

## AUTHENTICATION IN ART

Firstly, we would like to thank you for the positive reactions to the announcement of the AiA 2016 Congress on Technical Art History and Schooling. We were approached with great enthusiasm from different parts of the international art industry.

March has been a busy month for the Art Industry, with a large number of art fairs. Sadly, there were also some pressing concerns and issues being raised, especially on a forgery case which has recently come to light. Although it is a good sign that forgers and forgery rings are being discovered and prosecuted, many of you raised the question of how this could come to pass and more importantly, how this managed to go unnoticed for such a long time. The case that stands out most is the lawsuit in Germany, which has led to the arrest of the staggering number of eighteen people, who will be prosecuted for a number of allegations ranging from basic fraud to money laundering and international organised crime. Over a period of thirty years they have forged works of approximately seventy-five artists and made a profit of several billion (!) euros. The exact impact of the consequences of this forgery ring has yet to be fully discovered for the art industry.

Another development that gathered large amount of attention is the recent use of mobile analytical instruments by the vetting committees at major art fairs. One might ask what this has to do with the previous mentioned forgery case, but they are more intertwined then one might think.

After inquiries by international police forces in the German forgery case, it came to light that a large number of collectors and dealers, who became victim of this criminal ring, based their decision on what would later be discovered, were actually dodgy or lacking scientific reports. These reports originate from parties all over the world, which makes it a global problem, not an isolated incident. An art dealer at a major fair gave us one of the best examples of misconceptions. Before expanding on the subject, we would like to state that we accuse no party of mal intent. Our only aim is to bring certain misconceptions to light. The art dealer approached AiA with the question whether it was possible with a mobile lab to give a complete result on the authenticity of paintings. The reason behind this question was that this was the guarantee given by the experts linked to the mobile lab at the art fair. Our answer to this question was brief and simple 'No'. Of course testing is good, but in the way it is used now, a mobile lab could never encompass the full range of equipment and therefore technical capability needed for such a claim. Such equipment is too large and immobile for other practical reasons such as, for example, weight, floor stability, calibration and required range of measurable materials. Even if this was possible, the claim would still lack insight, seeing that the technical analysis is only one side of the medal. The other side is, for example, art historical evidence based on archival research. It is not until all these sides are linked, one can give an answer as complete as possible on authentication issues. Lastly, the technical research is being done in one to three days, a very short period of time. Professional and better-established research groups have not been able to give an ultimate insight on authentication issues after a considerable longer period of research and the use of a full equipped lab. The claim that current mobile labs can give a definitive verdict on multiple works in three days is utter nonsense.

It is exactly that these sorts of claims give rise to the opportunities of people with criminal intent. By spreading believe to dealers that the research performed by mobile labs are able to give a definitive verdict on authenticity, one poisons the entire art market. The dealers will tell their costumers the same 'story' as they have been told themselves. Once both the selling and the buying party trust that such reports contain the 'scientific truth', one gives free reign to the forgers and their associates. Here lies the connection between forgery cases and vetting committees. By creating a market in which any technical report is considered omniscient, one opens the floodgates for forgeries guided by the lacking reports.

The question which several dealers, advisors and collectors asked us is “who is liable when a fake is sold on the basis of a faulty technical report?” Let’s say the work in question is by Pollock (market related prices are in the tenfold of millions) that has been considered genuine by a technical report or an art fair ‘quick scan’. What happens if it turns out that it is actually not by Pollock but a fake? Who is liable? One could think, for example, the experts with their mobile lab, the University or Museum where these experts are employed, the vetting committee of the art fair, independent experts or even the art dealer? Or maybe they are all liable? What happens when a party has been fraudulent, how does one establish this? What are the technical possibilities and/or limitations of (any) research techniques? What will become of the value of objective scientific research when the market (insurance companies, collectors and advisors) presses its right of liability? These are all complex questions deriving from what seems to be a quite simple procedure. But it is going to be the reality of the Art Industry if we do not discuss this and bring clear insights into these widespread misconceptions now gaining ground in Technical Art History.

It is therefore that tackling these issues will be one of the main goals of the 2016 AiA Congress. We would like to invite you all to contact us, with any issue concerning Technical Art History, because the solutions must come from within the field itself.

In the next Newsletter we will address the topic of Schooling related to Authentication research.

## **AiA Mediation Board**

We are currently working on some major developments, which we will hopefully soon be able to disclose. What we can announce is that the AiA-MB has started cooperation with a motivated IT student group to develop a digital document filing system and database. This database will function as a replacement for all paper documentation. The entire process of documentation involved with an AiA-MB ADR procedure will be digitalized. As a result, this will enable the parties and the experts involved to submit necessary documentation from different locations around the world. Lastly and most importantly, we would like to announce that the AiA-MB site comes online on the end of April. We do want to stress that we are not admitting cases just yet, but we feel it is important that parties can get familiarized with the structure of the board and the several procedures.

Lastly we would like to announce that the Authentication in Art 2014 Congress papers will be made available online. Please visit the following page: <http://www.authenticationinart.org/congress-2014/congress-papers/>

On behalf of the AiA Foundation March-April 2015