

## THE HIDDEN TRUTHS

*On April 27th 1861, Giovanni Morelli, great art historian, met in Bologna his colleague Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle.*

*In that same city, 136 years later, one of the most fascinating adventures of modern art began.*

*It was 1997.*

*I am speaking about the works on paper of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, Francis Bacon.*

*History, and particularly history of art, is sometimes characterized by almost incredible events, and my personal and professional story can only confirm it. It's no coincidence that I mentioned the meeting between two art historians.*

*They had the task of inventorying part of the artistic patrimony of our country, and from Bologna they started a trip together that ended on July 9th 1861.*

*Many years later also Umberto Guerini and Cristiano Lovatelli Ravarino started their trip around the world from Bologna.*

*The journalist Cristiano Lovatelli Ravarino was the beneficiary of the legacy of the so called "Italian drawings", a corpus of about 600 works –drawings, crayons, and collages- realized between 1977 and 1992, year of Bacon's death.*

*Cristiano left along with the lawyer Umberto Guerini for a juridical, physical and intellectual trip with the aim of studying, collecting and inventorying this extraordinary series of works.*

*The simple and strange above mentioned coincidences make me believe that there must be something beyond them which takes us straight towards the predestination, in the mocking game of the returning and methodic intersections that the time proposes us. It seems that we were given precise indications on where to address our researches and studies, indications that led us towards the same confluent directions.*

*I have mentioned Morelli, the painting anatomist, on purpose, as his survey and attribution method is strongly present in this story.*

*In fact one of the aim of his methodological analysis, which all of the drawings were submitted to, (like all the works studied by Morelli) is the certain attribution, beyond any reasonable doubts.*

*Let's now go step by step.*

*When I was asked to take care of the "secret drawings", I immediately expressed my perplexities about their authenticity (before seeing them) because I knew that Bacon, according to Marlborough Gallery, the reference Gallery of the artist at that time had never drawn (David Sylvester, historical apologist, and the Maestro shared that thesis as well).*

*Even if I had never been fully convinced about the above thesis, I still expressed my perplexities about the drawings authenticity, as I didn't know the Irish artist well enough to motivate a disagreement.*

*I soon learnt that my friend Umberto Guerini had already shown the same uncertainties back in 1997.*

*We are both deeply convinced, each one in our own specific professional competencies, that facts must be reconstructed without any reasonable doubts: in dubio abstine.*

*When I first saw some of these drawings (I think it was in Guerini's studio in Bologna) all my perplexities disappeared.*

*I can still remember the astonishment and the emotion I felt in that moment.*

*I had the same exact feelings on the occasion of the anthological there was in Milano at Palazzo Reale in 2008.*

*There is an emotional intelligence as well as an emotional knowledge, which come before academic studies and personal experience when approaching a work of art.*

*The accumulation of images that stratify in the memory, after years spent visiting museums and exhibitions and studying texts, creates and sharpens those immediate, sensitive predispositions that lead to the first judgment.*

*They can't be considered certain and evident considerations, but they represent the necessary viaticum for future developments and achievements.*

*Since 1997, the path has been twofold. On the one hand lots of elements were collected to demonstrate that Bacon used to draw. On the other lots of evidences were researched in order to confirm it and authenticate the drawings.*

*The question that came up naturally since the very beginning was: "What naïve counterfeiters could possibly think of realizing 600 works on paper, if all the artistic community is fully aware that Bacon had never drawn?" The answer was pretty obvious: "Nobody!"*

*It's important to remember that in 1981 (Bacon being still alive), thirty of these drawings were exhibited at Nanni Gallery of Bologna. The echo of that exhibition arrived even in London, but nobody ever made any complaints!*

*I won't tell about all the turns of events and developments that have characterized these last sixteen years.*

*Many books that will come out in 2013/14, have already dealt with these topics. They will finally stop and silence all the attempts of speculating and discrediting and will give the objective evidences of the authenticity of these works as well.*

*These books will offer testimonial, sworn and filmed evidences of people who were in constant contact with the Maestro, as long as scientific evidences deriving from taxonomic studies about every single work.*

*By my side, I really want to make some considerations about a very important topic for modern art in this moment; that is the recognition of authenticity of a dead artist's work.*

*More and more contemporary artists have been certifying and ordering all their works on time lately. This should avoid any kind of post mortem instrumentalization or dispute.*

*I cannot but notice though, that, even if the "secolo breve" (short century) was characterized by very important scientific and technological discoveries, there are evident and inexplicable "holes" or "lacks" in the field of modern art. This fact is not due to the absence of adequate examination techniques, but to the fact that a critical, historical/comparative approach keeps prevailing over more scientific techniques. The reasons why this method is still preferred are neither comprehensible nor explained, at least in most of the cases. We can accept only partially the high cost of scientific studies over the work of art (really very high), as a motivation. We cannot absolutely accept though, that extremely valuable works of art are not examined and evaluated thoroughly with more precise and multidisciplinary methods. It seems that the higher the attributed value to a work, the less this work is scientifically examined. Or better, almost always the owner is charged with the expenses of these often very complicated and expensive procedures. Finally, it's not said that, despite a strict and conclusive reply of the studies, the "infallible" and "untouchable" evaluating committees will give a positive opinion about a work authentication. It is a sort of clash with a very difficult composition. On the one hand there are the critics perched on stubbornly extremist positions, on the other the collectors who, with the same stubborn obstinacy, keep fighting their battles as Don Chisciotte!*

*In addition to this, there is the proliferation of the expressive means: photographs, videos, serigraphs and other different materials. It is certain though, that at least for the painting and the most traditional supports, all the parties should agree on the right multidisciplinary contribution when determining a work authenticity. Whether we like it or not, we are able to get to certain results, or to results with a margin of error close to zero, thanks to the tools and methods we have today. In the case of Bacon drawings the prejudice, the belief, the myth that the artist worked directly on canvas without drawing, have prevented (deliberately?) the truth from coming out.*

*The above prejudices, the ignorance and the scepticism may have (paradoxically) contributed to start the first researches on the Italian drawings.*

*As far as I know such complex and deep methodologies have never been employed before in modern art (except for the antique artefact).*

*“Morelli method”, that is still widely recognized as the only way of analysing a work of art, is no longer adequate at least for one reason. In the second part of ‘800, the market of art didn’t exist, or better it wasn’t a “structured” market. At that time the artistic creation was still commissioned by nobles or religious.*

*A real market started to develop only around the end of ‘800, with the advent of industrialization and of the middle class; only at this point problems regarding the attribution of authenticity started to rise. I don’t disagree with Morelli comparative method, on the contrary I think it’s still a good one, but I strongly believe that it cannot be carried out without a scientific approach as well. It would be as if we stubbornly continued to move around by carriage, knowing that there are other faster and more efficient means of transport!*

*“Every work of art is child of its time”: these were the first words of one of the most famous art essays of the last century, “On the spiritual in art”, of Vassilij Kandinskij. If we agree that art (if it is real art) can only represent its time, we must also agree on the fact that the methods we use to analyse and study it must be continuously updated and adjusted.*

*The risks of a prevalence of the market, of an excess of marketing and financialisation over the creative aspect are more and more evident in this period. Bacon, who has become the most expensive artists of the world, makes no exceptions.*

*Allowing that only one or two experts in the whole world decide about the authenticity of a work of art may create some doubts.*

*Moreover, if they only use Morelli method, the whole evaluating process can be criticized and, as a consequence, the results of the study itself can be discussed.*

*If then, the experts sceptically refuse the scientific approach (objective and unquestionable), they confirm and corroborate the above doubts.*

*It’s no coincidence that, in these last years, litigations among collectors and “evaluating committees” or “archives” have exponentially increased, and it cannot be coincidence either that these “committees” keep changing and alternating. It seems, in every respect, “an escape from the truth”. This last topic is another very important one, I would say central in these times. Not only in art.*

*One of the distinctive traits of our contemporaneity is the transformation of the truth into lie, or, if you prefer, vice versa.*

*The market and marketing are the most suspected to have led to this paradoxical overturning along with the prevailing of the market “moloch” and the excess of a sophisticated communication.*

*I cannot forget, as an economist, an enlightening essay (written way before the Lehman-Brothers bankruptcy) of John Kenneth Galbraith, “The economy of fraud”, and, as an art consultant, the reactionary and very sharp essay of Jean Baudrillard, “The Conspiracy of art”. I cannot even forget the prophetic and visionary foreshadowing (written as a fairy tale) of Hans Christian Andersen, dated 1839, regarding what would happen to the art of these last decades.*

*The story is well known. Two swindlers convinced a shabby and naïve king to be able to make clothes using fabric with extraordinary qualities: whomever wore those clothes would become invisible to those men who were not up to their office, or were hopelessly stupid: a real miracle!*

*It is by all means the very first marketing operation ante litteram.*

*Art has become exactly as that artefact. A product aimed at a few elected ones who refuse to be part of the “mass”, the ordinary people. All this is made even more ingenious by another aspect that is the fundamental trait of the advertising offer: the ability of convincing the mass to have the chance to be part of the exclusive world of the few elected ones.*

*This concept has been theorized and academically systematized, becoming a pseudo-science.*

*It developed at first in USA in the mid 50's (when New York became the leading centre of the art market) and has lately become more and more extreme and effective. It was inevitable that, at the beginning of the 90s, the big advertiser Charles Saatchi, entered the art market, at first as a collector then as a gallerist.*

*It is also paradoxical that in 2011 Saatchi hurled at the art world defining it (I'm quoting) "gross and superficial"!*

*We are tempted to think that this could have been another, oversophisticated advertising strategy to attract attention by creating a debate.*

*This is also a moment in which art galleries manage auctions and auction houses become art galleries owners.*

*It's evident that there's an inextricable bundle of conflicting interests.*

*In such a situation, raising the problem of the "truth" risks to become a sort of anachronistic nonsense. Still, there must be the tight part of the funnel, a no return point. At that very point, the truth will be "loudly" and "incidentally" unveiled, the king will be naked (even if he will have been naked for a while by then) and everybody will be able to "see again", thanks to a naïve (and for this reason pure) child.*

*In all these years, Guerini's work has been characterized by a tenacious, tireless and patient research of the objective truth; all the other professionals involved in this affair, me included, share his same method and objectives.*

*In the first months of 2013, I assisted a lot of "unveiling", as if these truths, hidden for too long a time, had suddenly become urgency.*

*In this period, many people involved for different reasons with Bacon's life, have felt the urge to externalize and tell anecdotes that confirmed not only that the Maestro drew much, but also that Cristiano Ravarino's drawings are, without any doubts Francis Bacon's.*

*All this has been confirmed by an objective scientific analysis.*

*Whoever loves art will necessarily be involved in this beautiful and also painful story.*

*Those who had the responsibility of living it personally have the deep awareness that the History of Art must be necessarily rewritten.*

*Somebody, years ago, affirming that Bacon (he may have been a blameless accomplice) didn't use to draw, had magnified his myth.*

*I don't think the myth will be scratched by the revealed certainty that he did used to draw. In the Will left in 1988, Bacon himself claimed he used to draw, against everything and everybody.*

*I am convinced that the art experts have received a huge inheritance to study in the years to come.*

*History of art cannot procrastinate any longer the ascertainment of the truth.*

*It's a mandatory act owed to Francis Bacon.*

*Alberto Mariani*

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*He has been Art Advisor and Independent Curator since 2002.*