

# AUTHENTICATION IN ART

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## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### Experts question the authenticity of a group of works by Jackson Pollock

Tests suggest pigment used in some of the paintings not commercially available before artist's death in 1956

by ANNY SHAW | 9 November 2015



Jackson Pollock's paint-splattered studio in East Hampton, New York, including paint cans used by the artist. Photo by Susan Wood/Getty Images

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Questions have been raised about the authenticity of a group of works attributed to Jackson Pollock, six of which were exhibited at the Art Monaco fair in July by the Nevada-based Classic Fine Art. Around 30 paintings from the group were privately analysed by Art Access & Research, a UK-based company, in 2010.

The Art Newspaper has seen reports written by Nicholas Eastaugh, the director of Art Analysis & Research (formerly Art Access & Research), examining the pigments used in 23 paintings. Of those, 12 were found to include CI Pigment Yellow 74, which was not commercially available before the Abstract Impressionist artist died in 1956.

Reports on each of these 12 works state: “The earliest forms of this class of pigment appeared on the commercial market in 1910 (PY1), with others following in the 1920s (such as PY4-6). However, the date of introduction of PY74 is commonly given in the literature as 1957. This consequently raises a number of issues.”

The reports recommend additional research to confirm the identification of PY74, to explore whether the yellow pigment could have been applied later by another hand, and to establish whether it could have been made available to Pollock before its general commercial release.

Eastaugh’s investigations also uncover the use of several pigments that match those found in paint cans in Pollock’s studio. Of the 23 reports seen by The Art Newspaper, all record the presence of titanium dioxide white; 21 reports document the presence of calcite, a mineral used as a white pigment. Phthalocyanine compounds were observed in 21 works, aluminium metal flake was present in 19, and lead chromate was detected in 14. Synthetic ultramarine was found in four works, while low levels of cadmium sulphide were found in one; possible low levels were found in one of Pollock’s paint cans containing a pink paint.

In an email, Classic Fine Art says it believes the works are authentic and that “every indication” supports that belief. The gallery adds that it is carrying out “the highest-quality” tests and authenticity processes to verify them. In the meantime, it says it will not consider any exhibition or “financial involvement in the paintings” until scientific proof is available and the accepted authentication process completed.

“We will stand by the results, whatever they are,” Classic Fine Art says.

A webpage dedicated to the works on a site maintained by the company, which has been removed since the summer, suggested that fractal analysis, material analysis, DNA and fingerprint recovery had yielded “very positive” results.

Meanwhile, little information is available publicly about the provenance of the works. An article published online by Art Monaco Magazine states that the “small private collection” represented at the fair was originally acquired

by a New York collector, Armin Hershkowitz, from an anonymous woman. According to the article, Hershkowitz struggled to find a buyer for the collection before selling it to the collector and conservator Gabor Nemeth in the 1960s. Nemeth then sold a few works “for a low price”, including one to a furniture designer on the West Coast of the US in the 1970s, which was authenticated by Pollock’s widow, Lee Krasner.

In 2002, the article continues, Nemeth tried to obtain authentication for the other works but found that the Pollock-Krasner Foundation’s board of authentication had been dissolved in 1996. Instead, the works were subjected to various technical analyses.

Johnesco Rodriguez, the director of Art Monaco, says that Classic Fine Art provided him with “solid evidence” about the authenticity of the works before exhibiting at the fair. This included a video testimony by the art historian and physicist Richard Taylor, who examines fractals in Pollock’s paintings. According to Rodriguez, Taylor said that he had “never seen such a perfect match”.

The fair director adds that the works were also previously exhibited at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Museum of Biblical Art in Dallas. “We want to believe that they would not have displayed them if they weren’t sure of the veracity,” Rodriguez says.