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## Nuclear analysis proves Venice Guggenheim's Léger is a fake

*Using radiocarbon tests, researchers conclude the cotton plant used to make the canvas was cut no earlier than 1959*

By Hannah McGivern  
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The Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice put to rest a 40-year-old mystery this week when a work dubiously attributed to Léger was revealed by Italy's Institute of Nuclear Physics to be a fake made after 1959. The painting's authenticity was first suspected by the art historian Douglas Cooper in the 1970s and the work, supposedly from Léger's "Contraste de formes" series of 1913-14, was never exhibited or catalogued as a result. The Institute of Nuclear Physics dated the canvas beyond any doubt using the "bomb peak" method. Between the late 1950s and early 1960s, Cold War nuclear weapons testing doubled the radiocarbon concentrations in the atmosphere, and hence in all organisms alive at that time. By comparing the radiocarbon in a small unpainted sample with the known levels during the "bomb peak", the research team can say with confidence that "the cotton plant from which the canvas was produced was cut no earlier than 1959" —four years after Léger's death.

The director of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Philip Rylands, said he was relieved that conclusive evidence had finally been found: "Thanks to the application of innovative scientific techniques, the cloud of uncertainty has at last been lifted and Douglas Cooper's connoisseurship vindicated."



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