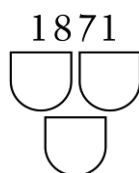


Hungarian University of Fine Arts

Doctoral School



POSSIBILITIES OF DETECTING FORGED 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY PAINTINGS IN  
ART CONSERVATION PRACTICE

**Investigation of the painting technique of Vilmos Aba-Novák (1894-1941)**

Thesis Statement of DLA dissertation

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## **The aim of the research**

Forgery of the artworks of famous artists has long caused many puzzles for art collectors, art historians, and conservators alike. Interdisciplinary thinking and the application of objective and impartial painting examination methods are essential in determining the authenticity of the artworks. Understanding the characteristics of the genuine paintings and then systematizing the information obtained may provide points of reference that can also be used to detect fraudulent pieces.

The knowledge of the conservator enables the specialist to see behind the surface and gather information from places that are not accessible to researchers in other fields. The doctoral research examines the tools and research methods that are available in art conservator training and later after completing the education, in conservation practice, and can be successfully used to confirm or question the authenticity of an artifact. The primary aim of writing the dissertation is to alter the criteria of certificates of authenticity. Expanding the list of research methods, learning about the creative process, painting techniques and materials of the artist can supplement and make the process of determining authenticity more objective.

In order to make the development of the research model, its guidelines and criteria more transparent and easier to interpret, the dissertation includes the analysis of the painting technique of a Hungarian painter, Vilmos Aba-Novák, who has commonly been a target of forgery.

## **The structure of the dissertation**

The first four chapters of the dissertation investigate art forgery in general, attempt to present the types of art forgery and provides a non-exhaustive list of important terminology.

The rest of the dissertation primarily focuses on the art of Vilmos Aba-Novák and the investigation of the artist's oil and tempera painting techniques. The brief description of the painter's biography is followed by the presentation of the painting examinations that form the backbone of the doctoral research, after which the most important findings of the research are presented. The characteristics of the painter's two significantly separate creative periods are discussed in the sixth chapter. The conclusion of the dissertation presents the summary of findings and observations gained during the comparative analysis of the genuine paintings and the ones of questionable authenticity, and the documentation of five years' worth of painting

examination data. The dissertation ends with recommendations concerning the directions of further research.

### **The main findings and results of the dissertation**

As part of the doctoral research a total of 27 genuine paintings of Vilmos Aba-Novák were given a full or partial scientific analysis. The examinations were based on the general painting conservators' examination protocol. Not all elements of the examination, which consisted mainly of photo technical and microscopic analysis, could be performed on all of the paintings due to the condition of the artifacts or other influencing circumstances. For this reason, the dissertation also includes summary tables that illustrate the results of each type of examination, as well as on which of the paintings included in the study the given examination could have taken place. The research based on the analysis of the genuine paintings also provided an opportunity to rank the elements of the conservators' examination protocol based on their effectiveness in the comparative analysis of the genuine paintings and the artworks of doubtful authenticity.

The two separate painting periods of the selected painter are characterized by two completely different painting techniques, the features of which are discussed in two subchapters of the dissertation. With the large amount of data included in the dissertation - obtained during the photo technical and scientific examination - the author gained a more thorough knowledge of the genuine paintings of the artist, thus obtaining new aspects of painting authentication. The central part of the dissertation is the presentation of the most important results of the conservation examinations, starting from the features visible to the naked eye and getting to know the deeper layers.

The most important finding of the dissertation is that the accurate documentation of the surface characteristics of the genuine works and their special photo technical examination, as well as the mapping of the layer structure of the painting are effective tools for detecting 19th and 20th century forgeries. The identification of the materials that make up the paintings was pushed into the background in this research, for the examination of the painter's preferred methods and painting techniques proved to be much more effective. Understanding and accurate documentation of the individual solutions that can be linked to the artist can be effective points of reference when determining authenticity. The comparative examination of the authentic paintings and the works of dubious origin is presented in the doctoral dissertation through specific examples. The aim of the documentation system prepared as part

of the dissertation is to organize the huge amount of data collected during the research into a transparent, easy-to-understand form. The content of the examination documentations would form the basis of the database, which will contain the information obtained from the genuine works of the often forged Hungarian painters.

### **The author's publication and presentation on the topic**

**2019 - A study from the volume of studies by the National Intellectual Property Office (SZTNH) under the auspices of the National Institute of Criminology (ORKI) and the Kieselbach Gallery, Art Forgery through the Hungarian Eye – Wheat from the Chaff**

Editors: Dr. Miklós Bendzsel, Dr. Péter Emőd, Dr. Gabriella Kármán

#### Title of the study:

Art Conservation Examination of Vilmos Aba-Novák's Paintings and Its Role in the Identification of Forged Artwork

**November 23, 2016 - National Anti-Forgery Board - Hungarian University of Fine Arts  
VIII. Examination of Works of Art by Scientific Methods II.**

#### The topic of the presentation:

Genuine or fake? Possibilities of Detecting Forgeries in Conservation Practice