

Materials and techniques of Jef Van der Veken Imitator of early netherlandish painting of the 15th and 16th centuries

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Jef Van der Veken (born in Antwerp 1872, died in Brussels 1964) was considered during his lifetime to be one of the most talented restorers of Netherlandish painting of the 15th and 16th centuries in Belgium, but he also made copies and forgeries in the style of the old Flemish masters. Van der Veken is the author not only of a copy of one of the panels of the Van Eycks' Ghent altarpiece the *Mystic Lamb*, but also of many fakes and pastiches of Early Netherlandish master to be found in museums and in private collections over the world. The perfection of the imitation meant that they were considered to be authentic works by the Old Masters. Today these attributions have in many cases been refuted on the basis of professional art-historical and laboratory investigations. Laboratory studies of the works produced by Van der Veken help not only to confirm unequivocally the modernity of a work on the basis of the identification of modern pigments, and also to answer the question about his techniques, enabled him to deceive the experienced experts' eyes. The non-destructives and non-invasive analytical methods are adequate and already sufficient to discover the forgery, but in many cases, particularly on the paintings produced before First World War, when his business was very flourishing, it is necessary to go further with micro-destructives analysis.

Actually, after the war Jef Van der Veken was pushed to change the strategy of his dishonest business, not only because international trade of works of art strongly decreased, but also because already in 1911 he had been black-listed as a forger in the then confidential publication of the union of museum conservators. His new strategy consisted in "hyper-restoration" of old paintings of low quality and commercial value. After removing the old paint layer, he created a new "chef-d'oeuvre" on the ancient support and its original preparatory layers.

He also perfected continuously his fakes. His knowledge about the ancient techniques and materials was considerable. In his role of restorer, he studied the technique of such famous Flemish painters as Van Eyck, van Weyden or Memling. This allowed him to perfect the methods for imitating the style of these masters.

Modern non-invasive analytical techniques often allow quite easily to discover the forgery, but to understand Van der Veken's techniques it is sometimes necessary to carry out the analysis the micro-samples. The case studies of several paintings of Vander Veken will be explained and the results of the various methods which were used for these studies be presented and discussed with the participants.