated as the exact museum title. Consulted in the original research; the bibliographic details were checked on 17 October 2026. Commentary

7. Rijksmuseum, “*Portret van model, getiteld Isabella*,” collection no. SK-A-5103; acquired on 12 December 2022. The title, material, measurements and reference to Lambrechts were checked on 17 October 2026. The unresolved discrepancy with figure 12 is discussed in the study. Related portrait · Persistent reference

8. Leiden Art History Blog, “Presenting the Colonial Past in the Museum,” 27 September 2019. Report of Maria Holtrop’s lecture of 6 February 2019. This is a dated account using the descriptive title, not a preserved state of the museum’s own page. Consulted in the original research and checked on 17 October 2026. University report

9. Europeana, “*Jonge vrouw met waaier*,” Dutch entry for the Rijksmuseum painting SK-A-2931. Consulted on 9 October 2026; the heading, abbreviated description, contributor and displayed dates were checked again through the retrieved page text on 17 October. Europeana gives first publication as 16 March 2018 and the last contributor update as 17 March 2018. Those dates do not certify an unbroken history of every part of the entry. Dutch entry

10. Wikimedia Commons, “File:*Jonge vrouw met waaier*, SK-A-2931.jpg.” The search service’s copy of the page text was examined on 9 October and checked again on 17 October 2026 after direct access failed. It gives *Isabella* in the description and records the image’s addition on 30 March 2024. The image date does not date every later change to the description. No reproduction of the painting is included. Commons record

11. Dorian Vale and Alexander V. Markov, correspondence, 4–24 September 2026, preserved in the Museum of One research archive as *Post-interpretive criticism, The unstable sign and the afterlife of interpretation*; with Markov’s subsequent response to this study in October 2026. The original letters supply the intellectual provenance described below, not independent evidence about the museum.

12. The observations, source access and unsuccessful searches are distinguished in the access note below. The check made for this edition does not supply missing intermediate versions or turn reported institutional dates into independently established dates of preservation.

Acknowledgment and intellectual provenance

I am grateful to Alexander V. Markov for the sustained exchange through which these questions became more exact and for his careful response to the documentary case. The selected passages and summaries from our letters are used with his permission. This is my independently authored study, not a jointly authored paper or a record of formal peer review. Responsibility for its documentary claims and conclusions remains mine.

The correspondence is preserved in the Museum of One research archive under *Post-interpretive criticism, The unstable sign and the afterlife of interpretation*. The page references below belong to that archive. They locate the original contributions without making the private letters part of this publication.

Table 5. The development of the argument and its separate contributions.

Date and contribution	Intellectual provenance
8 September 2026	My distinction between preservation and jurisdiction, and my account of renewed authority through local acts, appear on pp. 32–34 of the correspondence archive. Markov's semantic protocol is proposed in his response, pp. 42–44.
8 September 2026	I set out five responsibilities of contestability, pp. 57–58. Markov restates and examines them, defines deactivation and addresses ceremonial openness, pp. 73–74.
11–14 September 2026	Successional authority, the deactivation gap and recognition closure are proposed in my letter, pp. 137–142, and developed by Markov, pp. 168–170.
15–23 September 2026	The distinction between semantic and structural revision, and the relations among verification, warrant migration and reauthorization, develop across pp. 201–206, 241–244, 284–288 and 332–336.
20–23 September 2026	"Claim less from the record" originates in my letter of 20 September, p. 287, and is restated by Markov on 23 September, p. 334. His four-stage museum example and reauthorization by default appear on pp. 334–336.
24 September 2026	Continuity of justificatory burden, the temporal distinction and the alternatives concerning maintenance and inherited instruction remain my proposals in this letter, pp. 385–392. Subsequent engagement does not amount to agreement with every proposal.

Markov has since responded to the study and engaged with the distinction between earlier and continuing effectiveness. This does not convert every proposal in my preceding letter into an agreed conclusion. Continuity of justificatory burden remains identified as my proposal. The earlier reading of the museum case as maintenance through modification was also mine; it is not presented as a mechanism established by the evidence or attributed to Markov.

Access and the documentary record

The Internet Archive searches recorded on 9 October 2026 concerned the museum's earlier English and Dutch collection addresses, together with its persistent handle, for the years 2016–2019. A further request sought a version near 17 March 2018. None yielded a usable historical page. These are failures of access, not evidence that the archive contains no copies, that a revision never occurred, or that a correction later lapsed. The original requests remain linked here as part of the research record.

Handle search, 2016–2019 · English collection address · Dutch collection address · Availability near 17 March 2018 · Request for a dated copy

The source check for this edition did not recover those missing versions. It confirmed the relevant passages in the publisher's paginated text, but attempts to retrieve page reproductions again failed. The study therefore cites the printed page and note numbers without claiming a visual comparison of the illustrations. The material-and-measurements discrepancy concerning the related portrait remains unresolved. The Commons comparison relies on the search service's copy of the description, not direct access to its complete revision history.

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