

THE MUSEUM EXPLORES

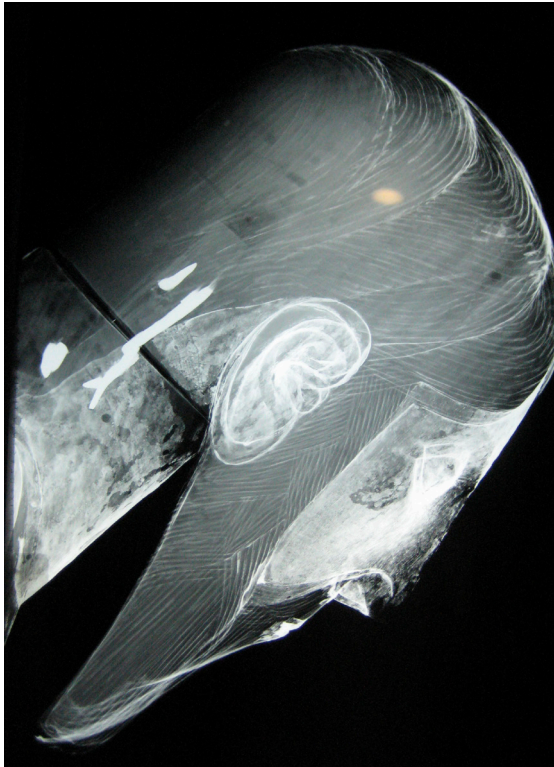
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Works of art under examination
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Press dossier



THE MUSEUM EXPLORES

Works of art under examination



From 23 November 2012 to 24 February 2013

Organised by: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

Curator: Mireia Mestre, head of the MNAC's Department of Restoration and Preventive Conservation

Sponsored by Agrolimen, BNP and HP and with the collaboration of Kremer and Pressing

Admission free

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Detail of the head of the *Batlló Majesty* under X-rays, showing the presence of metal staples.

***The Museum Explores. Works of art under examination* is an exhibition that brings together scientific and critical perspectives and, in an educational spirit, places the results of research before the public. The project takes us on a tour that unveils mysteries, unmaskes forgeries and adds to our understanding of some of the most important works in the MNAC's collections, shedding light on the work of interdisciplinary investigation that has been going on in the museum over the years, often in partnership with outside experts from different fields.**

This free exhibition looks at 32 cases and shows work from different periods that has been studied by the experts at the MNAC: paintings on wood, sculptures, paintings on canvas and various techniques on paper, photography and metalwork.

The show takes us into the world of investigation of works of art and reveals how a work can be analysed, identified or dated. It casts light on the clues that allow us to reconstruct the creative process and each artist's way of working. It also explains the essential elements that characterise a moment in art, an artist or the story behind a work, and helps dig up hidden aspects of some of the works in the MNAC's collection, such as the Batlló

Majesty, whose original polychrome has been revealed, the 1147 Christ, whose date was established thanks to a manuscript found in the back of the cross, or Joan Llimona's painting *Returning from the Plot*, applied over an earlier painting the artist wanted to conceal.

The original works are presented beside the images obtained using different types of radiation and with an explanation of the main scientific techniques that have been applied. The exhibition simply and instructively lays out the main methods of examination and analysis used in the study of the works on show.



Toma de muestra de san José de Arimatea del Paso procesional de Semana Santa de Damià Campeny.

Scientific exploration of the works

Museums today take advantage of the contributions made by scientific exploration of works and use resources that are ever more sensitive and sophisticated. In recent years, the restorers and scientists at the MNAC have exposed the museum's works to electromagnetic radiation with which materials can be characterised, penetrating the layers making them up to find out how the artist worked and what materials and what tools he used.

The exhibition shows us how the experts distinguish between an original, a copy, a fake and a hyper-restoration. Amongst other examples is the case of one of the three Eucharistic doves in the collection of Romanesque metalwork, which it has now been discovered couldn't be earlier than the 18th century.

We also learn how it is possible to reconstruct the different aspects some works have had during their lifetime as a result of their varying fortunes, the tastes of the time or the wishes of their owners. Thanks, for example, to the integral study of the *Batló Majesty*, it has been possible to make a virtual reconstruction of the decoration and the colour still present in many places beneath the polychrome that is visible today, which can be dated to between half a century and one century later than the original.

All these studies also indicate the state of conservation of the works and help to make a diagnosis and decide on the most suitable treatment. In the case of Pablo Gargallo's sculpture *The Violinist*, a work made from sheets of lead over a wooden core, with severe deterioration due to the incompatibility of these two materials, we have been able to assess the degree to which the lead has been affected. To look at the interior of *The Violinist*, neutron radiography was used, a non-destructive technique that can penetrate lead. This pioneer study in Catalonia and Spain was carried out at the Paul Scherrer Institute (Switzerland).

The tomograms obtained cast light on the sculptor's technique and meant we could map alterations and locate the areas of the interior that had been affected.

The exhibition is completed with works by contemporary artists that reflect on the artistic language, the condition and the fragility of art, the very notion of heritage, the obsession with the authenticity and originality of works, the fetish for the work of art as merchandise and fraud in the art world.

This project, which has a marked educational slant, pays special attention to families and offers an unguided tour for visiting the exhibition with children and discovering how artists work.

It is not always easy to track the path taken by a work of art from its creation until it leaves the artist's studio and begins a life of its own. Only through methodical, painstaking, systematic work can we make progress and improve our integral understanding and the conservation and interpretation of the heritage the museum preserves and makes public, in a process that is always open-ended and perfectible.



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Visiting times: Monday to Saturday, 10 am to 7 pm; Sundays and holidays, 10 am to 2.30 pm.
Mondays except holidays, closed

Place: Temporary exhibition room 1

Free app for tablets (iPad and Android)

In Catalan, Spanish and English

<https://itunes.apple.com/es/app/mnac-el-museu-explora/id579263644?mt=8>

Agrolimen



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