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The Telegraph

Genoa closes art exhibition after paintings 'turn out to be fakes'



Doge's Palace, where the exhibition took place CREDIT: DEAW.BUSS/GETTY IMAGES

- [Andrea Vogt](#), BOLOGNA

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Authorities in Genoa have confiscated 21 suspect artworks supposedly by Amedeo Modigliani after confirming that several paintings showcased in a major exhibition at the Doge's Palace were likely fakes.

Earlier this week, the foundation sponsoring the Genoa show decided to shut down exhibit three days early in order to collaborate with latest investigation enveloping the Italian expressionist painter and sculptor, who is one of the world's most famously faked artists.

“They did the right thing. This was absolutely shameful,” said Carlo Pepi, the 79-year-old Tuscan art critic and collector who alerted authorities about the suspected fraud.

“A Michelangelo is a Michelangelo. A Picasso is a Picasso. But when a painting is a fake, it is missing its soul, and these were missing that three dimensional elegance of

Modigliani - even a child could see these were crude fakes,” he told the Telegraph on Sunday.

Mr Pepi has spent decades battling art fraud. He began publicly expressing doubts about Genoa’s Modigliani exhibit in February, when the palace first began promoting it with a reprint of the 1918 oil painting “Marie, daughter of the people.”

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“My goodness, when I saw the poster of Marie and then looked through the catalogue and saw the others, I thought, poor Modigliani, to attribute to him these ugly abominations.”

Born in Tuscany to an Italian Jewish family, Modigliani worked mostly in France and died in Paris in 1920 when he was just 35. He is big business in the art world, with prices for his nudes and portraits skyrocketing even into Picasso territory. There is also a thriving market of fakes, which have turned up in Russia, the Balkans, and now Italy.

Mr Pepi has publicly called out suspected fakes before, but this time, exasperated by the large scale of the apparent fraud, he decided to make a formal complaint with the Carabinieri art fraud unit in Rome.

French art historian Marc Restellini, who is founder of the Pinacothèque de Paris and a Modigliani expert, backed him, calling the exhibit “dubious.”

After magistrates received independent confirmation of suspected fraud, the exhibit was shut down three days early – little comfort to the more than 100,000 people who have visited since it opened in March.

Three people, including the curator from Lugano, Switzerland, are under investigation.

The Doge's Palace released a statement “offering maximum collaboration” and noting it considered itself an injured party, having suffered a blow to its reputation as a prestigious international art partner that has in the past collaborated on exhibits of masters including Frida Kahlo, Van Gogh and Picasso.

“They did the right thing. It is rare,” Mr Pepi said. “I’ve been fighting this my whole life, but we need an army of people like me. More art historians must try to stop this influx of fakes. Otherwise they will end up destroying poor Modigliani.”