

# Art and Science: A Da Vinci Detective Story

by John Brewer

This is the story of the most sensational art trial of the first half of the 20th century, the case of Hahn versus Duveen. It begins in 1920, when a reporter from the *New York World* telephoned Sir Joseph Duveen, the self-described most powerful art dealer in the western world. Duveen, an Englishman, was in New York, where he habitually spent half of the year, having recently arrived from his London office. (His firm also had a gallery in Paris.) Suave, cigar-smoking, and turned out in the finest suits, Duveen was always available to the press, which he was prone to see as the publicity department of his firm, Duveen Brothers. The business thrived on the titillating gossip and sensational revelations he leaked to the newspapers. During the interview Duveen was asked about a painting that had recently been offered by the French wife of a young American airman to the Kansas City Art Institute for a vast sum, rumored to be either \$225,000 or \$250,000. Harry and Andrée Hahn claimed that their picture was a Leonardo da Vinci, the original version of the picture known as *La Belle Ferronnière*. The version of the picture in the Paris Louvre was therefore a mere copy. The claim was, of course, sensational. In 1920 there was no authenticated painting by da Vinci in any American collection, either public or private, and the arrival of a work of the master in a Midwestern city would have been an incredible coup, quite apart from the satisfaction it would have given Midwesterners to pull one over on the grandee collectors and galleries of the East Coast. But Duveen, much of whose wealth had been made supplying those grandees with Old Master art, was having none of it. Though he had never seen the picture or even a photograph of it, he condemned it, adding for good measure that any expert who authenticated it was not an expert at all. The real *Belle Ferronnière*, he told the reporter, was in the Louvre and not on its way to Kansas.

Mrs. Hahn sued Duveen in the New York courts for slander of title, claiming his reckless and irre-



Erich Lessing/Art Resource Inc.

**Which of these is the real Leonardo da Vinci? Is it the painting of *La Belle Ferronnière* on the left that hangs in the Louvre, or the one on the right owned by Andrée Hahn?**

Andrée Hahn and her *Belle* caught the imagination of the media, who saw them as two similar, beautiful, foreign ladies. The *Illustrated London News* even framed Andrée Hahn's photo in their four-page spread on the trial. (Courtesy of the *Illustrated London News* picture library.)



possible act had ended negotiations in Kansas and made it virtually impossible to sell the picture elsewhere. She hired herself a fancy New York lawyer, the improbably named Hyacinthe Ringrose, and sued Duveen for the enormous sum of \$500,000 in compensation, a figure endlessly repeated in the newspaper reporting on the case.

Duveen had always been a newshound, but in the Hahns and Mr. Ringrose he met his match. They set out to fight him not only in the courts, but also in the columns of the press. They spent a good deal of time painting a wonderful back story for their Leonardo. They claimed that the picture had been a wedding gift to Andrée from her aristocratic aunt, the Comtesse Louise de Montaut. It had been smuggled out of France and into Belgium in a basket of washing, before being shipped to the United States. Andrée herself was portrayed as a French aristocratic beauty, gallantly rescued as a war bride by Harry, the dashing Midwestern aviator, sometimes said to have been on General Pershing's staff. She and the woman portrayed in her Leonardo—foreign and beautiful—became as one. The Hahns' romance and the romance of Leonardo were intertwined.

While Ringrose sought sympathy for the young couple, he also encouraged Duveen and the experts he employed to examine the painting. Duveen obliged by paying a succession of American experts to visit Ringrose's office, where the picture was displayed. He also sent photographs to many of the European experts he used to authenticate pictures. Within a year he had a fat file of experts' opinions, all condemning the American Leonardo as a copy.

Armed with this information but confronted by the possibility that any attribution or opinion based on photographs would be challenged by Ringrose, Duveen decided on a publicity coup. He would ship the American Leonardo to Paris, take it to the Louvre, and place it next to the French *Belle Ferronnière*. His experts would then evaluate the two pictures. The plan was not easy to accomplish. The

Louvre, as one might expect, was not happy about this stunt, and it required all of Duveen's clout to allow the highly publicized comparison to take place. The Hahns wanted a fat fee (they got \$2,000 and all expenses) to allow the picture to go. But in 1923 Duveen overcame all obstacles, and assembled a star-studded panel of 10 experts to examine the pictures. These included Bernard Berenson, the most famous art connoisseur of the day; Roger Fry, artist and Bloomsbury denizen who had been curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; and the directors of the London National Gallery, the Irish Free State Museum in Dublin, the Imperial War Museum, and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. A number of well-known amateur experts on Renaissance art, such as Maurice Brockwell and Sir Herbert Cook, also testified, together with one scientist, Arthur Pillans Laurie, professor of chemistry at Heriot-Watt College in Edinburgh, who was not on Duveen's original list but had volunteered his services. As the *New York Tribune* put it: "Such a confluence of eminent authorities on art as was never seen before on land or sea filed within the sacrosanct enclosure of the Louvre this morning." The experts were interrogated by lawyers from both sides, and a huge transcript of their deliberations was returned to New York for submission at the trial. Almost without exception they denied that the Hahns' picture showed the hand of Leonardo.

The case dragged on a further six years. Duveen seems to have expected the Hahns to settle or withdraw from the case, but they felt, as it turned out quite rightly, that they had made serious inroads into Duveen's experts' testimony. As Mr. Hahn

commented to the *New York Herald*, he "did not consider that the European experts' opinion would hold much weight with the American jury." Eventually the case came to trial in the supreme court of New York in February 1929. A jury of ordinary New Yorkers—including two real-estate agents, a hotel receptionist, and a vendor of women's wear—had to decide on the authenticity of the American Leonardo. No juror had any pretense to art connoisseurship or expertise.

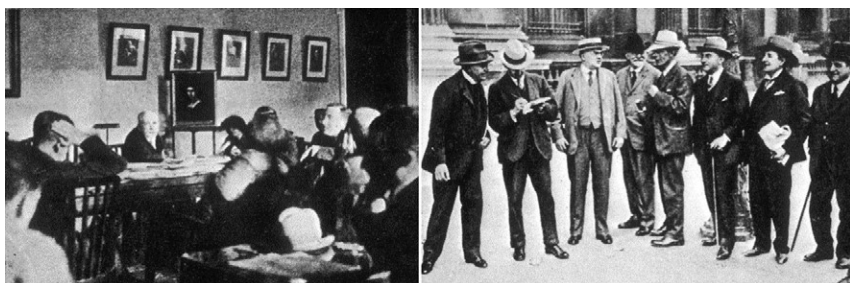
The trial lasted for six weeks and ended with a hung jury: the press revealed that nine of the jurors were in favour of Mrs. Hahn and her picture, with only three on the side of Duveen. Shortly before a retrial was to take place, Duveen settled out of court for the not-inconsiderable sum of \$60,000 plus legal expenses.

As I have emphasized, the struggle between Duveen and Hahn was carried out as much in the newspapers as in the courtroom. No art case was ever more extensively reported. In an age which was far more richly endowed with newsprint, stories ran not only in the big-gun newspapers of New York, but in almost all the major cities in the United States, as well as many, many smaller towns. In Europe the French, Italian, and German press, but above all the papers in Britain, carried extensive coverage. Copies of the two pictures were displayed in Midwestern department stores, and Macy's sold versions of the picture—"we admit it's a copy"—for \$17.95. There were huge queues of people wanting to attend the trial, and papers reported that in the final days, before the verdict, the courthouse was filled with the cream of New York society, or, as the *New York World* put it, "Boiled Shirt Gallery Waits Verdict of La Belle Jury."

Why was the case of such extraordinary interest? To understand this, we need to backtrack a moment and look at what was happening in the art market in the 1920s, and how the work of Leonardo fitted within it. The case happened during what was the art market's greatest ever peacetime boom. The emergence of new wealth in post-Civil War America, particularly during the Progressive era, together with the decline of wealth in Europe radically transformed the global market for

Duveen gathered his  
experts together at the  
Louvre so they could  
examine both versions  
of *La Belle* side by side.

(Courtesy of the *Illustrated  
London News* picture  
library.)





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**Old Masters.** In the late 19th century European agricultural rents collapsed as cheap grain imported from the United States produced a precipitate fall in food prices. The flower of the British and European aristocracy, the holders of most of the continent's cultural treasures, faced mounting debts and possible insolvency. The Europeans disgorged their cultural riches, and the American millionaires, helped by Duveen, bought them. A list of these rich American collectors—one that included Cornelius Vanderbilt, J. P. Morgan, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Benjamin Altman, Peter and Joseph Widener, Henry Walters, Henry O. Havemeyer, William Randolph Hearst, Henry Clay Frick, Henry Huntington, Samuel H. Kress, and Andrew Mellon—is an inventory of the triumphs of American capitalism in coal, iron and steel, retailing and banking, communications, and transport.

The scale of this collecting was unparalleled. When J. P. Morgan died in 1913 his artworks were valued at some \$60 million. Benjamin Altman, who also died that year, left paintings worth \$20 million. William Randolph Hearst was spending about \$5 million a year at the peak of his collecting. And Samuel H. Kress amassed 3,210 works



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**Sir Joseph Duveen waits to go into the New York courtroom at the start of the trial.**

of art. But these famous, often obsessive collectors, the men and women Duveen liked to work with, were only the most visible manifestation of a much broader phenomenon in which America's wealthy citizens appropriated the cultural treasures of Europe, decorating their houses in what is best described as plutocratic pastiche.

At first other rich collectors, notably the European and English branches of the Rothschild family, took part in this spending spree, but by the decade before the First World War all the top prices were paid by Americans. The tremendous competition among the American superrich for a relatively small number of high-prestige works pushed their prices higher and higher and shaped a market that soon became the object of prurient curiosity in the public at large. These developments were reported in the American press in a very particular way. They were patriotically portrayed as a consequence of a distinctive American, entrepreneurial style of collecting carried out by businessmen (the many female collectors, including Isabella Stewart Gardner, were generally overlooked) who were able to outbid and outwit European owners and collectors, using their modern superior business acumen and experience. This was depicted as a very American phenomenon; there was no suggestion, for example, that these collectors might be aping the manners and lifestyles of European aristocracies and merchant elites.

At the same time, a new body of experts emerged, self-anointed connoisseurs, whose arcane skills could be used to manipulate the market. These experts were viewed suspiciously by the American press, because, although they were necessary to authenticate works, they were also in a position to deceive collectors and the public. They were the gatekeepers between commerce and transcendence, or the alchemists who transmuted art into gold. The connoisseurs determined the authenticity of the art object and thereby transformed it into a commodity. And the volatility of the market—shifts in prices and fashions—was blamed on them.

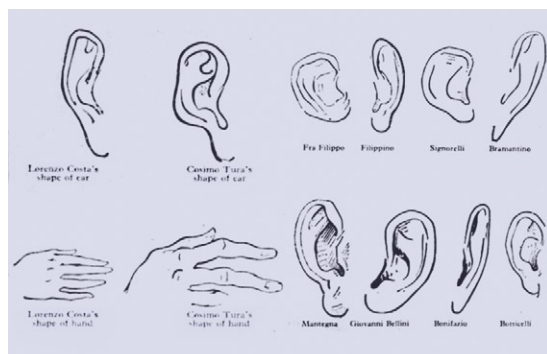
Duveen was strongly associated with this new vision of American collecting. He assiduously

cultivated the most important—that is, wealthy—collectors, bought many of their greatest treasures, and tried hard to monopolize their business, seeking to keep them away from rival dealers. Working with monopoly capitalists, he publicly portrayed himself as the monopolist of great Old Master art. He liked to project an image of total power. Even as he copied their business practices, Duveen persistently maintained the fiction to his clients that price was not important—that it only mattered to have the best—even while the publicity about the market was all about dollars and cents. He played on the idea that what was being bought had a certain transcendental value that was humanly universal, eternal, unbounded, and beyond the quotidian, a value whose commercial worth was determined by the fact that it wasn't commercial but an expression of the human spirit. You cared about attribution because you wanted to be sure you were buying a Leonardo. But you bought a Leonardo because it was agreed to be one of the highest forms of human expression. You were buying something mysterious, wonderful, and intangible. The power of the collector lay in magnanimously making this experience available to a larger public.

Leonardo seemed eminently well cast as the forefather of the engineers, designers, and businessmen who were transforming the United States into the world's greatest industrial power.

The high end of the art market concentrated on a relatively small number of painters. Roughly speaking, this Olympian clan included the Italian artists discussed in the first major history of art, Giorgio Vasari's 1550 book *Lives of the Artists*, led by Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo; a few Dutch and German artists, notably Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, Hals, and Holbein; a cluster of British portraitists, especially Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Romney; and a few southern Europeans like Velázquez and El Greco. Wealthy collectors did not want Old Masters, or high-quality old pictures; they wanted works by great artists. They

**Giovanni Morelli revolutionized connoisseurship in the late 19th century by using anatomical features, such as the shape of the ears and hands, to identify the artist.**



wanted not just an artwork but a piece of cultural capital, one that enabled them to share in the experience of the creator's genius.

Because the art object's allure rose from its expression of the genius of the artist, the key sign of a picture's worth was the hand of the master. Publicly, at least, the assumption was that there were three types of art on the Old Master market: originals (bearing the sole hand of the master), copies (acknowledged), and fakes (works of deception). Experts were aware of a more complex picture connected to workshop practices and collaborative or divided labor, but there was a constant pressure on them to push works into a positional relationship to "the original."

Leonardo in particular had both universal appeal and a special place in America. His star had waxed in the 19th century, as he came to be identified as a thoroughly modern man. The Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* described him as "the best-balanced genius in human history. He was painter, military engineer, courtier, politician, mechanical inventor," adding that he was "the Edison, (Panama Canal) Goethals, and Sargent of his Time." Leonardo seemed eminently well cast as the forefather of the engineers, designers, and businessmen who were transforming the United States into the world's greatest industrial power. His masculine image (no hints of his homosexuality here) was complemented by his reputation as the painter of the eternal feminine. By the late 19th century he was best known as the creator of the *Mona Lisa*, the portrait of an enigmatic woman that was probably the most famous painting in the world.

But Leonardo's work also had a particular association with forgery and copying. One of the most notorious Leonardo fakes was the *Profile of a Maiden*, owned by none other than the father of modern connoisseurship, Giovanni Morelli, and bequeathed by him to a friend, Donna Laura Minghetti. Like the Hahns' *Belle* some years later, the Minghetti portrait was taken to the Louvre, and also examined by experts in London. Bernard Berenson authenticated the work, and it was sold to an American collector, Theodore Davis. Yet by the second decade of the 20th century it had been exposed as a fake, executed by a 19th-century Italian sculptor and restorer of pictures named Tricca. This discomfited Berenson, who dropped all mention of the picture but remained prominent in the growing literature that voiced misgivings about the number of fakes on the market. Nor was this the only case. The most sensational Leonardo story of all, the theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre in 1911 by an Italian painter-decorator, and its recovery two years later in Florence, led a whole series of owners to claim that their version of the *Mona Lisa* was the original, and the recovered work a copy. In 1926, during the period of Hahn versus Duveen, there was a major panic in France when an American art dealer showed what he claimed to be the true *Mona Lisa*. Hundreds of French



**Bernard Berenson, an American of Lithuanian origin, lived in gentlemanly style in a villa near Florence, and promoted himself as a discerning connoisseur of Italian Renaissance art. He is shown here contemplating the Canova sculpture of Pauline Bonaparte, Napoleon's sister, in the Borghese Gallery, Rome.**

citizens thronged into the Louvre to ensure that “their” *Mona Lisa* was still there.

The case of Hahn versus Duveen not only raised questions about the authenticity of a particular (and potentially extraordinarily valuable) picture, it raised, in stark terms, the question of whether the 20th-century art world was to be governed by the aesthetic opinions of a self-anointed elite of connoisseurs, or by the rigorous strictures of modern science. Duveen set out to vindicate not only his condemnation of the Hahn picture, but the entire system of attribution and connoisseurship on which his hugely profitable business depended. In the five days at the beginning of the trial when he was cross-examined by the Hahns’ lawyer S. Lawrence Miller, he went to great lengths to disparage the Hahn Leonardo, commenting on its ugliness and poor execution, and also devoted a great deal of time to instructing the jury and the general public on how to judge pictures.

He emphasized the role of longtime experience and acquaintance with great pictures, the importance of first impressions in viewing a work, and the power of the connoisseur to discern the hand of the artist just as a reader can recognize the handwriting of a friend. His views were borne out by the defense’s evidence—both the experts’ views recorded in Paris and the testimony of connoisseurs in court. Sir Martin Conway, one of Duveen’s English experts, justified his rejection of the Hahn picture by saying, “I simply look at the Hahn picture and the impression produced on my mind is that it is not by Leonardo.” Maurice Brockwell said, “[I]t is a question of psychology, not of the magnifying glass; it is the mind of the great master that we see, the spiritual content, the psychological correlations.” Another of Duveen’s experts, the Irishman Robert Langton Douglas, described his use of “constructive imagination.” Berenson spoke of the importance of “accumulated experience upon which your spirit acts almost unconsciously.” The first look was what established the attribution. Though

Berenson (and others) looked to the techniques of his mentor Giovanni Morelli—using small details such as ears and fingers to make attributions—this technical work was always subordinate to a powerful first impression in attributing pictures, and to what Berenson himself described as “a sixth sense.” The subsequent gathering of evidence was merely a coda, a corroboration of a view that had been made by the expert’s eye.

These connoisseurs had a good deal invested in presenting themselves as aesthetes and persons of refinement, part of a long gentlemanly tradition of amateur and socially distinguished critics of art. No one knew this better than Bernard Berenson, known as B.B., who was widely regarded as the most discerning connoisseur of Italian renaissance art. After 1912, B.B. was regularly used by Duveen, who paid him a whopping 25 percent of the profit on works he expertized, and that Duveen subsequently sold. B.B.’s authority as an expert undoubtedly came from his exceptional “eye,” but it was reinforced by his self-presentation as a gentleman of refinement, and his manner of living at his villa, I Tatti, in Settignano outside Florence.

Like Berenson, most of the connoisseurs were self-taught, and had no expert qualifications or formal training. There was no sense of belonging to a professional group with a career path, qualifications, institutional grounding, and accepted standards of conduct and competence. When Duveen’s lawyer, Louis Levy, drew up a list of questions asking about the qualifications of the Paris experts, he was told that most would not answer because they found such questions impertinent and ungentlemanly. Even when the witnesses agreed over the Hahn picture, they could not resist disparaging one another, questioning the skills of colleagues in a way that played into the hands of the Hahns’ lawyers. This mirrored the many personal and critical disagreements by which this art world was riven. As Douglas commented during the trial, “Experts fight like cats and dogs.”

They were deeply hostile to technical tests, forensic investigation, and archival research, regarding it as ungentle, too scientific, and too academic. Sir Martin Conway testified that he had “no interest in technique or the way that a great master paints, whether he paints with wax or oil.” When Duveen’s lawyer suggested they use an X-ray expert to support them, Duveen wrote: “I would rather not have X-ray evidence introduced into the case. I do not believe in it, and if I am asked on the stand if I approve of X-rays, I shall frankly say ‘No.’” Berenson repeatedly poured scorn on technical knowledge of pigments, X-rays, and chemical analysis as matters beneath a gentleman connoisseur. Here is a typical exchange during the cross-examination by Hyacinthe Ringrose:

**HR:** There is a picture in the Prado labeled da Vinci?

**BB:** Yes.

**HR:** Is it not by Leonardo da Vinci?

**BB:** No.

**HR:** Have you ever seen it?

**BB:** Yes.

**HR:** Is it painted on wood or canvas?

**BB:** On wood, to my recollection, but I may be mistaken. That is not interesting. It is not interesting on what paper Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*.

Or again:

**HR:** Now, do you know with what oil he mixed his pigments?

**BB:** No.

**HR:** Didn’t he say in his book *Trattato della Pittura*, which you say you read, that he painted all his pictures with a mixture of walnut oil and not with linseed oil?

**BB:** I will take your word for it, it is of no interest for me.

**HR:** Can you tell me the difference between a picture painted in walnut oil and linseed oil?

**BB:** I certainly can’t, and I defy you to do so, too. It is all perfect humbug.

As one of the Hahns’ lawyers later wrote, “Practically all of the defendant’s witnesses knew nothing about pigments or technique, essential elements in the equipment of any real expert.” Imagination, used by most of Duveen’s witnesses, frequently read into a painting something which was in their mind only and not visible in the painting, such as “psychological correlation, sixth sense, and rhythmic coordination.” This sort of wordsmanship worked well in the intimate surroundings at I Tatti or in the dark shadows and warm lights of Duveen’s showrooms when the rich collector, the dealer, and the expert huddled round a picture. But as Duveen and his experts were to find out, connoisseurship looked a lot less convincing in the harsh light of a courtroom, where the facetiousness, flippancy, and arrogance of the experts—R. Langton Douglas, for example said, “Frenchmen know nothing about painting and there are no authorities in the Louvre”—did not come over well.

The Hahns’ lawyers were also able to show that Duveen’s experts had changed their minds. Many of them had once publicly acknowledged that they did not see the Louvre’s *Belle Ferronière* as a work by Leonardo. The history of the attribution of the Louvre picture is complex, but for our purposes it is enough to know that received wisdom in the early 20th century was that the work was either of the Milanese school or the work of Leonardo’s pupil Boltraffio. Yet in the courtroom nearly all of Duveen’s experts, with only one doubter, confirmed that the Louvre picture was definitely by Leonardo. Their firm attribution, exposed in court as a sharp change of mind, fed the accusation that the experts were kowtowing to Duveen’s wishes. And though there is no evidence of Duveen’s direct intervention, it is hard to explain the change in expert opinion (which then later shifted back to its earlier position), except as a defensive response to the public attack on conventional connoisseurship. Nor was the situation helped when the Hahns’ lawyers exposed the often long-standing financial arrangements that Duveen had had with his experts, paying them for their attributions and opinions.

Of course the point at issue in the trial was the authenticity of the Hahn picture, not the work in



Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute Library, Williamstown, MA.

**The writing below this photo of the Hahn Belle says: “This is the photograph to which I refer in my letter of January 16, 1922—in which letter, I explain my solemn conviction that the portrait here reproduced is not by Leonardo da Vinci. R. Langton Douglas, director of the National Gallery, Dublin.”**

Between 1936 and 1945, Dutch artist van Meegeren embarrassed art experts and museum directors with his Vermeer forgeries, many of which ended up in renowned collections. His *Lady and Gentleman at a Spinnet*, right, was purchased by a wealthy Amsterdam banker. In 1968, measurements of uranium-226 and lead-210 levels in the white paint used in the suspect Vermeers showed conclusively that they had been painted less than 50 years ago, rather than in the 17th century.

the Louvre, but Duveen had claimed that it was his sure knowledge that the Paris picture was the original *Belle Ferronnière* that enabled him to dismiss the Hahn picture without ever having seen it. This was in response to the accusation of the Hahns' counsel that "to call the painting a fraud without ever seeing it was reckless, and that is proof of malice," for the Hahns had to demonstrate not only that their picture was genuine, but that Duveen's condemnation was irresponsible and malicious. To that end they were greatly helped by a letter Duveen wrote in August 1920—before the conversation with the *New York World* reporter that led to the lawsuit—in which he had said, "The Louvre painting is not passed by the most eminent connoisseurs as having been painted by Leonardo da Vinci, and I may say that I am entirely in accord with their opinion."

The basis of the Hahns' prosecution could not have been more different from Duveen's defense. They depended on the analysis of pigments, the use of X-rays, and the painstaking recovery of the picture's provenance. Harry Hahn contrasted "the air-spun conjectures, subjective guessings, sixth-sense flairs, and, in certain instances, downright dishonesty produced by members of the Duveen clan" with "reliable historical documentation" founded on the "objective and scientific nature of accurate historical research."

The use of science and history to expose the feebleness of connoisseurship was, I want to stress, a radical move, though it may have been forced on the Hahns because they had great difficulty in securing the support of art experts, beyond the one French official who had attributed the picture to Leonardo back in 1916. Their only expert witness at the trial, a Russian named Chernoff, was a painter and an expert in pigments. But using pigment analysis and X-rays was bold and innovative, not least because such scientific analysis was in its infancy. Today, of course, there are a variety of techniques, used routinely in such conservation



labs as that at the Getty, that enable scholars to date a work of art and learn not only of what materials it is constructed but of the processes by which it was made. The use of ultraviolet light, infrared analysis, X-rays, polarized light microscopy, carbon dating, and autoradiography, in which pictures are exposed over time to low levels of radiation in a nuclear physics laboratory, can all reveal a great deal about a picture and make it extremely difficult for any forger to succeed. Thus the famous van Meegeren forgeries of the 1930s and 1940s that bamboozled Vermeer scholars were conclusively shown to be fakes by a dating process based on the proportion of a certain lead isotope in the lead-based paint. Nowadays it is even possible to identify different hands in a work using high-resolution digital scans.

But even today, with much more sophisticated technology, experts, including those who are especially skilled in using these scientific techniques, warn of the limits of this type of investigation. As the late Walter McCrone, the analyst who claimed the Shroud of Turin is daubed with 14th-century pigments rather than Christ's blood, emphasized, analytical techniques cannot demonstrate that a work is by a particular artist, though they can prove that it is not. They can refute but not demonstrate an attribution.

Moreover, the effective use of such techniques is not merely a matter of technology, but depends on the art-historical knowledge and technical experience needed to interpret the scientific results obtained. This became very clear in the Hahn trial. The Hahns used X-rays to sustain their claim that their picture had been cut off at the bottom when it had been transferred from wood to canvas in 1777.





**X-ray of the Louvre *Belle*,  
made by a young Harvard  
graduate student.**

But the only X-ray expert they could call was a medical radiologist—a doctor—with no knowledge of pictures, and when Duveen, against his better judgment, countered with an X-ray of the Louvre *Belle Ferronnière*, his expert was a young researcher and graduate student from Harvard University. In 1923, when the Hahn picture went to the Louvre, there was no scientific laboratory attached to the museum, and it was only in the 1930s that labs began to open in the major museums.

Ironically, the most systematic scientific examination of the Hahn and Louvre pictures was carried out by one of Duveen's experts, Professor Laurie, though as I have stressed, he pressed his services on Duveen, and the dealer was not always sure that his contribution was especially helpful. Laurie was the author of two studies, *Materials of the Painter's Craft* (1911) and *Pigments of the Old Masters* (1914), but his art-historical knowledge was confined to Dutch and British art of the 17th and 18th centuries. As befits a scientist, he was extremely cautious. In Paris, after examining both pictures with a microscope and failing to find what he called "dating pigments" that would prove the pictures to be later works or copies, he "would not testify as to who painted either . . . nor did he pretend to be an expert on technique and did not want to be drawn into artistic questions." But what he did say, which was seized upon by the Hahns' lawyers, was that the Louvre picture contained "neither lapis lazuli, vermilion, Naples Yellow, or a non-fading green, which were the finest and most prized paints," and that "the red ochre used in the bodice is termed barn painters' paint." He further stated that "the greens are verdigris crystals which have faded." Compared with the pigments used in the Hahn picture, the lawyers claimed, "the paints . . . are of the most

ordinary and inferior kind, and not such as would be used by a master in da Vinci's time."

The Hahns' efforts to discredit traditional connoisseurship and the sort of highfalutin claims it made were remarkably successful with both the judge and jury. Justice Black, who had a lawyerly sense of hard evidence and a strong commitment to proof on the basis of facts, was withering, both in the court and in his written opinion, about Duveen's experts. "It required," he remarked, "some mental agility to follow some of the experts from their positive testimony on the stand to the diametrically opposite views they had expressed in their books long before." "Beware experts," said Black to the jury. "Because a man claims to be an expert does not make him one . . . I have profound respect for critics whose conclusions rest upon facts . . . the opinions of any other kinds of experts are as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. Some of them expound their theories largely by vocal expression and gesture; others wander into a zone of speculation founded upon nothing more tangible than 'psychological correlation.' I do not say that this is as absurd as it sounds to the layman, but it is too introspective and subjective to be the basis of any opinion a jury can pin its faith upon."

The attack on connoisseurship and the rather bold commitment to science on the part of the Hahns had a political and patriotic dimension. The Hahns' counsel portrayed the struggle with Duveen as a conflict between the little man, a Midwesterner and an American (bear in mind that Hahn ran a car dealership), and the rich, cosmopolitan, European monopolist. Headlines like that in the *Indianapolis Star*—"Lad from Kansas Corn Belt Starts Fight that Jars Art World"—were common. Throughout the press there was much talk of American common sense and Midwestern levelheadedness.

Because the trial ended with a hung jury and an out-of-court settlement, the struggle between the Hahns and Duveen resulted in an unsatisfactory



stalemate. Duveen later conceded he was much distressed by the case, and he seems to have courted publicity thereafter through visible and uncontroversial acts of philanthropy rather than bruising and spectacular litigation. Berenson, as his wife explained to Duveen, felt horribly wounded and exposed. The case, written up in Harry Hahn's *The Rape of La Belle*, published in 1946, remains a key piece of evidence for a populist conspiratorial view of the art world.

The Hahns won an agreement that Duveen would not make any more comments on the picture, but the power that he and the experts still exerted on the art market meant that the *American Belle* remained unsold. Subsequent attempts up to the present to sell the picture have foundered, not least because of the reluctance of experts to give a public opinion on the status of the work. (The Hahn family continues to speak of an art market conspiracy.)

The events of the 1920s point to an important moment in the history of the Old Master art world, one in which, for the first time, connoisseurs and experts had to deal with the claims of a more scientific investigation of paintings. The response of these experts was typical of many who face a new way of looking at the world, both dismissive—claiming such new insights to be worthless—and defensive—fearing the intrusion of different methods into a well-established field of humanist scholarship. The Hahns' enthusiasm for science may have been tendentious, a trifle naïve, and in many ways premature, but it pointed towards the sort of connoisseurship that was to develop in the future and has become conventional today—one in which the accumulated visual acuity and art-historical experience of the humanist scholar works with, rather than against, the precise findings of the scientific investigator to produce a richer and more complete knowledge. Isn't that just the sort of collaboration that a humanist teaching at Caltech should applaud? □

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