

Signatures on Artwork

The Phenomena of Signatures are so vast that it took quite some time to highlight it here in relevance to Queen Catherine Howard in Stained Glass.

So.....

The basic of all we do is surviving. In our society, surviving means Money, if we like it or not. That counts for everyone, including artists. If an artist cannot sell his work, another source of income is a necessity. See; Vincent van Gogh.

To sell Art, it must have a function; being furniture or household items like vases, tableware or kitchen items. The value can also be solely decorative as sculptures, paintings and drawings.

As our population was growing over the centuries the production of these items increased as well. Craftsmen formed Guilds to secure their markets and stabilize their income. Being part of a collective there was no need to individualize an object with a clear visible signature.

But fraud, dishonesty and greed are as old as mankind and to secure the authenticity of one's work, using hidden hallmarks were quite useful. It seems that Leonardo painted a minuscule L and V as probable secret initials in the Mona Lisa's left eye.

Up until the late sixteenth century, the sheer lack of regular signatures, kept the artists unknown.

For time sake, I will focus on paintings only. Holland's Golden Age was from the late 16th Century till the late 17th Century. In that period the popularity of paintings for house decoration became so great that it is estimated that between 5 and 10 million paintings were produced. (Ref. 31 page 11).

Obviously the bulk was inferior and cheap. Everybody with a keen eye for color and proportion and with the help of a couple of guilders for a painter's chest could be painting away as an artist. But to distinguish from this heap it was a necessity for well known and well paid painters to authenticate their work with clear visible signatures.

In that respect, Stained Glass, on one hand, is similar to paintings as a decorative item, on the other hand it is completely different in respect to production. The production of the glass itself, up to the 18th Century, was prohibitive. It is easy to see that the Stained Glass artists did not worry about copying of their work. In their time, the few were well known.

However, exceptions exist. In Fritz Geiges book: Der alte Fensterschmuck des Freiburger Münsters. It shows on page 84 two images of Hans Holbein the Elder's name/signature. Not to forget that Tiffany also signed his stained glass masterpieces but that is end 19th Century. In my research, I did not find any study about hidden hallmarks in Stained Glass

Dirck Crabeth and his brother Wouter were the creators of the most significant stained glass windows of the St Jan's Church in the Dutch City of Gouda. Correct, from the cheese! Dirck never signed his work, just no need.

Here a related detour: The images of the windows of the St Jan's were first drafted on paper at a one to one scale. These strips of heavy paper are only between 2 to 3 ft wide but are very long, some are over 20 ft. They are called "Cartons" and still exist in the church archives. Not interested yet? Hold on:

Window no. 7 is among the largest and is almost 20 meter (65') high. That is Hugh! The 30 cartons are 72 cm (29") wide and varying in length from 253 cm (8'3") to 432 cm (14'2").

Total surface of all 415 cartons in the church archive is 1159 sq.m. (12,475 sq.ft. or more than 4 tennis courts) and the cartons have a combined total length of 1.8 km (1.2 miles or 5900 ft). And that was dating back 500 years.

The reason that I bring up window 7 from the Cathedral of Gouda is the mere fact that it is majestic, mind boggling large and beautiful. In the course of my ten years research journey through the Continent of Stained Glass, the Crabeth brothers are among my top favorites. To say that I have studied and observed thousands of Paintings, Drawings and Stained Glass images is not exaggerating, not to mention the innumerable books, notes, magazines and articles.

My fellow Researchers will agree that a lot of the stuff is ultimately boring but that just once-in-a-while the "Wait-a-minute----", makes it all worthwhile. Probably about two years ago, when scouting stained Glass for signatures and hallmarks, I had that "Aha Erlebniss---".

Hans Holbein the ELDER was the creator of the three magnificent windows of the Moratorium from the Cathedral of Eichstatt. While looking closely at the "Schutzmantel Madonna", it suddenly dawned on me that the image is perfectly balanced. The symbolism of Maria with her cape wide open gives an eerie feel but almost unnoticeable is the fact that you don't see the CAME (lead strips). Of course the came is there but it does not partake in the essence of the image. That disappearance, let's call it CAMELOSS.

From that moment on I have looked with a different perception at all Stained Glass and must admit that only a few have that magic. The "Letstes Gericht" has it even stronger but it is more dispersed, may be because the image is divided in different scenes. The last one, "Kreuzigung Christy" is probably the strongest but feels overwhelmed by a deep Cold.

Back to Gouda. As imposing and beautiful as window 7 is, Cameloss is just not there, at least, I do not experience it. But a word of caution is in place: In the gallery, "King Henry VIII in Stained Glass" is so severely damaged by weathering and breakage that restoration involved a multitude of extra came strips. It is not fair to judge it on Cameloss. The same is correct for many other stained Glass windows.

That does not diminish the fact that Old Masters like Hans Holbein the Elder did have the ability to perform the magic of Cameloss as well as his son did with Queen Catherine Howard in Stained Glass.

Just cannot help it but after having read this you will never look at Stained Glass as you did before. But just Enjoy

Stay Safe,

Caretaker.