

Press Release
30 September 2011

The man behind the false "Werner Jägers" art collection confessed to the forgery.

The third hearing in the trial of fraud, that has now become famous and was revealed by gallery director Sofia Komarova, was held Tuesday September 27, 2011 in Cologne. Wolfgang Beltracchi, main protagonist in the case, spoke for the first time before the prosecution and admitted having produced fifty fake paintings. The prison term for the man and his three stooges will certainly be of six years.

"It was really fun", this short sentence alone gives the underlying motivations of the forger. The latter said to the court he wanted to produce false works of art that could compete with real paintings. The other forger's main purpose was also to fool the art market, dealers and specialists he admitted his despise for their "incompetence and venality". With at least fifty fake paintings sold on the world market since 1995 and tens of millions of profits, Beltracchi seems to have nicely achieved his aim.

Native from Höxter in Germany, the "artist" learned to paint with his father, a church painter. It was not without pride that Beltracchi also revealed he started his career quite early, helping his father to reproduce Rembrandt masterpieces at the age of only fourteen. According to him, he even succeeded at the same period to accurately reproduce a Picasso composition in a matter of hours.

By the 1970s, Beltracchi began his transformation into an apprentice forger. Then an art student close to the liberated counterculture movements of his generation, he started to collect old canvases, frames, pallets and all sorts of old color tubes and pigments. He trained to copy great artists but also produced own compositions. During the court session the forger explained his act was absolutely not motivated by greed even if the scam allowed him to reap a huge fortune deposited in an account in the Principality of Andorra and to acquire luxury properties in Southern France and Freiburg, Germany. The desire to match the production of masters like Max Pechstein or Heinrich Campendonk and the ability to completely take control of their art fascinated him: "If the artist was left-handed, then I painted with my left hand."

Beltracchi also claimed to have made all the fakes alone, and that he never had any contact with any experts. Judge Wilhelm Kremer who was presiding the session, was all the same very surprised that the chronological inconsistencies presented by the history of the Jägers Collection never alerted specialists. In fact, according to Beltracchi and his three henchmen, Werner Jägers (who was the grandfather of Wolfgang Beltracchi's wife Helene) was supposed to have expanded his collection of expressionist paintings by buying directly from the famous art collector Alfred Flechtheim at the age of only sixteen.