



GENUINE FAKES

THE ART OF DECEPTION

Genuine fakes. The art of deception

In 2016 the Museu d'Art de Girona experienced a traumatic incident when six Renaissance panels attributed to the Girona painter Pere Mates came up for auction. It turned out that two of the panels were identical to some others that the museum had bought six years earlier, in 2010. An exhaustive process of studying and analysing all of the panels finally showed that the earlier works were fakes.

That discovery planted the seed of the exhibition we are now presenting and which at the same time proposes an intriguing visual debate around what we have called “the art of deception”.

Genuine Fakes delves into the darkest, dirtiest side of the art market. It is an opportune yet risky undertaking at a time when we are threatened by lies, camouflaged as post-truth and when simulation and falsehood look for any number of strategies to be believable.

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DIEC. [Dictionary of the Catalan language of the Institute of Catalan Studies] “False”

1.1 *adj.* [LC] What is not true out of error or deceit.

2.1 *adj.* [LC] What is not real, that only has the appearance of another thing, not genuine.

2.2 *adj.* [LC] That takes on the appearance of something so as to deceive.

3.2 [LC] **falsely** *adv.* a) Not conforming with truth or reality, aiming to deceive.

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THE STATE OF BEING FALSE

A fake is a counterfeit artefact created or manipulated with a premeditated purpose to deceive, with fraudulent intention and a desire to get financial benefit. A fake is an object enjoying the illusion of authenticity until the

day it is unmasked. It is a fraud, a toxic agent and a distorter of art, cultural heritage and historical narrative.

What do not fall into this shady category are wrongly attributed works, overdone or clumsy restorations, copies, replicas or honest imitations, which on the contrary have great didactic value and indisputable historic and cultural interest.

In any case, we have to recognise there is a positive secondary dimension to something fake: the undeniable historic value; the category of an interesting cultural object and even sometimes a fascinating one, the capacity to provoke important reflections on fundamental concepts such as authenticity, originality, genuineness and authorship and the meaning of each of them in every historical context and cultural tradition. Above all, we must recognise that we should look closely at ourselves and remember we are not infallible.

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Unknown autor

Still life with fruit,

in the manner of Pierre Bonnard

S. XX

Oil on panel

No. 27

Museu d'Art de Sabadell

The Sabadell Art Museum had a pioneering exhibition on fakes, the inspiring “L'Art de Falsificar” (The Art of Forgery) (1997) curated by Ricard Mas. This piece “in the Bonnard style” is one of those singled out as a fake among those which make up the museum’s rich pictorial collection.

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The literature about the world of fakes and forgers is plentiful, especially in the international scene. Exhibitions, studies, biographies, chronicles of events, personal memories etc., have provided some stories that have allured and fascinated the public, and which more than anything have converted some of these characters into popular personalities, appealing even, as many people see them as tricking the powerful and stuffy, presumptuous critics causing trouble in the snobbish art market, not unlike the way art thieves like Erik the Belgian are seen.

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¿Fake or genuine?

THE “PERE MATES CASE”

The Museu d’Art de Girona holds the largest, most significant collection of the work of Pere Mates (c.1490-1558), born in Sant Feliu de Guixols and one of the most representative artists of the Catalan Renaissance. When an opportunity arose in 2010 to acquire three pieces, panels on wood, attributed to the painter, there was no doubt it was interesting. The paintings matched the documented references and well-known published photographs, although the works showed signs of having undergone excessive restoration. Six years later in October 2016 another six panels attributed to the painter came up for auction. Surprisingly two of them were identical to the ones bought a few years earlier. The coincidence suggested the false identity of the first ones and the possibility that they were the result of some shady, fraudulent activity. The “Pere Mates Case” had broken, the press spread the word and research and analytical work began to ascertain if these were genuine or fake works.

THE “SOLSONA CASE”

This whole episode was quite scandalous and had the feel of a crime thriller to it. According to the court order in 1982, the operation was carried out by two brothers, Llorenç and Ferran Monjo Carrera, antique dealers and “restorers” conspiring with the Solsona Museum’s director. In the early seventies, the Museum’s director handed over some pieces from its collection to them –six panels and three carvings- to supposedly be restored. However the brothers’ real intention was different: to get them copied, return the copies to the Museum, sell the originals and share the profits between them. The alarm sounded when the genuine works were spotted in an antiques market. In 1985 the originals returned to Solsona Museum.

Forgers and imposters

The history of forgery is a crime story, often motivated by quite particular psychological mechanisms and by greed and vanity, but it can also be a fascinating tale –and morbidly attractive - showing the motivations, techniques and strategies of art forgery.

MOTIVATIONS

If we read about or listen to forgers, we see that many of them willingly took the risk of crossing the red line to illegality out of spite, because at some point in their background they had been hurt by an alien art market and by a system of critics and experts whom, according to their own particular view, did not value their work or talent as much as they thought they deserved. It was this system of the art market and its specialists that they detested, full of powerful, but ignorant and snobbish collectors, and arrogant and presumptuous critics who they wanted to boycott and ridicule by confusing them and showing up their limitations.

“I have never ‘copied’ any work of art: first because I’m not that stupid, and secondly because I’m not remotely interested in doing so. I allow myself to be inspired by a painter, I substitute him, enter into his spirit, ‘possess’ his style in the spiritual sense of the word, and by doing this I think in some way I prolong his art. After all it could possibly be a way of paying him homage.

Elmyr de Hory in an interview with André Brincourt, published in *Le Figaro* (1973)

“If my paintings hang in a museum long enough, they will become real”.

Elmyr de Hory in *F for Fake* by Orson Welles

Elmyr de Hory

Elmyr de Hory (1906-1976), the pseudonym

used by Hoffmann Elemér, was an imaginative and devious painter and forger. Everything about his life seemed to be a performance, starting with his name and aristocratic airs from the pop era. Having failed as an artist in his own right in 1920s Paris he devoted himself to faking other artists such as Matisse, Chagall, Picasso and Modigliani. A large part of his success was due to the guile of his unscrupulous dealers Réal Lessard and Fernand Legros with whom he ended up having a stormy relationship. He lived in Ibiza for the last sixteen years of his life where he committed suicide in 1976 anxious about imminent extradition to France and the threat of imprisonment. His story inspired the biography written by Clifford Irving (*The Story of Elmyr de Hory, the Greatest Art Forger of Our Time*, 1969) and the Orson Welles film *F for Fake* (1973).

A motive for forgery was the need to escape poverty, or mere **greed**, a desire to get rich, unleashed in realising when they came into contact with money-hungry dealers they could earn much more money devoting themselves to fraud than if they were dealing with their own creations or doing restorations.

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“The dealer is not interested in art, he is basically interested in the profit he can make, judging artists by their market value; the art historian is not really interested in art either; he studies it, true, but he is more interested in promoting his own career and accumulating recognition and honours [...]. In reality, art itself is neglected, nobody truly studies it with the honesty needed and although I can hardly claim I am a model of honesty I do feel in that respect that I am honest, I mean I do try and understand something of art”.

Eric Hebborn in the BBC documentary *Portrait of a Master Forger* (1991)

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Eric Hebborn

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Nobody could deny the technical and manual skills of Eric Hebborn (1934-1996), who trained in top art schools and demanding restoration workshops. He revealed his secrets in *The Art Forger's Handbook* (1997) and his autobiography *Drawn to Trouble* (1991).

Apparently he produced about a thousand fake Old Masters, “dating” from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, which through trading got into such prestigious institutions as the British Museum or the Pierpont Morgan Library. He never experienced law courts or prison, though he came close to it when he was rounded up and under suspicion from the firm Colnaghi, the journalist Geraldine Norman and investigations by major art historians like Konrad Oberhuber. He was assassinated in a street in Trastevere in Rome but neither the motive nor the murderer has come to light.

Mockery was used to question the more idolatrous side of the cultural system.

Fake Modigliani heads

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The most hilarious example is that of the fake Modigliani heads invented by three students and a painter with a bad reputation, to jeer at an initiative Livorno dreamed up in 1984 for the centenary of Amedeo Modigliani's birth there. The city's plan was to dredge the moat surrounding the old town to find out if the legend was true that as a young artist Modigliani had thrown his first sculptures into the water, upset by the poor reception they had received by the critics.

The students and the painter made three heads and threw them into the canal hoping they would be found and regarded as Modigliani's work. The heads were indeed found and much to their amazement not only did the art historians not realise they were fakes, but quite the opposite, they praised the heads as the promising early works of the great artist, until the three young people decided to confess.

Psychological disorders have also led to some cases.

Mark Landis

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Mark Landis (born in 1955), “the most famous art counterfeiter who never committed a crime”, is a case in point. His activities were sparked off by his schizophrenic condition

(according to some he is bipolar). Over the course of thirty years he managed to “contaminate” the collections of forty six museums in the United States. He never accepted payment for his “creations” as he would give them away, saying they were donations. It would seem that what motivated him was winning the acceptance of museums and enjoying the flattery of their gratitude and a moment of glory.

When the concept of forgery is used to create an original work designed to provoke reflections on art, originality and authorship we enter a world of an attractive **intellectual game**.

Jusep Torres Campalans

Here in Catalonia we have a very famous example of this with Max Aub’s “Jusep Torres Campalans”. This Cubist painter from Mollerussa -contemporary of Picasso, Modigliani and Mondrian- was invented by Aub who gave him his own biography, a body of work, interviews and even critical reviews and an exhibition project with a curator. All of it totally faked of course. The methodology behind this ironic artistic hoax is interesting because it deconstructs a mechanism based on the veracity of the author’s existence and his original work in order to construct a false one that is real at the same time, as if it were a Cubist exercise in which all the facets of the (de-) construction are valid and necessary.

SKILLS

Forgers of art works create new artifacts –but ones which hardly deserve to be called “originals” – and aspire to introduce them into the market as legitimate works having given them a camouflage of authenticity based, among other methods, on the invention of a false history and on falsifying the authorship, usually by capturing the same style and calligraphy of an artist prized and sought-after in the market, and whose signature furthermore can be imitated.

Many forgers have based their success on their skills and being in command of a whole range of techniques learned in painting and restoration workshops and in a meticulous observation of old and contemporary masters housed in museums and collections; but also in a very sharp awareness of anticipating the specialists’ analysis, that of the **“fakebusters”** as Thomas Hoving (1996) called the hunters of forgeries.

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Unknown author
(falsely attributed to Matteo di Giovanni)
Madonnina
s.d.
Temper on panel
Museu de Montserrat. Abadia de Montserrat
No. 200.220

Acquired in Rome in 1913 (or perhaps a year earlier), probably thrown in with another acquisition. Once it arrived in Montserrat, the abbot Marcet offered it to Señora Amatller, a collector of Gothic paintings, who showed interest in buying it though after consulting Monsignor Josep Gudiol finally rejected it. The abbot took new steps to sell it, this time to the collector J.Soler i Palet who was not interested either. The abbot returned it to the dealer in Rome, Giuseppe Gonnella, probably the forger. Father Ubach acting as intermediary wrote to the abbot telling him Gonnella had not come to get the painting so therefore it belonged to the monastery. In a visit to Montserrat, two highly regarded historians in Italian art assured them that the artist must have been Matteo di Giovanni, and for twenty years it stayed in the Museum of Montserrat under that name until Liliana Barroero, in a comprehensive study of the Italian paintings in Montserrat, (no. 48), after consulting Pico Cellini, confirmed it was a fake.

The model copied is the Madonna col bambino tra angeli e santi (62cm x 45cm), located in Sant’Eugenia, Porta Pispini in Siena. The forger must have taken a photograph of the work to Rome and simplified it by putting a gilt background, embellishing it and rolling over it to create cracks which, being uniformly horizontal, only go to confirm it is fake.

Notes supplied by Father Josep de C. Laplana

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Icilio Federico Joni

The origins of Icilio Federico Joni (1866-1946) are an example of how turning to fraud came from the need to escape from poverty, as he had been an orphan abandoned in the “*ruota dei gettatelli*” (Foundling wheel) at the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena.

We could say that he had a brilliant career: he became an expert forger of Medieval and Renaissance painting, capable of duping the most penetrating eye of the time, that of Lithuanian-born American connoisseur and historian Bernard Berenson, and he never suffered any kind of legal persecution. Perhaps that impunity inspired his cryptic, crude motto hidden on the back of some of his works, PAICAP: 'Per andare in culo al prossimo'.

Alceo Dossena

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The great scholar on forgery, Frank Arnau, called Alceo Dossena (1878-1937) "a human anachronism" for his ability to recreate the sculptures of the greatest Italian masters such as Giovanni Pisano, Mino da Fiesole and Donatello. He did them with such skill that many say his works have the same power as the originals. Surprisingly his career was untouched by the law. Although he was tried between 1928 and 1929 he was pardoned for lack of proof, being unable to show he was aware of what his dealers Alfredo Pallessi and Alfredo Fasoli did with a work which he maintained he had made as an original in Renaissance or Gothic style.

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"I was born in our time, but with the spirit, taste and perception of times gone by".

Alceo Dossena quoted by Frank Arnau in *The Art of the Fake* (1961:1964)

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Wolfgang Beltracchi

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Among the most daring strategies of schemes to legitimise the origins of a work we must mention: the invention of a past. Wolfgang Beltracchi (born in 1951) would show sepia-tinted photograph of the grandmother. The grandmother appears pictured in a room in which a series of twentieth century avant-garde paintings are hanging on the wall, that she had apparently hidden from the Nazis and which her granddaughter maintained had been passed on to Flechtheim, a prestigious collection. Beltracchi intended to put these paintings on the market alleging this

"legitimate" provenance. In fact the photograph, and all that can be seen in it, was a farce including the sepia tone: the paintings were Beltracchi creations and the "grandmother" was Helene Beltracchi herself impersonating her grandmother.

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UNMASKING AND PUNISHING

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Despite the fact all the dexterity and skill displayed brings years of prosperity and a comfortable life, and perhaps some sick personal satisfaction to see their own work hanging among the masterpieces of the great collections, in the end most forgers get discovered.

All who are involved in the business of unmasking fakes try to detect the forger's great enemies, that which one of them, Tom Keating, called "**time bombs**": the **anachronisms**. They could be pigments or bases from the wrong period, or incongruence in the language, the artistic codes or the iconographic stamps of each period or artist. In contemporary work one has to rely on police-like investigation work, often focused on identifying the origins of the doubtful or suspicious work, and in reconstructing the route it has taken through collections and galleries.

No fake stays unpunished for more than one generation, according to those in the know.

Lothar Malskat y Dietrich Fey

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The most notorious work of Lothar Malskat (1913-1988) and Dietrich Fey (1912-2004) was the fake frescoes in Schleswig cathedral (1937) and in the Marienkirche in Lübeck. After having received huge praise from art historians close to the German National Socialist party, they began to come under suspicion, for among other inconsistencies, because a turkey in the ornamental border seemed out of place, a fowl that was not known in medieval Europe (they did not reach the Old Continent until the sixteenth century). But what is really interesting is that before admitting that these birds proved it was fake, the Nazi cultural system justified their

presence by claiming there had been a discovery of America that was not by Columbus, but by Vikings, dating back to the thirteenth century. In the end the fraud was only revealed when Malskat himself, in a fit of megalomania and jealousy that Fey had claimed the public praise for the interventions done by both of them, went to the police to confess the whole invention, demanding “recognition” for his role in it.

Otto Wacker

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Otto Wacker (1898-1970), and his brother Leonhard specialised in inventing and distributing works as if they were “VanGoghs”. They managed to con the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, prestigious galleries like Matthiesen or Goldschmitt, and important scholars on the master who issued certificates of authenticity of some paintings that the Wackers stated had been the property of a Tsarist Russian noble exiled in Switzerland. In the end they were brought out into the open thanks to the doubts of the conservators Grete Ring and Walter Feilchenfeldt and the analysis carried out by the Berlin museum which found out a synthetic resin had been used to speed up the drying process which was only invented in 1907, and that neither the pigments nor the French canvases of the time normally used by the painter had been used. Brought to trial by the Matthiesen Gallery and the German Federation of Antique Art Dealers, Otto was tried in 1932 and accused of “accumulative fraud and falsifying documents”, and given a nineteen-month prison sentence and a fine of 30,000 marks. It was the first trial in which scientific examinations were used to authenticate the art work.

ATONEMENT

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Some forgers, once found out and accused of fraud and swindling, served prison sentences. These were relatively light, maybe because their crimes were bloodless and not based on damaging any kind of cultural heritage, but rather “inventing” new objects, albeit illicit and leading to serious financial issues.

When released they sometimes reinvent themselves, changing, as one of them said, “their business model” – often using the fame acquired during their illegal years – devoting themselves to creating their own work or to inventing “genuine forgeries”, fakes recognised as such and sold through their websites and given certificates of authentication. A few have written autobiographies, inspired literary biographies, documentaries, film productions or plays, and have also starred in television programmes. Very few have had a sad or even tragic ending, except as it happens, the three best known: Van Meegeren died a few weeks after the court sentenced him to a year in prison (it was known that he was a morphine addict and an alcoholic); Elmyr de Hory committed suicide as he faced possible imprisonment having discovered the Spanish state was about to extradite him to France; Eric Hebborn was assassinated with a hammer in a small square in Trastevere in Rome.

Han van Meegeren

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Han van Meegeren (1889-1947) is a historic figure in the world of forgery for his fraudulent recreations of Vermeer works, which were even acquired by major institutions like the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen or the Rijksmuseum; however his most famous client, without any doubt, was the sinister Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, who bought his “*Christ with the Adulteress*” in 1942. After the war, he was accused of having given the Nazis valuable works that were Dutch national treasures, which would incur the death penalty.

That forced him to admit that far from being originals all these paintings were his fakes which meant he faced an infinitely lighter charge: a prison sentence.

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“Dragged down by the psychological effects of my disillusion in not being recognised by the artists and critics of my country, one fateful day in 1936 I determined to show the world my worth as a painter and decided to create a seventeenth century masterpiece”.

Han van Meegeren during his trial (1945).

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“I did not hand over a single Vermeer to the Germans, but instead a Van Meegeren. This is a Vermeer that I forged!”

Han van Meegeren during his trial (1945).

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John Myatt y John Drewe

John Myatt (1945). According to Scotland Yard, the fraudulent company he set up with John Drewe (born in 1948) was “one of the most damaging art hoaxes of the 20th century”. He did the paintings and Drewe invented a prestigious history for them, infiltrating false documentation into the archives of very important institutions. Once they were found out, Myatt spent four months in prison (out of a one year sentence) and his accomplice, Drewe, two months (out of a six-month sentence). Today Myatt has a website in which he does not even question his trajectory in “the biggest art fraud of the 20th century”, he has starred in the series *Fame in the Frame* (Sky Arts) and he takes part as an expert in the programme *Fake or Fortune?* (BBC).

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Fake works in Catalonia

Here in Catalonia the underworld of forgery is little known so it is difficult to delineate its boundaries, measure its intensity or distinguish the most outstanding and decisive episodes in our cultural heritage. It is difficult to find out about the main participants in depth and enumerate the victims. Nevertheless today we do have a list of our “very own” forgers and illicit practices which show how this phenomenon has made its mark since the early twentieth century (when collectors began to be wary of it and the critic Feliu Elias observed it and wrote about it in the magazine *Mirador*.

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Joan Sacs [Feliu Elias]: “The fakes of modern Catalan painting”. *Mirador*. April 27, 1933, p. 7
Joan Sacs [Feliu Elias]: «Counterfeit». *Mirador*. May 20, 1933, p. 1

The writings of Feliu Elias (1878-1948), deeply knowledgeable about the artistic activity in Barcelona in the first third of the twentieth century, show up to what point the phenomenon had permeated and was known and considered in the Catalan artistic circles of the time.

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“The fame of Ramon Casas is growing to such an extent that there is money to be made faking his paintings and drawings, even his most basic sketches”

Joan Sacs (Feliu Elias) in: “Forgery in modern Catalan painting”. *Mirador*, 221, 27 April, 1933

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“Collections as important as those of Lázaro Galdeano, Emili Cabot and Mateu dels Ferros, are not without their forgeries and the latter was particularly a victim of these charlatans. [...] Even in the days of Fortuny, his Catalan admirers were faking his works and adding the signature, and to this day there are workshops in Barcelona churning out Nonells, Vayredes, Martí-Alsines and any others in demand”

Joan Sacs (Feliu Elias), in *Mirador*, 20 May, 1930)

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“Ramon Casas was not alone in suffering forgeries posthumously. We all know that the paintings and drawings of Nonell, Picasso, Vayreda, Martí i Alsina, and even Benet Mercadé have been forged for years, without even mentioning the fake Fortunys. - It seems that lately our market of modern paintings has been infiltrated with works falsely signed under the name of Santiago Rossinyol...! [...]”

Joan Sacs (Feliu Elias) en «Les falsificacions de pintura catalana moderna» (27 de abril de 1933)

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The Junyer Vidal brothers

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Sebastià (1874-1966) and Carles (1877-1963) Junyer Vidal had a workshop in Barcelona in the mid-1930s, devoted to creating works in a Romanesque and Gothic style and where a good number of contemporary artists worked. They supplied a burning demand for medieval art that the importation of works could not satisfy. It was the perfect moment to introduce

illicit work into the market. Within this context the Junyers' workshop found wonderful opportunities, combining the restoration of medieval works with the creation of convincing substitutes, the results of excessive restoration or blatant forgery.

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Workshop of the Carles and
Sebastià Junyer Vidal brothers
Bishop
First third of the 20th century
Temper on panel
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

The work was acquired in auction by the Ministry of Culture and placed in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

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"We are looking at a brilliant forgery, the best that has ever been done in our country, not only for its way of recreating the period style but also for its way of giving expression to the damaged parts".

AVINYÓ FONTANET, Gemma; BARRACHINA NAVARRO, Jaume. «Els germans Junyer Vidal i la falsificació de pintura gòtica». En: BASSEGODA, Bonaventura; DOMÈNECH, Ignasi (eds.). *Col·leccionistes, antiquaris, falsificadors i museus. Noves dades sobre el patrimoni artístic de Catalunya al segle XX*. Memoria Artium, 21, Barcelona, 2016, pág. 31

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Letter from Josep de Togores to Miquel Utrillo
Barcelona, October 7, 1918
Handwritten, black ink
Biblioteca Popular Santiago Rusiñol, Sitges.
Collection Miquel Utrillo, s / n

"...for the last two weeks I have had panels in the studio which I shall restore at my own expense. They are from Junyer Vidal, and it is understood that when they send them it is because they are sure of the result, as the Junyer V. brothers have seen how I learned step by step at Can Veciana. I implore you not to tell anyone about this because the Junyers would get angry [...] I know all the tricks of the trade so I can guarantee results. Moreover I do it cheaply".

Letter from Josep de Togores to Miquel Utrillo

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"Their business operated in utmost silence and extreme mystery. One hardly saw them, hidden away in their houses".

MARÈS, Frederic, *El mundo fascinante del coleccionismo y de las antigüedades. Memorias de un coleccionista*, Barcelona, 1977.

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Unknown author
Female nude, in the manner of Pablo Picasso
Chinese ink on paper
Museu d'Art de Sabadell
Non. 1818

The culmination of the Junyer brothers' activities was adulterating some of Picasso's early drawings. We must remember that the Junyers were close friends of his, especially in the period between 1901 and 1903 when the artist from Malaga was suffering from financial problems. They helped him and a grateful Picasso gave them drawings – often caricatures of Sebastià – which he had sketched on visiting cards or wrapping paper and which later the Junyer brothers would "sign" to increase their value. When he found out Picasso would cross out the false signatures and sign on top. With facts like these it comes as no surprise that Frank Perls, Picasso's German-born American gallery owner, ended up referring to the Junyer brothers as bandits in a note discovered by Avinyó and Barrachina (2016).

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"This tactic used by certain unscrupulous foreign antique dealers of camouflaging Catalan, Aragonese and Valencian gothic altarpieces as Italian primitives was employed with certain frequency during the last quarter of the nineteenth century [...]. In these last two years [...] we have seen nearly a dozen of our altarpieces disfigured in this way. [...] As these altarpieces are easily accessible and cheap, not wanted by anyone, any sharp and unscrupulous person could find the trick of converting them into a base for a forgery which no one would see as anything else but a retouched authentic work. The business must have had relative success because these repainted panels that we have seen lead one to think that others must have also been camouflaged".

FOLCH I TORRES, Joaquim, "Una taula de mestre Garcia de Benavarre", *Gasetta de les Arts*, Any II, no.6, February 1929, p.28

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Genuine or fake

STUDYING THE “PERE MATES CASE”

When three panels from the *Retable de sant Joan Baptista* (Saint John the Baptist altarpiece) came up for auction in May 2010, they were regarded as original Pere Mates panels. The composition, details in the scenes and the figure drawing, above all the mastery of some of the characters' faces, were totally consistent with the black and white photographs published up until then, and the small differences were considered the result of retouching in later restoration work.

When new panels from the altarpiece appeared on the market in 2016, two of which were identical to the ones in the Museu d'Art, suspicions were aroused that we could be dealing with fakes. A series of technical and analytical studies immediately began so as to discover the true nature of the different works and as far as possible expose the fraud.

Historical and artistic study

The first step when undertaking a study of a work of art is to delve into its history, which can sometimes prove to be difficult. In the majority of cases one has to initiate a process of research into archives, libraries and museums. Investigation into documentary sources, reading studies and comparative analysis with other works by the same author or of the period, can help to confirm an attribution, discover the promoter's identity, get nearer to a chronology or, if lucky, determine the exact date of its execution. It is a question of placing the work within the artist's development or the context of the history of art and then following its later history.

Concerning the Pere Mates panels, the research to date has allowed us to outline part of a journey through their past and more recent history.

Artistic technique: panel painting in the sixteenth century

Another very significant aspect when studying a work is to recognise **the artistic technique** deployed in its execution: identifying the kind of materials, the way they were used or even the type of brushstroke, can help situate a work within a precise time framework and, if the analysis is really precise, attribute it to a particular artist. At the same time, understanding the artistic technique is absolutely essential in evaluating the state of conservation of the work and to start the process of its scientific analysis. In the case of the Pere Mates panels, the technique had to coincide with the one normally used in painting on wood throughout the sixteenth century whether it be in tempera or in oils.

Scientific and technical study

The study of a work of art is helped and complemented with physio-chemical analysis undertaken by scientists specialising in cultural heritage. Applying different examination methods and various instrumental analytical techniques, in a sequential and complementary process, will provide information, sometimes clues and in other cases certainties, about the materials used in a work and its state of conservation.

Visual inspection

A keen eye can, simply by looking at a work of art, recognise its technique and morphology and detect inconsistencies, overpainting or added details. This observation, both of the front and the reverse, allows one to get an overall first impression of the work before any scientific analysis has begun, prompting questions and helping to plan which analytical techniques to use and to determine which areas are suitable for extracting samples that will provide answers to the many questions.

Photography with diffused light:

This is the first step towards documenting the work, both the front and the back. The work is lit with soft light avoiding reflections and contrasts as much as possible. The resulting image will show the chromatic range and equal contrast over the entire surface, clearly showing details which shadows could obscure.

Reverse side: wooden base

GENUINE WORK:

- Wood from a deciduous tree, probably poplar
- Few wooden slats, middle-sized, 25-30cms wide.
- The slat joints are covered with putty and chromatic retouching con masilla y retoques cromáticos
- Evidence of later interventions:
 - Cross battens held in place with contemporary screws
 - Mechanical cuts along the edge of the base, probably to adapt the panel to the frame
 - Woodworm holes filled with wax (contemporary intervention)
 - Surface covered with a thick layer of wax

FAKE WORK:

- Coniferous wood, probably pine
- Many narrow wooden slats, 10-15 cms wide, industrially manufactured
- Rough-textured wood
- Evidence of mechanical cutting
- Evidence of later interventions:
 - Synthetic wood paste used to fill the joints and cracks in the wood

Front: polychrome layers

GENUINE WORK:

- Final varnish giving a yellow tinge. Possible presence of wax
- Thin pictorial layer, with various shades and hues
- Network of cracks due to natural ageing process of the paints
- Thick and fine gold leaf details
- Lifting and loss of image over the entire surface, especially in the cracks and joints of wood
- Evidence of later intervention:
 - Visible retouching in some areas all over the surface

FAKE WORK:

- Surface covered with a layer of resin or rusty and/or coloured varnish
- Flat pictorial layer hardly crafted
- Cracks and large, irregular fissures on the picture surface
- Details in gold leaf
- Evidence of later interventions:
 - A lot of matt retouching mainly on the wooden joints and connections

Photographic and radiographic analysis

Photographic techniques are an essential part in analysing a work of art and the starting point from which other methods can then be used to complete the material examination. The work is

photographed under visible radiation (photographs with light applied in different ways and with higher or lesser detail) and invisible radiation (with ultraviolet and infrared light). The result obtained from each one of these images will bring new information to the process of analysis.

Photography with skimming light:

The work is lit obliquely. The resulting photograph shows the texture and clearly indicates any alterations of the image's surface or pictorial layer: ripples, fissures, cracks, loss of paint, lifting, etc. It is now easier to appreciate the brush strokes, their thickness and shape and to a certain extent the painter's style

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

- Irregularities and rippling produced by the wooden slats which form the base
- Cracks due basically to the ageing of the binder that cannot cope with the base's movements

FAKE WORK RESULT:

- Many small irregularities and rippling effects produced by the slats which constitute the base

Photography with ultraviolet (UV) light:

The work is lit with Wood's lamp ultraviolet light. The ultraviolet rays cause fluorescence in certain substances which according to their chemical composition react by showing different colours especially in the case of certain varnishes. This method shows up previous and later interventions such as additions or overpainting.

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

- Varnish applied homogeneously
- Small chromatic retouching spread over the entire pictorial surface and very visible retouching where the joins meet

FAKE WORK RESULT:

- This confirms the existence of a uniform coloured varnish
- Multiple retouching, particularly concentrated around the joins of the slats of the base

Digital infrared photography (IR):

It is lit with a highly powerful tungsten light bulb. Using photographic cameras with modified sensors, sensitive to the zone of the infrared (IR) electromagnetic spectrum, invisible to the human eye, the different absorption of these materials is captured by these radiations revealing what is immediately beneath the pictorial surface: the preliminary drawing, alterations to the composition or errors and possible underlying paintings or inscriptions.

Also used is infrared reflectography by means of a video camera equipped with a tube sensitive to IR radiations. The image can be directly observed through a high resolution monitor. This

system has more penetration than photography but less power of spatial resolution and lower quality in the final image.

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

- The preparatory drawing of the composition done with graphite tip pencil can be seen
- The chromatic retouching is outlined more clearly. They are also more contrasted

FAKE WORK RESULT:

- Low quality preliminary drawing
- No difference can be seen between the polychromy and retouching

Macrophotography:

The photography of detail, using enlarging optical lenses which allow one to capture reality tenfold, and better observe the surface of a work.

Microphotography:

Using a camera coupled to a magnifying lens attachment, the surface of a work can be captured in a far more detailed way (10 to 60 times larger) and if a microscope is used it is possible to observe stratigraphy, various materials at 50 to 1000 times larger, the morphology of pigments, fibres, wood and so on.

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

- The grain is more disaggregated and heterogeneous, more typical of handmade pigments

FAKE WORK RESULT:

- Small grain, compact and homogenous, more typical of industrial pigments

Radiographies

Radiographic technique allows us to pass over the entire surface of the artwork with an x-ray beam and register and fix the somewhat complex resulting image on a radiographic plate. This image shows different intensities according to the capacity the materials have to absorb the radiation and makes the structure and constituent materials of the work obvious, as well as the system of union which keeps them together. It also shows up the existence of overpainting, precisely marks the exact perimeter of the faults or loss of original paintwork and reveals the transformations and changes of composition superimposed on the painting

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

- Showing extent of wood-boring insect damage
- Original wooden slats made from poplar, new pine wood cross battens held together with iron screws
- Loss of paint clearly outlined
- Cracks in the joints patched up with wood glue
- Remains of forged nails that held the original crosspieces together

- The pictorial composition shows the presence of radio-opaque pigments such as lead white

FAKE WORK RESULT:

- Modern elements such as the screws in the cross-battens
- The grain in the pine wood of the planks and cross-battens
- The slats joined together with square pins reinforced with grafting and wood paste
- Cracks appearing on the thick preparatory layer
- Inability to see the pictorial layer

Physical and chemical analysis

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The analysis of small samples of the work being studied allows more specific information to be obtained concerning its constituent material and consequently shine more light on important and sometimes even decisive data concerning the stratigraphic structure and composition; in other words how the different layers of paint (stratigraphy) were organised and the kind of wood, pigments, binders and carriers that were used to create the work

Extraction of samples

In order to perform a physicochemical analysis of a work of art, it is necessary in some cases to extract a small amount, or sample, in the least invasive way which could include from the base, preparation and pictorial layer. The extracted samples are strategically selected, for example choosing certain colours or areas suspected of being odd in some way or revealing, always being as careful as possible not to be too invasive. In the case of the Pere Mates panels the decision was made to extract samples of the wood from the base, among others, and a specimen of the white and blue colours from each one hoping that the analysis would determine whether these were genuine or fake.

Analysis of the wooden base

Samples of wood are sliced in thin layers and examined and photographed with a magnifying glass and/or a microscope. According to the structure and by comparison it is possible to determine the type of wood.

Examination with binocular magnifying glass

The samples obtained are observed and photographed with a binocular magnifying glass and prepared to be worked on and submitted to different destructive and non-destructive analytical techniques.

Optical microscopy (OM)

In order for the samples to be submitted to the various analyses they are previously placed in transparent polyester resin so they can be cut, polished and become perfectly flat cross

sections.

A first examination of these samples seen through an optical microscope will reveal in detail the shapes, size and colours of the different materials and their distribution in layers, obtaining a cross-section or stratigraphic view.

Electronic tracking microscope

Studying the samples with this technique allows one to obtain high resolution and greatly enlarged black and white images that provide information of the morphology, distribution of the compounds present in the various layers and their chemical composition.

Infrared spectroscopy by Fourier-transform

The FTIR spectrometer technique based on the interaction of infrared radiation with the material, allows one to obtain a graphic representation of the characteristic spectrum of the organic and inorganic compounds. By comparing the spectrum of a sample with the standard reference spectrum we can identify the different molecular components and, therefore, identify the type of materials present in the different layers.

Preparatory layer

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

Confirmation that the preparatory layer consists of plaster

FAKE WORK RESULT:

Two layers detected, the top one is traditional plaster preparation mixed with a protein substance, and a lower one of barium sulphate and calcium carbonate in a binder of oil or resin.

Whites

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

Conclusion: the white pigment used is lead white

FAKE WORK RESULT:

Conclusion: the white pigment used is titanium white

Blue

GENUINE WORK RESULT:

Conclusion: the blue pigment used is based on azurite blue

FAKE WORK RESULT:

Conclusion: the blue pigment used is Prussian blue

Historic pigments

What we know as a pigment is any substance

that once ground and mixed or dispersed in an appropriate medium or binder gives colour to a surface. These substances, which can be classified according to their colour or chemical composition, may be natural -organic or inorganic-, artificial or synthetic. In the course of history, the variety of pigments has continued to grow thanks to new trade routes, new technical discoveries and new means of synthetic and industrial production, particularly from the eighteenth and nineteenth century onwards. This is why finding out the kind of pigment used in a work of art and its composition can be a crucial factor in working out its chronology.

For centuries **white pigment** was limited to two types: the whites obtained from derivatives of gypsum and calcium carbonate, mostly used as carriers, and lead white, virtually the only white pigment used until the end of the 19th century when other white pigments began to be made synthetically, such as zinc white (1834) and titanium white (1921).

- **Gypsum ($\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$)** is a white mineral, formed by calcium sulphate, found in many different varieties across the world. Known since prehistory, its main use has been as a carrier, mixed with glues, to prepare panels and canvases for painting. From the nineteenth century onwards it began to be produced artificially.
- **Barite (BaSO_4)**, a barium sulphate based mineral, also known as barium white, blanc fixe or permanent white, has not been used much as a pigment. The artificial or synthetic variety, known since the beginning of the eighteenth century, is mostly used as an additive to other white pigments to lower production costs, or as a base or carrier for preparations from the nineteenth century onwards.
- **Lead white ($(\text{PbCO}_3)_2 \cdot \text{Pb}(\text{OH})_2$)**, also known as cerussite, Saturn white, silver white or flake white, is the most important pigment in western painting. Known since classical antiquity it was the only white available until the end of the nineteenth century when its level of toxicity, due to the lead content, became obvious so its production and use was gradually restricted. The pigment was obtained from cerussite, a lead carbonate, though according to ancient notes it was prepared by applying vinegar onto metallic lead, which produced a white crust which was then scraped and ground down.

- **Titanium white (TiO₂)**, an artificial mineral pigment, is a titanium dioxide made from the minerals ilmenite, rutile and anatase and adding barium sulphate (BaSO₄) as a carrier. Although it was discovered in 1821 it was not put on the market and commercialised as a pigment for artistic use until 1921, when Norwegian and North American companies began to produce it. Since then it has been the most widely used white in painting.

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Blue pigment is not easily obtained naturally and its use has been very closely tied in with the availability of very limited mineral resources. This led to an important trade in it and in more recent times its synthetic and industrial production. Egyptian blue is the oldest, produced artificially from a combination of sand, limestone and minerals; but the technical complexity in producing it meant that over the centuries it was used less and less. For hundreds of years the only blues used were azurite blue and ultramarine blue obtained from lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone from Asia which began to be sold in Europe from the thirteenth century (Indian blue and enamel). At the beginning [ver original] of the eighteenth century a new artificially made blue appeared: Prussian blue (1703). This was followed by others like cobalt blue or French ultramarine (1828), all of them produced industrially.

- **Azurite blue (Cu₃(CO₃)₂(OH)₂)** is a natural pigment obtained from azurite, a mineral commonly found in copper deposits. Azurite has been given various names according to where it has been extracted or has come from, such as Sevilla blue or Santo Domingo blue. It is prepared by grinding the mineral into grains that are not too small, so as to keep the colour intensity, and mix them with a binder. It was not used much in frescos or oil painting because it would lose colour and shine and tended to go green. However it was widely used in tempera on panels, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
- **Prussian blue (Fe₇C₁₆N₁₆)** also known as Berlin blue, Paris blue, Antwerp blue and China blue is an inorganic pigment regarded as the first modern artificial pigment. It was discovered accidentally in 1703 when a German dye manufacturer, Diesbach, was working on the production of a strong red pigment using cochineal. By complete chance the samples got mixed with potassium causing a chemical reaction which gave a deep blue. However it was not generally used as a pigment until 1750, when it was sold ready prepared. Since then it has been used widely in art, gradually replacing natural blues.

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“THE PERE MATES CASE”: AN OPEN CASE

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Following the many studies and analyses all the works attributed to Pere Mates were subjected to:

- the conclusion is that the paintings acquired in 2016 would have been painted in the sixteenth century. They were seen to consist of materials used in that period, such as lead white and azurite blue, and their morphology matched that of panels and paintings from the same period.
- In contrast the results of the analysis of the three panels bought in 2010 were categorical: the pine base was cut roughly; the preparatory layer included barium sulphate, a compound used from the nineteenth century onwards; furthermore the pigments were from after the eighteenth century

The “Pere Mates Case” has been solved, but only partly. There are still a lot of unanswered questions: who painted the fakes, and why? Were they done to merely copy a work or with an intention to deceive? Did they only copy these three panels or the whole altarpiece?....We need to follow up new clues to this case which remains open.

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Epílogue

Does the perfect fake exist? Can fake works have some positive worth beyond being the proof of great daring and some degree of technical ability? Could they even get to be “beauties” and provoke an aesthetic experience?

We are inclined to say no to these questions as we consider authenticity is a fundamental element in a work of art and because we believe that an intimate link is established between the person and the work they are contemplating, an enthusiastic and trusting

relationship based on the veracity of the work and on the sincerity and moral integrity of the artist, a relationship which the forger makes impossible corrupting and perverting these principles. Perhaps it is because we believe in the changing but indestructible aura of a work of art.

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