

Artists' Thumbprints to Identify Paintings

LIKE the climax of a fantastic detective story is the latest achievement of science in comparing fingerprints to identify as a real Da Vinci an age-worn canvas, recently bought by a New York collector of art.

The question whether a certain painting is the original work of a great master can now be determined absolutely, simply by examining the painting for fingerprints left on the canvas by the artist and comparing these with fingerprints found on paintings known to be originals. Signatures can and have been duplicated. Fingerprints cannot be forged.

When George T. Pearsons of New York last year acquired two rare old paintings, the restoration of one of them, believed to be of comparatively little worth, revealed qualities that at once identified it as the work of a master.

"From what I could judge," said Pearsons, "the painting was a Gianpetrino. But the restorer, who had worked on many famous old paintings, expressed to me in confidence the belief that it might be the work of Leonardo Da Vinci, one of the old masters.

"Finally, one day there came to my office Arthur Sowaal, fingerprint expert and artist. While he was talking to me, his attention suddenly became focused on the painting hanging in my office.

"Examining the canvas through a magnifying glass, he discovered that in the pigment of the painting appeared several fingerprints of an unusual nature. All of them were of the plain arch type—a fingerprint type characteristic of only five per cent of all persons who have recorded the swirling lines of their fingertips. And on all of them appeared two well defined scars.

"Then began a series of remarkable demonstrations of the accuracy of fingerprint records, which finally confirmed my painting as a real Da Vinci.

"Sowaal's first move was to photograph with his fingerprint camera all of the fingerprints he found on my canvas. These he deposited with me. Then he went to the New York Public Library and examined a score of enlarged photographic reproductions of the works of old masters. Finally, he obtained permission to photograph certain finger-marked sections of reproductions of Da Vinci paintings.



Arthur Sowaal, fingerprint expert photographing Da Vinci's thumbprints that proved the painting of Saint John to be a 400-year-old masterpiece, worth its weight in gold

"The fingerprints were calibrated with delicate instruments and compared with such care, that they proved the same hand executed all of them.

"For final, clinching evidence, the fingerprints on my painting were compared with those found on Da Vinci's 'Virgin of the Rocks' in the National Gallery, London.

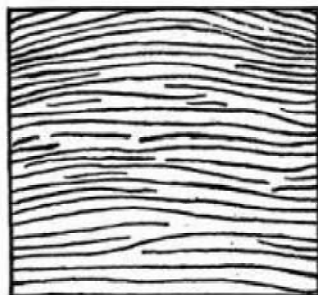
"Da Vinci, who was a sculptor as well as painter, used his left hand in painting and often obtained the desired result on his canvas by impressing his finger on the moist pigment. Often, his paintings show, he made a long, sweeping movement with

his right thumb to produce a shadow."

"The scar on the Da Vinci fingerprint is an elongated figure eight or double circle. The proof is molded in the paint and as long as the pictures exist, just so long will the evidence remain," says Sowaal.

There is other evidence, further substantiating Sowaal's findings. In 1510, Morelli, a contemporary of Da Vinci, pointed out to a group of friends that Da Vinci used his finger in painting. Further, it is recorded that when Da Vinci was urged to sign his masterpieces he proudly replied: "My marks are all over my work."

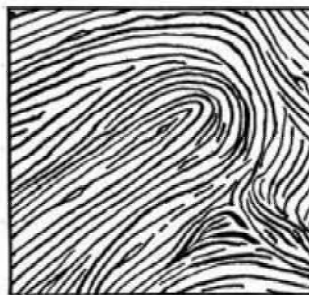
Which of These Types of Fingerprints Is Most Like Yours?



Da Vinci's fingerprint is of this rare arch type



Accidental type — another exceptional formation



The loop type includes 30 per cent of all fingerprints



Common whorl type—60 per cent of all fingerprints