

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

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The destruction of a fake *Achrome* attributed to Piero Manzoni. Photo: Artribune.

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PIERO MANZONI FOUNDATION COMES UNDER FIRE FOR DESTROYING THE ARTIST'S WORKS

The Piero Manzoni Foundation in Milan is facing scrutiny for destroying thirty-nine works attributed to the late postwar Italian artist last December, following legal disputes over their authenticity.

The foundation claims that the pieces were fakes, and since Italy only allows artists' heirs to destroy works with the approval of the Italian judicial system, it took the owner of the works, collector Giuseppe Zecchillo, to civil court to contest their provenance. While the judge ruled that the pieces were forgeries and granted the foundation permission to destroy them, a judge presiding over a separate case—in which Zecchillo was standing criminal trial for allegedly counterfeiting works—declared that there was not enough evidence to determine whether the canvases were fake or real.

Since the foundation destroyed the works despite the conflicting rulings, which were issued in 2006 and 2009, respectively, it now faces accusations of manipulating the authentication process in order to boost the value of its own holdings.

In a more recent case, Lionel Ceresi, a lawyer representing dealer Giovanni Schubert, argued in a hearing last October that Manzoni's works have been authenticated by Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo, the foundation's director, in collaboration with the artist's siblings Elena and Giuseppe Manzoni di Chiosca since 2004, creating a conflict of interest. The foundation used to consult with art historian Germano Celant for this task, but he is no longer affiliated with the organization.

Di Marineo has denied all the allegations facing the foundation, and Hauser & Wirth, which has collaborated with the organization since 2017, has also come to its defense. "Together we are safeguarding the artist's legacy by organizing exhibitions and commissioning new scholarship and research that shed light on Piero Manzoni's diverse practice," the gallery wrote in a statement provided to the Art Newspaper. "The Fondazione, helmed by Rosalia Pasqualino di Marineo, is the worldwide expert on Manzoni and has ultimate responsibility in executing the interests of the artist and his family."