

Press Release

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New facts in the false art collection "Werner Jägers" case released.

In August 2008, began in Germany what has now become the biggest scandal of fake artworks in Europe since the end of the Second World War. In this dismal affair in which art buyers have lost millions, a German major auction house now also risks its reputation.

The case, led by the prosecutor of the city of Cologne, in which AV Modern & Contemporary collaborated, is now almost ready and the identity of the four main defendants who will go to trial next September are known. Wolfgang Beltracchi, 60, his wife Helen Beltracchi, 52, the sister of the latter Jeanette Spurzem, 53, and Otto Schulte-Kellinghaus, 67, inventor of the second false art collection of the case ("Sammlung Wilhelm Knops") and responsible for the logistics of the whole operation, will face charges of organized fraud, forgery and risk up to ten years of prison. Fourteen paintings, on the forty-seven set in question, are part of a first indictment. For the thirty-three-remaining works (including twenty that unfortunately could not be found), another legal procedure has been established.

During his official declaration of 10th May, Günter Feld - General Attorney of Cologne - announced that charges might also be brought against Professor Henrik Hanstein, director of the important German auction house Lempertz. It appears Hanstein supposedly didn't proceed to a thorough authentication as legally mandatory for a number of artworks in the case before they were put on sale by his company.

A large part of the fakes put into circulation on the market since 1995, were signed to pass for leading German expressionists painters such as Max Pechstein or Heinrich Campendonk, thus taking advantage of lacks in historical documentation during World War II. The fraud, concerns sellers and buyers in nine European countries and the United States.