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**April 3, 2007**

# Provenance Still Unclear, Possible Pollocks Have Been Sold

By **RANDY KENNEDY**

An announcement two years ago of the discovery of a trove of small drip paintings thought to be the work of Jackson Pollock set off an uproar in the world of art scholarship that has yet to die down. The paintings have been scrutinized by connoisseurs, been subjected to computerized pattern tests, undergone chemical analysis at Harvard and elsewhere, and deeply divided a group of once-united Pollock experts.

Now questions about their authenticity may begin reverberating in the art market too. The man who found the paintings, Alex Matter -- the son of Herbert and Mercedes Matter, close friends of Pollock -- has quietly sold some of them, though he had generally maintained in interviews that he was not interested in profiting from their discovery.

He has never publicly disclosed selling any of the works -- 32 in all, including some ephemera and works on paper. Twenty-five paintings are scheduled to appear on Sept. 1 at an exhibition at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College and will be the subject of an exhibition catalog featuring new scholarship by Ellen G. Landau, one of the world's leading Pollock experts. She has said she believes the works are genuine, though recent scientific tests have begun to suggest that they are not.

Information about the sales came to light recently through the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, which guards the legacies of the artist and of his wife, the painter Lee Krasner. The foundation's chairman, Charles Bergman, was told by the SoHo gallery owner Ronald Feldman at a lunch in January 2006 that he had bought an unspecified number of the paintings outright and owned some jointly with Mr. Matter, according to the foundation's lawyer, Ronald Spencer. Mr. Spencer added that the foundation believes other paintings may have been sold to two other collectors or dealers.

Through a receptionist at his gallery, Mr. Feldman declined to comment about the paintings. It is unclear how much he paid for them; it is also unclear if he still owns any of them or whether he has sold any to collectors. Mr. Matter, who is recuperating from surgery, referred questions about the paintings to his lawyer, Jeremy Epstein, who said he was aware only that Mr. Feldman had been serving as an adviser to Mr. Matter.

"I don't know what his financial interest is," Mr. Epstein said of Mr. Feldman.

The foundation gave The New York Times a letter Mr. Bergman received shortly after the 2006 lunch, in which Mr. Feldman referred to the "rapidly mounting evidence and ever growing consensus that the paintings found by Alex Matter are indeed works by Jackson Pollock."

In the letter Mr. Feldman went on to express concern that the foundation might be acting in a "prejudicial manner" toward the works. He wrote that a "controversial cloud" hung over the paintings, but that the foundation could "help Alex Matter 'correct the record' by publicly reaffirming that the foundation is simply awaiting the outcome of a consensus which is currently being formed by the experts."

In a letter of response Mr. Bergman disagreed strongly with Mr. Feldman, writing that the foundation, based on evidence it had seen up to that point, found "good reasons for profound doubts about these works." And for that reason, he explained in his letter, the foundation had decided not to give copyright permission to Mr. Matter or Mr. Feldman to use any images of authentic Pollock works to accompany an exhibition or catalog of the newly discovered paintings.

The foundation, which was formed in 1985 primarily to give grants to artists, has become deeply involved over the last several months in trying to determine for itself whether Mr. Matter's paintings are authentic. It is a question that foundation officials said they believed was important because of the sheer number of works involved.

An analysis by Harvard's art museums of three of the paintings, conducted with Mr. Matter's permission and released in January, found that some pigments used in the paintings were not patented or commercially available until long after Pollock died in 1956. Mr. Matter and Dr. Landau have questioned the conclusions of the study.

Recently the foundation learned that Mr. Matter had commissioned a forensic scientist, James Martin, in Williamstown, Mass., to conduct an extensive chemical analysis of many more of the paintings. But Mr. Martin has yet to release the results of the study, completed last fall. In a February article about the paintings in The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Mr. Martin said he had decided not to release the results after being threatened with legal action by Mr. Matter's lawyer, Mr. Epstein.

The foundation said it believed that Mr. Feldman was also involved in seeking to prevent the release of the report. This, it said, is what motivated it to release his letter to Mr. Bergman and to speak publicly for the first time about Mr. Feldman's statements that he owned some of the paintings.

Mr. Martin, reached yesterday, declined to comment about his study. Mr. Epstein denied that he had ever threatened Mr. Martin with legal action but did say that he had told Mr. Martin he was not authorized to release the report because Mr. Matter did not feel that it was complete.

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**February 4, 2007**  
**DRIP WARS**

## **A Pollock, in the Eyes of Art and Science**

By **RANDY KENNEDY**

THE disciplines of art history and connoisseurship tend to conjure up images of hushed galleries, towering library stacks and an almost priestly corps of experts equipped not only with the knowledge of centuries but also with “the eye,” a sixth sense of whether a canvas is a Rembrandt or just an attractive also-ran.

But increasingly, other things might be included in this tableau — electron microscopes, infrared spectrometers, radiocarbon dating, X-ray fluorescence technology first developed for the Mars Pathfinder and teams of white-coated people with mechanical engineering or physics doctorates poring over artwork.

Modern science employed in the cause of art world detective work is not exactly new; it was pioneered by scholars like Edward Forbes at [Harvard](#) beginning as early as the 1920s. But advances in technology and a growing desire among scientists to delve into art and conservation questions have made it a much more prominent part of the field in the last decade. And as this has happened, a clash of cultures between two very different worlds — hard science and the more subjective, individualistic traditions of the art scholar — has come into sharp relief.

The differences are particularly pronounced in the commercial art world, where tens of millions of dollars can hang on decisions about a painting’s authenticity. Probably no case in recent memory has highlighted this clash more than the mystery surrounding a group of 32 paintings and other pieces that Alex Matter, the son of the photographer Herbert Matter, said he found in 2002 among his father’s possessions in a Long Island storage locker. Inside a dusty brown wrapper with handwriting saying, “Jackson experimental works (gift & purchase)” and “Pollock (1946-49),” the paintings were in the unmistakably drippy, droppy, swirling style of [Jackson Pollock](#), a close friend of the elder Matter’s.

Ellen Landau, a well-regarded Pollock scholar, once served on a board whose job was to sort out numerous fakes from genuine Pollocks. Using little more than her eyes and her extensive knowledge of the artist’s work, she said she believed the paintings were authentic. But her pronouncement, one that might have been accepted as something close to gospel only a few decades ago, especially given the close friendship between Pollock and Matter, proved but an opening salvo in a public battle over who painted the works.

On Monday, the Harvard University Art Museums released a long-anticipated scientific study, performed with the cooperation of Alex Matter, of the chemical properties of three of the paintings, finding that some paints and pigments used in the works were not patented and probably not available until long after Pollock died in 1956. Alex Matter and Dr. Landau, who has conducted extensive research into the

connections between Herbert Matter and Pollock, have questioned some of the findings, and Mr. Matter stressed in a statement that he believes “the authentication of works of art is still more art than science.”

The team at Harvard responded the way that scientists generally do: by saying that there is no arguing with science. Drawing an analogy to what he said were Bush administration efforts to suppress [NASA](#) information about [global warming](#) because it was politically unpalatable, Narayan Khandekar, a conservation scientist at Harvard, said in an interview that he and others who conducted the study were “absolutely sure” of their results and that quibbles about what they found struck him as disingenuous.

“I think it’s very much dismissing information because it’s inconvenient for their arguments,” he said, adding that such an approach to scholarly debate is “a little like [Stephen Colbert](#)’s concept of truthiness, where you’re almost there but you don’t have the whole thing.”

Dr. Landau said she did not reject science reflexively over her own experience, but added that she simply cannot reconcile the study’s findings with the other information she has collected, like a handwriting study that confirms the notes on the package were in Herbert Matter’s hands and evidence that the paintings had been corrected and retouched in a method that Pollock employed.

“I can’t construct an alternate scenario that makes any sense,” she said. “Science might not be wrong, but the research behind it might not be a 100 percent correct. And so more research needs to be done.”

In the wider art world, traditional scholarship is beginning to accommodate science a little more willingly. But some experts say the friction between the two is not only about turf wars but also about fundamental differences in culture. In a 2005 discussion sponsored by the Getty Trust, Richard Stone, senior conservator at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), argued that part of the problem was that “art historians basically do not collaborate” while science demands it.

“Collaboration is regarded by many in the humanities as equivalent to playing tennis with the net down, somehow an unsporting activity,” Mr. Stone said.

In the case of the possibly Pollock mystery paintings, whether science and the trained “eye” of connoisseurship will ever see eye to eye remains uncertain, at least as far as Dr. Landau is concerned. “Ultimately I don’t know what’s going to happen,” she said. “Maybe it’s going to end up being a big mystery, you know? ‘C.S.I. Pollock.’ ”

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January 30, 2007

## Harvard Analysis Casts Doubt on Works Said to Be Pollocks

By RANDY KENNEDY

A yearlong scientific analysis by the Harvard University Art Museums of three paintings discovered in 2003 and considered to be possible works by Jackson Pollock has found that some of the pigments used in the paints were not patented or commercially available until long after Pollock died in 1956.

The examination of the chemical makeup of the paintings -- conducted with the consent of Alex Matter, who found the works among the possessions of his late father, Herbert, a close friend of Pollock's -- does not conclusively end the debate over whether Pollock had a hand in the works.

But the findings cast doubt on that possibility. And they suggest that at the very least, the paintings, taken from a cache of 32 works found by Mr. Matter in a Long Island storage bin, may have been substantially added to or altered after Pollock's death.

In the case of one of the three paintings, which is dominated by bright orange drips and splashed curlicues, the analysis found a pigment in the orange paint that was not available until 1971. That work and another of the three also contained substances within the paints that were "most likely" not available until 1962 or 1963, the report said. A third painting, which was badly damaged and heavily restored, was found to contain a brown paint that was developed in the early 1980s and did not come onto the market until 1986. (Herbert Matter died in 1984.)

To examine the paintings, Harvard relied on some of the latest technology to be trained on disputed works of art, including an electron microscope. Even before the analysis was complete, however, the paintings had been the subject of an intense scientific and scholarly debate.

After viewing the works, Ellen Landau, a professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland and one of the world's most respected Pollock scholars, decided that they were authentic and agreed to help with scholarship for an exhibition of them, now scheduled to open on Sept. 1 at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College.

But after Dr. Landau's role in supporting the works was announced in 2005, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, which had declined to enter into authentication disputes for almost a decade, became involved. It enlisted Eugene V. Thaw, a veteran art dealer, and Francis V. O'Connor, an art historian, who wrote the four-volume catalogue raisonné, or complete listing, of Pollock's work. Both scholars disagreed strongly with Dr. Landau, with whom they had previously served on a board that examined paintings to determine whether they were genuine.

In early 2006, a physicist at the University of Oregon also examined some of the paintings, using a computer to identify fractal patterns, which recur on finer and finer magnifications, like those of snowflakes. He determined that six of the paintings did not show the same patterns as those of indisputably authentic Pollock paintings that he had examined earlier.

But in December, two physicists published an article disputing those findings and questioning the use of fractals as a way of authenticating Pollock paintings.

The Harvard Art Museums said yesterday that no one involved in the examination of paintings would be available to comment until today. A statement posted last night on a Web site where Mr. Matter and Mark Borghi, a Manhattan art dealer, have promoted the discovery of the newly discovered paintings took issue with the Harvard findings.

It questioned the dating of some of the pigments and suggested that the use of varnish might have contaminated some results. The statement also noted that the pieces of blue-coated cardboard that were used for each of the three paintings were shown by carbon dating at Harvard to have been made before 1955, suggesting that they could have been used by Pollock.

"The authentication of works of art is still more art than science," the statement said. "Scientific analysis can attempt to eliminate a work of art as genuine, but it can't determine if it is indeed the work of any given artist. That has been, and remains, the job of the scholar."

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**November 15, 2006**

**MOVIE REVIEW | 'WHO THE \$#%& IS JACKSON POLLOCK?'**

## **One Feisty Woman Takes On the Art World**

**By STEPHEN HOLDEN**

"The art world is a 'through the looking glass' experience," declares Tod Volpe, a suave wheeler-dealer in Harry Moses' entertaining documentary "[Who the \\$#%& is Jackson Pollock?](#)" It is, he says, an environment of "illusory costumes and disguises by people who are masquerading."

"It's all about money," he adds. "It's a dog-eat-dog shark tank experience."

Mr. Volpe should know. He was a high-end art dealer who serviced the Hollywood elite until the bottom dropped out of the market and, strapped for cash, he sold paintings belonging to others. He ended up serving two years in prison for fraud. In the movie Mr. Volpe, back in business, is the prime mover for a group of beady-eyed investors working with Teri Horton, a former truck driver whose \$5 purchase of an unsigned painting that may or may not be a [Jackson Pollock](#) could reap them a fortune.

Ms. Horton, a salty, outspoken woman who lives in a trailer and whose hobby is rooting through Dumpsters in search of buried treasures, has less delicate words to describe the world beyond the looking glass: “The whole art world is a fraud.” And as she jumps through hoops trying to prove the authenticity of the canvas she purchased at the Dot Spot Thrift Shop in San Bernardino, Calif., now defunct, you are inclined to agree with her.

Ms. Horton, the farthest thing from an art-world aesthete, had never heard of Pollock when she purchased a canvas she describes as so ugly that she tried to give it away to a friend (“We were going to throw darts at it,” she recalls), but it wouldn’t fit through the door of her friend’s trailer. At a garage sale a local art teacher spotted the painting and suggested it might be a Pollock. Her curiosity whetted, Ms. Horton began calling Los Angeles art dealers. Her son, Bill Page, joined the search, which became a decade-long quest for validation of her purchase.

As this smart, hard-bitten woman with an eighth-grade education pursues her quest, the documentary portrays the debate between connoisseurship and science as a culture war. Among the connoisseurs who insist that a refined eye is the ultimate judge of authenticity is Thomas Hoving, the former director of the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) in New York, exuding contempt and superciliousness. He is the most outspoken in his rejection. Shown the painting, he dismisses it as “pretty, superficial and frivolous.”

Leading the scientific side is Peter Paul Biro , an equally self-satisfied forensic specialist from Canada who matches a fingerprint on the back of Ms. Horton’s painting to fingerprints found on a Pollock painting in Berlin and in Pollock’s former studio in East Hampton, N.Y. In a frivolous side trip, the film travels to England to consult John Myatt, one of the world’s most notorious art forgers, who also believes the work is not a Pollock.

As Mr. Volpe puts it: “The painting is like Heathcliff in ‘Wuthering Heights.’ He didn’t get his inheritance until he got a title.” Now and then, you wonder if the movie itself might be a public-relations maneuver preparatory to an auction.

By the end of the film, you have the unpleasant sense that the snobs have drawn their wagons into a circle to keep out hicks like Ms. Horton and her experts, and that these smooth-talking guardians of an insular world that enriches itself through a kind of legal insider trading are deeply threatened by the intrusions of forensic science. The movie calls into question the determination of provenance, in which a history of a painting’s ownership is used for certification.

Half buried in all this detective work is a sketchy biography of Ms. Horton, who grew up in the Ozarks without modern conveniences and at 18 married a man who took the children when the marriage ended three years later. She is quite a character. She turned down a \$2 million offer for the painting, no questions asked. And since the film was completed, she has also refused a \$9 million offer from Saudi Arabia. Authenticating the work, she says, is not a matter of money, but of principle.

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November 9, 2006

## Could Be A Pollock; Must Be A Yarn

By RANDY KENNEDY

After retiring from truck driving in 1987, Teri Horton devoted much of her time to bargain hunting around the Los Angeles area. Sometimes the bargains were discovered on Salvation Army shelves and sometimes, she willingly admits, at the bottom of Dumpsters.

Even the most stubborn deal scrounger probably would have been satisfied with the rate of return recently offered to her for a curiosity she snagged for \$5 in a San Bernardino thrift shop in the early 1990s. A buyer, said to be from Saudi Arabia, was willing to pay \$9 million for it, just under an 180 million percent increase on her original investment. Ms. Horton, a sandpaper-voiced woman with a hard-shell perm who lives in a mobile home in Costa Mesa and depends on her Social Security checks, turned him down without a second thought.

Ms. Horton's find is not exactly the kind that gets pulled from a steamer trunk on the "Antiques Roadshow." It is a dinner-table-size painting, crosshatched in the unmistakable drippy, streaky, swirly style that made Jackson Pollock one of the most famous artists of the last century. Ms. Horton had never heard of Pollock before buying the painting, but when an art teacher saw it and told her that it might be his work (and that it could fetch untold millions if it were), she launched herself on a single-minded post-retirement career -- enlisting, along the way, a forensic expert and a once-powerful art dealer -- to have her painting acknowledged as authentic by scholars and the art market.

She is still waiting, defiantly, for that recognition and the payoff it could bring. But as a kind of fringe benefit, her tenacity has made her into a minor celebrity, a pant-suited David flinging stones at the art world's increasingly wealthy Goliaths. Now it has also landed her the starring role in a documentary scheduled to open next week in New York and later around the country, called "Who the #\$% Is Jackson Pollock?" (When Ms. Horton asked this of her art teacher friend, the original question included a word that cannot be printed in this newspaper nor, apparently, blown up on movie marquees.)

The movie, directed by Harry Moses, a veteran television documentarian, was produced by him; Don Hewitt, the creator and former executive producer of "60 Minutes"; and his son, Steven Hewitt, a former top executive at Showtime. Mr. Moses said he first became aware of Ms. Horton's quest when he was approached by Tod Volpe, a high-flying art dealer who fell to earth, and landed himself in prison, in the late 1990s for defrauding several of his celebrity clients, including Jack Nicholson and Barbra Streisand.

Mr. Volpe, who has harbored dreams of breaking into movies, proposed collaborating with Mr. Moses on a 10-hour documentary mini-series about corruption in the art world, a subject he said he knew well. Mr. Moses said he thought the idea was too outlandish and that it would never sell in the American television market. But he was struck by Mr. Volpe's account of Ms. Horton, especially after learning that she, with the help of a Canadian art restorer named Peter Paul Biro, had found a fingerprint, in paint, on the back of her canvas and that Mr. Biro said he had matched the print to one he found later on a paint can in Pollock's Long Island studio, now maintained as a museum.

Mr. Moses approached Don and Steven Hewitt with the idea of a theatrical movie about Ms. Horton, something Mr. Moses had never tried. Both were interested, but the elder Mr. Hewitt said that the project hinged on whether Ms. Horton could, in essence, sell it.

"You can only make these things work," Mr. Hewitt said in an interview in the corner office he still maintains at CBS, "if you find people who are better at being themselves than an actor or actress would be at playing them. And I took one look at Teri and I said, 'My God, she's Elaine Stritch.' And she is. You couldn't do better than this lady."

Mr. Hewitt, who at 83 is still busily casting about for projects to forestall his retirement, then called Michael Lynne, the co-chairman of New Line Cinema, which was in the process of forming Picturehouse, a new division for art and independent-type movies. A deal was struck, and Ms. Horton became the unlikely leading lady for the division's first documentary.

The filmmakers were initially fascinated by the science-versus-art angle of Ms. Horton's story, about how forensics may be starting to nudge the entrenched tradition of connoisseurship from its perch in the world of art authentication. But as they spent more time with her, they began to see the movie as being about something more important than whether the painting was a real Pollock, a question left very much for the viewer to decide.

"It became, really, a story about class in America," Mr. Moses said. "It's a story of the art world looking down its collective nose at this woman with an eighth-grade education."

In the movie, which has the earnest feel of an extended "60 Minutes" segment, the filmmakers seek to place Ms. Horton, 74, fully within the grand tradition of stubborn, we-know-better folk heroes, somewhere between Will Rogers and Wrong Way Corrigan. She is arrayed against a formidable team of establishment skeptics, including Ben Heller, an early Pollock collector, and Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who examines the painting in somewhat dramatic fashion, tilting his head and almost touching his nose to the canvas before pronouncing it "dead on arrival." Later in the movie Mr. Hoving says that Ms. Horton has no right to be bitter about her treatment by the art world and adds sternly, when told that she would vehemently disagree: "She knows nothing. I'm an expert. She's not."

In Ms. Horton's campaign to publicize her battle, there are few places she has not tried. In 2004 she shared the bill on an "incredible but true" edition of "The Montel Williams Show" with a guest who had survived having a knife plunged into his skull and a boy who was once trapped inside an arcade game at a Piggy Wiggly store. She appeared on "The Tonight Show" with Jay Leno. This week, to promote the movie, she took a red-eye flight to New York to appear on David Letterman's "Late Show" alongside her painting, which will be accompanied at all times, she noted, by herself and two armed guards.

Interviewed over drinks in the back booth of a bar near her hotel on Tuesday, Ms. Horton was clearly having fun in her now-enlarged role as self-appointed scourge of high-dollar high culture, which she calls "the art-world conglomerate conspiracy." She said, though, that she remained completely confident that she would see herself vindicated, and that she would sell her painting at her price -- no less than \$50 million -- within her lifetime.

And if that does not happen? She clicked a long, lacquered fingernail on the tabletop. "Before I let them take advantage of me," she said, smiling broadly, "I'll burn that son of a bitch."