

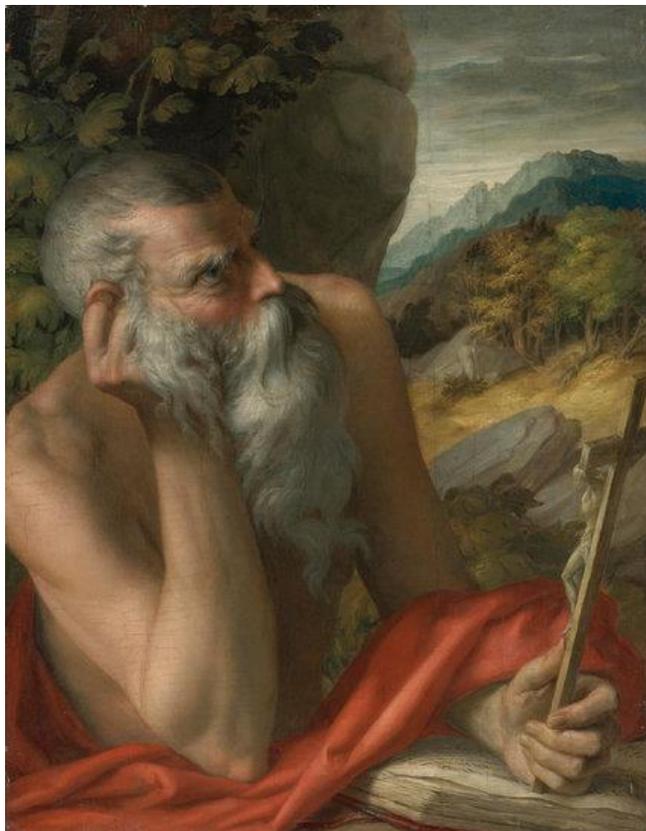
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Second Old Master Painting a Fake, Sotheby's Says in Lawsuit

By NINA SIEGALJAN. 17, 2017



“St. Jerome,” attributed to the circle of the 16th-century Italian artist Parmigianino, has been determined to be a modern fake, according to a complaint filed by Sotheby’s auction house in United States District Court in New York on Tuesday. Credit via Sotheby’s

AMSTERDAM — A painting attributed to the circle of the 16th-century Italian artist known as [Parmigianino](#) has been determined to be a modern fake, according to a complaint filed by Sotheby's auction house in United States District Court in New York on Tuesday.

The company filed the complaint against the collector Lionel de Saint Donat-Pourrières, who consigned the painting to Sotheby's for a 2012 auction, where it sold to another collector for \$842,500. Last year, Sotheby's asked the buyer to send the painting back for testing, after receiving information that the artwork may have passed through a source under investigation before coming into Mr. de Saint Donat-Pourrières's possession.

Through testing of paint samples taken from the oil painting, the auction house says, it has determined that the portrait of "St. Jerome" contains pigments throughout the paint layer that were not invented until the 20th century.

According to the complaint, "Each and every one of those samples (none of which were taken from areas of restoration) contained the modern synthetic pigment phthalocyanine green, which was first used in paints nearly four centuries after Parmigianino died."

This is the second painting that has been deemed a fake in what may be a widening old masters' forgery case that could go back several years. In [October, Sotheby's announced](#) that a painting attributed to [Frans Hals](#) that it had sold for around \$10 million could not have been painted in the 17th century because it also contained 20th-century pigments.

"St. Jerome" was tested using similar methods by Orion Analytical, a materials analysis firm specializing in art, which Sotheby's acquired late last year.

Sotheby's is refunding the buyer in full, according to the complaint, and is seeking damages from Mr. de Saint Donat-Pourrières of \$672,000, the amount he received from the sale. Mr. de Saint Donat-Pourrières, an art historian who lives in Luxembourg, did not respond to requests for comment.

"As was true in the recent case of the fake Frans Hals painting, Sotheby's is honoring its guarantee and fully reimbursing our purchaser," Sotheby's wrote in a statement emailed to The New York Times. "We have also exercised our contractual right to cancel the sale, which requires our consignor to reimburse us."

Sotheby's also said it had confirmed a "St. Jerome" link to a European art collector named Giuliano Ruffini. Mr. Ruffini previously sold the work attributed to Frans Hals to the London-based art dealer Mark Weiss in 2010, Mr. Weiss confirmed.

Mr. Ruffini has subsequently been the subject of an investigation by the French police, who seized a painting attributed to [Lucas Cranach the Elder](#) that was in the Prince of Liechtenstein's collection that had formerly been part of Mr. Ruffini's collection.

No charges have been filed against Mr. Ruffini, who continues to say that he never claimed that any of the works were authentic.

Mr. Ruffini's lawyer, Philippe Scarzella, confirmed in an email to The New York Times on Tuesday that the Parmigianino was owned by Mr. Ruffini, and that "there was a dispute about this painting between middlemen and Mr. Ruffini around 15 years ago." He called into question the validity of Orion's scientific investigation, adding, "I have a thick file on this painting and many experts have declared the 'St. Jerome' was genuine."

"It is well known that Sotheby's owns this laboratory," Mr. Scarzella said in an additional email. He contended that Orion's findings would need to be confirmed by "another independent expert."

"St. Jerome" was exhibited at the Galleria Nazionale of Parma and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 2003 as an original Parmigianino. Later, it was downgraded to "circle of Parmigianino" because of scholarly debate about its authenticity. After Sotheby's sold it, it was lent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art from April 2014 to February 2015.

Bob Habeldt, a dealer in old masters art, said in a telephone interview from Paris that the filing in New York was "a wake-up call, and it'll make people look at what they have on the wall or what's on consignment or what's been purchased in the recent past more closely."

He added, "People are scrutinizing what's in their collections, and I think that's an ongoing process. I don't think it'll shake up the market more than it already has, because if you notice, the sales results at auction and in the market haven't changed."

Johnny van Haeften, a London-based dealer in old master paintings, however, said he was not concerned that the market might contain more such fakes.

"All the pictures are so different, they all need to be taken on their own merit," he said in a telephone interview. "As far as the other pictures are concerned, the jury is still out."

He added, "One should be very careful about making a general observation; each one should be taken on its own merits."