FINGERPRINT

Innovative Visual Data Management for Collections of Prints and Drawings

DURATION 15/12/2015 - 15/03/2020 BUDGET **486 297 €**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

FINGERPRINT is an interdisciplinary project, involving art history, art technical research, digital imaging, image processing, conservation science and collection- and data management. The aim is to monitor and evaluate with advanced digital imaging, statistical processing and laboratory analyses the phases of the genesis of a print, from the unique preparatory drawings over proof impressions to later states and editions.

Until today art historical research on prints and drawings depends for the largest part on traditional art historical methods based on observation with the naked eye and on the subjective memory and knowledge of connoisseurs. The aim of this project is to develop tools to automatically perform an objective artifact analysis, and software to visualize, compare and order large numbers of complex visual and material data.

The graphic works of Pieter Bruegel the Elder (ca. 1520-1569) kept at the Royal Library of Belgium forms a test case for this project. Because of the size and importance of the Brussels collections - which contains apart from two extremely rare preparatory drawings by Bruegel a complete overview of Bruegel's printed output, often in many different states and editions dating from the mid-16th to the 18th century - it forms an ideal basis for gathering the research data and developing and implementing the new tools and techniques.

They will be designed to gather and threat the data in order to answer specific questions regarding the prints and drawings from this corpus. The questions are not only regarding aspects of collection management, technical art history and conservation science but will focus also on the production, distribution and consumption history of the artefacts in this corpus.

The research starts with the identification and selection of a corpus of drawings and prints, within the oeuvre of Bruegel. A detailed investigation of historical materials and techniques will be developed, using imaging techniques as High Resolution Imaging (Phase One), Imaging with the Portable Light Dome and Multi Spectral Imaging (MSI) and analytical techniques to define ink characteristics (XRF). For the identification of changes in printed lines, "Automated Objective Quality Measure" will be developed. The characteristics of each print in the corpus will be assessed in a survey, using visual and analytical techniques. The final aim is the development of a matrix for evaluation of a corpus of drawings and prints. The outcomes of the matrix will be compared with the observations of traditional connoisseurship.

The resulting data and conclusions will be published in an open-source database linked to the online public access collection database of the Royal Library of Belgium. The generated data will be further deepened and placed in context with art historical research on the edition history of Bruegel's prints. Apart from historical sources and documents this research will also make use of our deepened material and technical knowledge of the corpus.

It is to be expected that the research results (data and tools) will offer new insights for art historical and conservation research. First of all in the field of the selected corpus, but also in a larger sense on the history of printmaking, production, distribution and consumption. The tools and the gathered data can offer us more precise insights in the appreciation history of the artefacts and can shed new light on historical restoration and conservation methods. The data of the material condition of the artefacts can form an important guideline in decision making in the field of storage conditions, accessibility, loan and exhibition. It is to be expected that the developed tools and methods can be used to make detailed condition reports.



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The tools and methods developed in this project can be applied to other corpuses of drawings and prints. They will be made available for the international scholarly and scientific community via the online catalogue of the KBR and the websites of the partners. The research results will be published in international scientific and scholarly journals and in proceedings of study days and conferences. The new insights on the work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder will also be communicated to a larger public in exhibitions such as 'Pieter Bruegel the Elder' (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 2-10-2018 to 13-1-2019) and 'Bruegel in Black and White' (Brussels, KBR, 15-10-2019 to 15-2-2020) and into its accompanying catalogue. Intermediate results will also be presented during study days and conferences such as 'The Bruegel Success Story' Symposium XXI for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting' (Brussels, KIKIRPA, 12&13-10-2018) and 'The Hand of the Master. Materials and Techniques of Pieter Bruegel the Elder' (Wenen, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 6-8 december 2018).

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LINKS

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