

Conference Paper

Towards the Question of Examination and Refined Attribution of Western European Paintings from the Collection of the Yekaterinburg Museum of Fine Art

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Abstract

The article considers the issues of examination and attribution of artworks. The central focus is on the results of studies of four West European paintings from the collection of Yekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts. The paper describes the results of technical and technological examination of *Still Life with Broken Game and Watermelon*, which was attributed in the process of studying the brushwork to Pietro Navarra, a little-known early eighteenth-century Roman artist. As a result of the search for attribution, the painting *Eleazar and Rebekah*, previously attributed to an unknown Italian master, was revealed to have connections with the work of seventeenth-century Neapolitan artist Andrea Malinconico. The painting *The Death of Camilla*, long considered to be the work of Carlo Chignani, has been re-attributed as *The Death of Dido* possibly by the mid-seventeenth-century Lombard artist Carlo Francesco Nuvolone. The painting *Singing Actors* is dated to the end of the seventeenth century and is attributed to the Roman master known by the pseudonym Pseudo Carocelli.

Keywords: evaluation, attribution, Italian painting of the 17th century.

1. Introduction

The world practice of art evaluation is heterogeneous, disassociated and multilayered. There is evaluation aimed at meeting the needs of antiquarian market that for the purposes of discussion can be named “practical, or market evaluation”. Its main goal is to identify fakes and search for mistakes made by art forgers. And there is another – academic, museum or scientific evaluation – that represents a complex scientific research aimed at identifying which techniques have been used in making the artwork, as well as collecting information about its history and movements. Both kinds of evaluation use physical and chemical methods, study the provenance and give evaluation based on the study of style, iconography and iconology [1].

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2. Materials and Methods

Methods of academic evaluation are successfully adapted by the practical evaluation. Russian government is attempting to legalize this kind of evaluation at the state level and introduce certain strict rules and regulations. So, in 2017 Federal Agency for Technical Regulations and Metrology developed a national standard of the Russian Federation that is to be applied in “granting evaluation services of paintings and graphic works” [2, p. 1]. The standard gives definitions of the main terms used in the process of evaluation. Principles of independence, reliability, sufficiency and exhaustiveness of an expert research are formulated. Also, there is a general characteristic of methods and procedures used in technological and historiographic analysis. Supposedly, the most important part of this document is an unconditional requirement to treat technical and technological data as a proof that can confirm on the objective grounds or contest the authenticity of analysed artefacts.

The pioneer of technical and technological analysis of art collections in the Ural region is the Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts that started collaborating with the Expertise Sector of Moscow Institute of Cultural and Natural Heritage in early 2000s. Today expert assessment of artworks aimed to explore different historical epochs and artistic materials is becoming more and more popular in the Ural museum. At the same time challengers of technical and technological analysis are tackled in the Laboratory of Artistic Practices and Museum Technologies of Ural Federal University that has established partnerships with major regional museums. This is a way of handling classification of art collections that remains one of the most urgent issues for Russian museums. However, when considering technical and technological evaluation that allows to identify a certain historical period and national school of art that work belongs to, it is crucial to remember the key role of attribution process as well. So, if similar works of art are discovered they can connect the analysed artwork with a circle of other works produced by the same master, which, in turn, provides a possibility to elaborate further research.

3. Discussion

This article is dedicated to the results of evaluation and attribution of four works of Western European painting from the collection of Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts. The first one is *Still-life with Dead Bird and a Watermelon* (Canvas, oils. 91 x 120.6, Inv. No. 456), which arrived in the collection of Sverdlovsk Painting Gallery in 1936 from the

Sverdlovsk Regional Museum. In the catalogue of 1949 the painting was attributed to the authorship of Michele Pace del Campidoglio (Michelangelo del Campidoglio) (1610–1670) [4, p 63]. Composition and style of this artwork fitted the model typical of 17th century Italian still-life like a glove. Abundant gifts of Italian nature are depicted lying in the ground against the backdrop of the landscape. They are complimented with images of two guinea pigs and a diversity of dead birds of prey that are positioned amidst the grapes, figs and peaches. A careful examination of Campidoglio's still-life shows that there are animalistic motives among the berries and fruit – figures of amphibian animals or small animals, but never the images of dead birds of prey. This circumstance made the researchers feel more critical about the author of this still-life.

The technical and technological analysis provided the following data. The painting was created on a rare linen canvas that has thick weave of 6x8 threads per cm². The weaving base on the stretcher is placed horizontally. The canvas is dubbed. The surfaces of the painting contain the wash-outs all the way to the undercoat and in some places even to the priming. The author's canvas is trimmed around the edges by 5–7cm. The priming has a glue-chalk base. The binding used in the priming is protein glue. The filler in the priming consists of red and yellow ochre with an addition of dark ochre, black organics, lead paint and calcite. The priming has ocher-brown colouring and its tonality is used to create an artistic form. Colour mixes used for the construction of multi-layer structure include typical 17th century pigments, among them ochre, lead paint, indigo, lead and tin yellow and Neapolitan yellow, natural red organic pigments. The undercoat in the painting is coloured. The artist used the impasto technique for building the form. Using overlaying and half-overlaying colour pastes, he gradually increased pigment layer in light areas, while in shadowed areas the priming remained partly uncovered, accentuated by the rough texture of the canvas. [5] The unique manner of the artist's technique shows in applying pastous small overtones with lead paint and yellow tone on the surface of fruit and around the counter of the leaves. [8, p. 667]. The results of technical and technological analysis bring us to the conclusion that the layered structure, the patterns of building the form and used materials comply with Italian art practice of the mid-17th and second half of 17th century.

At the same time, it is important to highlight that still-life with hunting trophies are typical first of all for Holland and Germany of this period. It is logical to suppose that the author of Yekaterinburg still-life was either a pupil of northern schools who worked in Italy or an Italian who was close to the circle of northern masters. A convincing counterpart was discovered in the art of little-known Italian artist Pietro Navarra. His name was just recently introduced into art history thanks to the work of Italian researcher

Lomberto Golfari dedicated to the artist monogram “PN”. [6] Pietro Navarra, a pupil of Franz Werner von Tamm (1658 – 1724), who succeeded in “painting fruit, flowers, birds and dead animals”, was mentioned in *The Life of Modern Artists, Sculptors and Architects* written by Leone Pascoli and published in Rome in 1736 [7, p. 378]. Modern Italian researchers G. Bocchi and U. Bocchi in their fundamental work about Italian still-life in the 1630s–1750s point out the existence of 60 artworks that belong to the brush of Pietro Navarra [8, p. 665]. A convincing countertype of Yekaterinburg painting is a *Still-Life with a Parrot and Two Guinea Pigs* from the Antwerp Museum Mayer van den Bergh that has a monogram PN.

The next work is *Eleazer and Rebecca*. It appeared in museum collection in 1962 as a painting of an unknown Italian artist from Evgeniy Konstantinovich Zmanovsky (Inv. No. 1150). In Western European museums this biblical story presents the meeting of Eleazer, the oldest of Abraham’s slaves, and Rebecca, the future bride of Isaak, on the outskirts of Harrana that is usually titled *Rebecca at the Well* [9]. In the past the painting was severely damaged. The central figure of Rebecca has big losses covered up by later paints-overs. As far as we know, technical and technological analysis of the artwork has never been done, and its authenticity hasn’t been confirmed till nowadays. Nevertheless, a similar painting that belongs to the hand of a famous Neapolitan artist Domenico Andrea Malinconico (1635–1698) was discovered in the collection of Bari pinacotheca. This discovery enabled to narrow down the further scope of research. Luka Bortolotti, an expert of the Roman auction house Bertolami Fine Arts, thinks that Andrea Malinconico created this work in his early period under the influence of Nicolas Poussin and dates it in the beginning of 1660s.

Bernardo Dominici, the author of the book that contains biographies of Neapolitan painters, sculptors and architects published in 1742 described Andrea Malinconico as one of the best students that came out of a big and prosperous school of caballero Massimo Stanzione [11, p. 293]. The art of Massimo Stanzione, which appeared in the mid-17th century, became a “real alternative to the ethic rage” of Baroque artists and “in just a few years’ time it turned into a beacon for the whole generation of young painters” according to A. Ragione, an expert in Neapolitan art. Andrea Malinconico learnt from his teacher and accepted the philosophy of classical heritage. He was an author of numerous compositions on Biblical and Evangelical themes for the churches and monasteries in Neapoli, Sorrento, Agerola and on Capri. The cycle of paintings made for the Neapolitan church Santa Maria dei Miracoli in 1680s is considered to be one of his biggest works. Stephano Causa, a professor of the Neapolitan university and a leading specialist in art of Neapolitan school describes A. Malinconico as “an

artist of significant depth” and a founder of a new family of painters that consisted of his younger brother Nikola and his sons Oronzio and Nikola [13]. Andrea Malinconico's distinguished service to the Catholic church were marked with a Papal Order of the Golden Spur and the right hereditary nobility. Taking into consideration the opinion of Stephano Causa that “Neapolitan art scene of the third quarter of 17th century remains unknown beyond the works of Caravaggio and Giordano” the identification of a new artwork relating to the circle of one prominent representative of Baroque Neapolitan art school is especially relevant in the history of Neapolitan art.

The third in our list is a painting ascribed to the art of Bologna academic painter Carlo Cignani (1628 – 1719) under the title *The Death of Camilla*. This painting appeared in the museum collection in 1968 from the private collection. The inscription on the back of canvas “Change de Toille par B. Peronard S.Petersbourg 1815” has a spelling mistake and was read incorrectly. It should be translated as “The sizes were changed by B. Peronard. St. Petersburg. 1815”, which confirms that fact of restoration works, the clipping of old edges and therefore the old age of the painting. The attempts to discover similar paintings in Carlo Cignani's art heritage failed. Compositionally similar paintings were found among the productions of the art workshop of Lombardic master Carlo Francesco Nuvolone (1609–1662), one of the most prominent representatives of Lombardic Art School of the mid-17th century. His father Panfilo Nuvolone (1581–1651) originally taught him; later he studied in the Academy of Ambrosiana under the supervision of Giovanni Battista Crespi (1557–1632). Carlo F. Nuvolone took pseudonym Panfilo that is often used in documents and signatures [15]. Carlo F. Nuvolone worked a lot for the churches and monasteries in Milan, Narva, Parma, Monza and Alessandria, as well as other Lombardic towns. As a monumental painter, he preferred mural paintings.

There were seven paintings attributed to Carlo Francesco Nuvolone or his workshop that can be considered as countertypes of Yekaterinburg work. All of them were created based on the story of Dido's death. In the mid-17th century a famous Italian expert Francesco Frangi states that Carlo F. Nuvolone used this story in his works. [15] We come across the story of Dido in antique literature, especially in the work of Virgil [16, p. 111]. According to his epic *Aeneid*, Dido, the queen of Tyre ran away to Libya after the murder of her husband Sychaeus, where she founded the city of Carthage. Later, she was forced to kill herself, according to one version, because she refused to marry Iarbas, a king of Libya. According to the other version, she did it after a break-up with her beloved Aeneas.

A painting *Death of Dido* from the private collection in Palermo included in a catalogue of Dzeri is the closest one to the museum artwork (canvas, oil, 98 x 73 cm.). We can

also point in the direction of a similar story that was attributed to the authorship of Carlo F. Nuvolone or his circle from the collection of the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts and Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, as well as similar works that appeared lately at the European auctions. There are no doubts about the value of Yekaterinburg painting and the need to further specify its time of creation and author. At the same time, it is crucial to take into account that among the artists who were part of Carlo F. Nuvolone's circle, while he was acknowledged as "an indisputable and prolific hero of Lombardic Baroque", were his brothers Guiseppe, Michelangelo and Giovanni Batista, his nephew Girolamo, and dozens of pupils and imitators that in Francesco Frangi's opinion copied "the Nuvolone's manner" in an "endless amount of works....of varying quality" [17]. Even today, according to F. Ferro, the results of interaction between the artists of Nuvolone family within the workshop raise questions among the specialists who are trying to attribute artworks to specific masters [18].

The Singing Actors is the last painting from the group of researched artworks. It appeared in the museum collection in 1936. In the 1949 catalogue it was attributed to Ferrara artist Dosso Dossi (1470/86-1542). The X-ray analysis demonstrated that this work was completed on a canvas made from the hand-made threads that have a lot of knots and thickenings. Manual loom technique with wide spacing between threads (average density 8x6 threads per cm²) made linen fabric uneven. This rare and rough canvas made it possible to attribute this painting with a great extent of certainty to an Italian school of art and chronologically date it between the second third of the 17th and the mid-18th century. The search for similar paintings led to the artistic heritage of a Roman master Angelo Caroselli (1585–1652). This attribution was verbally confirmed by V.E. Makarova.

Furthermore, Angelo Caroselli's works, which are seen by many researchers as being made under the Dutch influence, are focused around the everyday life and are quite mundane in their style, with an interest for some allegories and symbolism [19]. Such theatrical effects and aphorism are alien to them. The space is built differently, and the interaction of figures is also composed in a way that makes them look crowded in the space of Ekaterinburg painting. Further search for countertypes allowed us to consider the work of an unknown artist that art historians named Pseudo-Caroselli [20]. Theatrical passions, lush costumes and unusual hattery, the shimmer of jewellery, bright contrasts of tones, typical "crowded space" in the composition and crying frivolity of anatomic depictions bring us to attributing this museum painting to the art of exactly this artist, who was possibly involved in the movement of Roman Bamboccianti, Dutch artists living and working in Rome and painting everyday life and the morals of the social grassroots.

4. Conclusions

In summary, this research allowed to specify and pinpoint the dating and authorship of some artworks from the collection of Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts, as well as establish the directions of research for the future.

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