
What InCoRM is

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InCoRM has received enquiries from journalists about what InCoRM is, its aims and purpose, how it is funded, what art historical opinions consist of and if they are the same as “authentications” of works of art. As a complement to what can be seen on the InCoRM website, “About InCoRM” where its Code of Good Practice is also found, this statement clarifies and amplifies what InCoRM is. It is followed by “The Art Historian’s ‘Opinion’ – Principles of Expertise”.

- InCoRM is an independent non-profit organisation concerned with cultural and scientific interests. InCoRM is not involved in or linked to the art market in any way whatsoever.
- InCoRM is a loosely knit organisation founded by art historians and scientists. They are united by their pursuits in Russian Modernism and several are actively engaged in the integration of history and scientific investigation in the scholarly enquiry into works of art. The aim is to facilitate research and to expand and share knowledge.
- The specialists make up the core of those working in this field and are internationally known and recognised for their excellence. Being a specialist member of InCoRM is a mark of the highest academic and professional standards.
- Excluded from InCoRM are those who claim to be specialists but who either authenticate works of art determined by financial or vested interests, or who denounce as “fakes” works of art they have never seen and about which they cannot claim to know anything factual, always unable to give a convincing or professional defence of their unsubstantiated allegations. Individuals in both these groups are involved in the art market. They are the critics of InCoRM.
- InCoRM specialists do not authenticate works of art although they may act as historical or scientific consultants to museums, collectors or galleries around the world. Under French law (InCoRM being a non-profit organisation registered in France) an authentication is a legal guarantee that a work of art is genuine. InCoRM specialists, on the other hand, carry out research on works of art and, based on scientific and art historical information, may express an “opinion” about a work of art. An opinion is not an authentication or a guarantee. Whatever opinion they may give, always based on fact and fully justified, is done in the name of the individual specialist, never in the name of InCoRM.
- InCoRM does not authenticate works of art because it is an organisation founded not as a guarantee for the art market but for research.
- To fulfil its purpose and its status as a non-profit organisation, InCoRM’s activity is the progressive compiling of an encyclopaedic website on the history and documentation of Russian Modernism. It is freely available, made possible by the support of Affiliate Members – museums, collectors and galleries. The website – www.incorm.org – is complemented by investigative and scholarly articles published in the JOURNAL OF INCORM.
- When necessary, InCoRM will be a voice in the defence of Russian Modernism, which is found on this FORUM. In the confusion over the genuineness of Russian Avant-Garde works of art, the research of specialists is setting new standards, both scientific and historical, that provide reliable and professional means for determining what is true and what is false.

And if, as one reads in the press, the temptation to forgers is due in part to the political history of Russia in the 20th century and the resulting gaps in our knowledge of Russian Modernism, together with the consequent lack of

provenances as a traceable history, the research and gathering of information in the work of specialists can make an important contribution to the protection of the art against forgeries on the one hand, and to their detection on the other hand.

Patricia Railing, PhD

President

25 June 2013

The Art Historian's "Opinion"

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Principles of Expertise

In the current scare about fakes contaminating the world of the Russian Avant-Garde, the art historian is sometimes being called an "expert" in the German press. There are all manner of speculative (and sometimes misinformed) remarks about what they do and whether or not they have been duped by artworks, unable to tell the difference between an original and a fake, or by falsified documents.

Responsible art historians who express their opinions about Russian Avant-Garde works are bound by a rigorous set of principles which they apply in determining whether a work of art is by a given artist or not. They are like **DETECTIVES** who are working with their knowledge of art and their knowledge of history in order **TO DISCOVER**. They are engaged in researching all the factors that would contribute to establishing what makes up the artistic characteristics and chronology of a given artist's body of work in a historical context. Their premise is an open mind, uncluttered by prejudice or preconceived ideas, not to mention vested interests of whatever kind whether, in favour, or, not in favour, of a work being genuine.

So to clarify these principles for both journalists and the general public, presented below is a brief outline of the principles which the art historian relies on to lead to a truthful assessment about a work of art, whether in museums and private collections or when it has previously been unknown.

1. **The Art Historian Examines the Work of Art in Person.** Attention is given to the paint surface, to the back of the canvas, to the stretcher if it is original, to whatever marks may be found on the back such as bleeding of pigments or glue, labels, stamps, signatures or other notations, to the nails and their condition where the stretcher may be thought to be original, to the condition of the canvas. Finally, the art historian studies the work itself as structure and colour, together with all the creative aspects of it, and mentally compares it to other known works by the supposed artist.

2. **The Scientific Report.** There must be a scientific report done by a laboratory which is known to the art historian and has an experienced reputation in the analysis of Russian Avant-Garde works. This scientific report must consider the following:

- **Pigment analysis** showing that the pigments found are contemporary to the period in which the work of art is intended to have been executed.
- **Even Polymerisation**, or bonding, of the binding materials. Uneven bonding indicates false ageing. This includes signatures which, if recently applied, disappear under infrared reflectography.
- **Analysis of Paint Layers and Craquelure.** Paint layers reveal the characteristics of how an artist lays in paint in the various stages of creating a painting. Craquelure reveals patterns of stress due to molecular differences or chemical incompatibility of pigments, mechanical damage (knocking, for example), or conditions of storage (as dampness). False damage is easy to identify.
- **Underdrawings and Underpainting** reveal aspects of the creative process.

- **Canvas and Stretcher.** Analysis of the canvas reveals its condition, treatments (glue, for example), natural ageing or attempts to make it appear old, and so on. On the stretcher may be attached labels, incisions or other information.

3. **Art Historical Factors.** Art history is made up of two components: the artistic and the historical.

- **The Artistic Factors.** The art historian needs to be aware of the creative processes of a given painter and the scientific report provides information about the pigments, paint application (smooth or impasto, gestures, layering, and so on), the way canvas may be nailed to a stretcher, the application of grounds, their pigments and colours, whether and when the painter may paint wet on dry (the ground having dried) or wet on wet, and so on. This information may also contribute to placing a work in a creative context and so to dating it. Based on the artistic factors, the art historian attempts to discover where the work in question occurs in the artistic process as, say, an oil sketch or a finished piece for exhibition, where the work in question fits into the artist's stylistic chronology, as, say, an early or a late work.

All these factors of technique make up an artist's technical "signature" at any given moment. Put together, they help to establish a pattern or outline of an artist's studio practice over time and bring to light the different phases of the creative chronology. The artistic factors lead to a history of the artistic. This is a new science that is only just beginning to be practised by art historians and this is due to the increasing in-depth information that scientific instruments used in the analysis of works of art can provide.

It is clear that the art historian must be highly informed about the creative process of an artist by being familiar with what scientific investigation reveals, and by having seen and studied many, many works of art.

- **The Historical Factors.** The Artistic Factors are the basis for the historical determination of what typifies how an artist progressed through different styles. There are also the various historical factors of preparatory drawings or other related work, exhibition history, date of the work, archival documents, relationships with other artists and sharing of artistic ideas, sources of ideas, writings, social and political factors, provenance where it exists. These factors may contribute varying degrees of pertinent and relevant information in the understanding of an artist's overall artistic history and the assessment of a given work of art.

4. **Assimilating the Artistic and Historical Factors into a Whole.** Drawing together all the factors is dependent on the art historian having seen many works over the artist's creative career. Judgements about an artist's works must be based on a maximum of information and research; where either is lacking then the art historian is not able to pronounce on a work of art. The throw-away allegations of "fake" pronounced by individuals and published in the press (or spread about as rumour, i.e., unverified) are slanderous and damage works of art; they reveal the accuser's lack of professionalism and lack of knowledge. Art historians have the task and the duty to raise the authority of the informed "Opinion". What is set out here can be a guide to establishing an international standard for the "Opinion".

Although some art historians may certify that a work of art is "authentic", which under French law is a legal undertaking and a guarantee of a work's genuineness, most art historians prefer to give "opinions", which should be evidence of research into the work in question; it is not a legal guarantee. Opinions, or expertises, are based on having seen the work, on scientific reports about the work, and on artistic and historical information and knowledge arising from in-depth familiarity with an artist's body of work. All these factors combine to justify the art historian's opinion about whether a work of art is by a given artist or not, by his or her students or not, or not of the style and period at all.

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