



AiA Art News-service

FAST COMPANY

Sotheby's scientists just scored a big win in the battle against fake art

Here's another example of why science pays, kids. It was exactly one year ago today that Sotheby's [announced](#) the acquisition of Orion Analytical, a materials analysis and consulting firm whose crack team of scientists—led by the [noted](#) art-fraud guru Jamie Martin—would use their forensic skills to detect fake artworks.

The famed auction house then established its Department of Scientific Research, which is the only facility of its kind in the art-auction industry.

In honor of the department's [first anniversary](#), Sotheby's today is revealing one of its recent coups: **Researchers did a materials analysis on a 1915 work by Kazimir Malevich, the pioneering Russian abstract artist, to help verify that it was the real thing.** As it turned out, the painting contained the same unusual blue paint additive as another Malevich work from the time period—this one in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. Researchers also examined both works with infrared photography to discover they both contained similar hidden changes that Malevich made during the composition process.

The painting, *Suprematist Composition With Plane in Projection*, went on to sell for \$21.2 million at Sotheby's New York headquarters earlier this year after a fierce bidding war, so you can see there's a lot at stake here. It was the fourth-highest auction price ever for a Malevich work.

“It’s been an incredibly energizing year for me at Sotheby’s,” Martin said in a statement. “I’m particularly inspired by my work with specialists worldwide—it is the combination of their art historical knowledge with our laboratories’ analysis that has led to our most impactful determinations.”

The takeaway? If at all possible, you should definitely hire in-house scientists because they pay for themselves. Sotheby’s says it has established state-of-the-art laboratories in both New York and London and plans to expand to Hong Kong, as well.

You can learn more about Martin’s forensic work and the research department [here](#).

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