

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

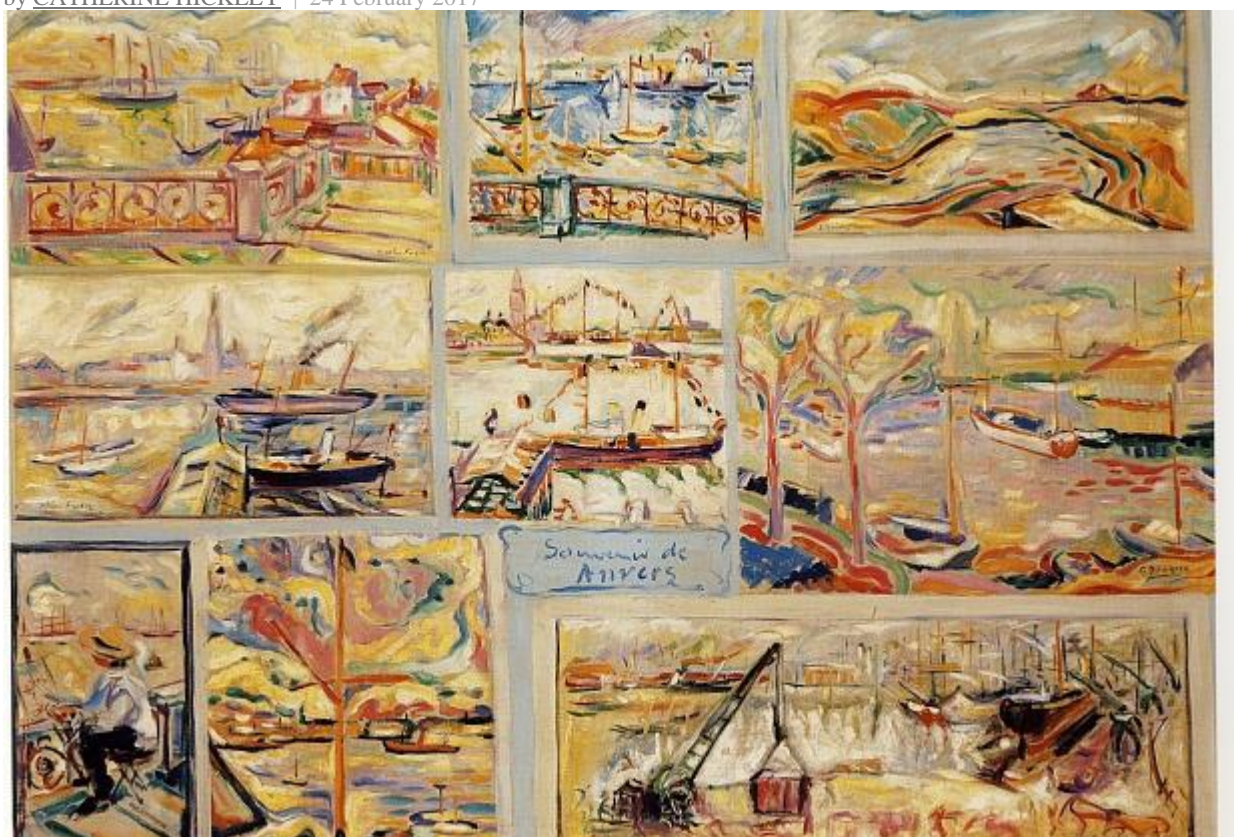
AiA Art News-service



Sotheby's catalogue mistakenly includes work forged by Wolfgang Beltracchi

Auction house removes image from online version after German journalist spots error

by CATHERINE HICKLEY | 24 February 2017



Wolfgang Beltracchi's "Souvenir d'Anvers"

The catalogue for the 2 March Sotheby's Impressionist and Modern Art Day Sale in London mistakenly identifies a forgery by Wolfgang Beltracchi called *Souvenir d'Anvers* as a genuine collaboration by the Fauvist artist Achille-Émile Othon Friesz and Georges Braque.

The work—which is not in the auction—is illustrated in the catalogue to support the sale of a Friesz painting called *La Ciotat*, whose authenticity is not in doubt and which carries an estimate of £500,000 to £700,000. The forgery was spotted by the German journalist Stefan Koldehoff, who wrote an article for the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

A text alongside the illustration of *Souvenir d'Anvers* says “Friesz and Braque sat side by side, painting the same views and each challenging the other to paint with the most radical colours and the least commitment to literal representation possible.” The painting shows nine small harbour scenes described in the Sotheby's catalogue as views of Antwerp.

“In what was a genuine mistake, *Souvenir d'Anvers*, formerly attributed to Braque and Friesz, was erroneously illustrated as one of the comparative images in our catalogue,” says a spokeswoman for Sotheby's. “The image has now been removed from our website.”

Koldehoff co-authored a 2012 book with his colleague Tobias Timm about Beltracchi, in which they describe the Friesz/Braque forgery. They said that on the back of the painting there was a bad imitation of a label from the Galerie Alfred Flechtheim and another from the Galerie Schames, which no longer existed in 1906—the year the painting was supposed to have been produced. The work also contains a spelling mistake: In the centre are the words “*Souvenir de Anvers*” instead of the correct French “*Souvenir d'Anvers*.” The painting was consigned to the Paris-based Galerie Aittouarès by Beltracchi's associate Otto Schulte-Kellinghaus, according to the book.

The German state prosecutor estimated that Beltracchi and his accomplices reaped about €16m from his forgeries, which were sold in the US, Japan, the UK and France as well as Germany. His trial focussed on just 14 forged works but Beltracchi himself estimates he created around 300, most of which are still in circulation. He was released from prison in 2015.