

ARTE RITROVATA

Ritorni in laguna



Cultural Heritage recovered by the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit

Museo di Palazzo Grimani

19.12.2023 - 25.02.2024





Arte Ritrovata. Ritorni in Laguna

Museo di Palazzo Grimani

19 December 2023 - 25 February 2024



**MINISTERO
DELLA
CULTURA**

*Segretariato regionale per il Veneto
Direzione regionale Musei Veneto
Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle
arti e paesaggio per il Comune di
Venezia e Laguna*



**ISTITUTO ITALIANO
DI TECNOLOGIA
CENTER FOR CULTURAL
HERITAGE TECHNOLOGY**

Thank you to the Arma dei Carabinieri

Organizing Institutions

Ministry of Culture

This exhibition features over 15 works spanning from archaeological to historical-artistic fields, offering a unique opportunity to explore the phenomenon of falsification within the cultural heritage sector. This initiative is grounded on at least two interpretations, both of immediate relevance.

The first perspective is aimed at giving due recognition to the efforts of the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (TPC) in tackling the illicit removal of cultural assets. Recent news events have highlighted the significance of these functions, especially in addressing the alarming phenomenon of the depletion of the national heritage, a cause to which the General Command of the Carabinieri has always shown great dedication. It is worth noting that Italy was the world's first country to establish a dedicated police force to combat crimes related to cultural heritage.

The second viewpoint intends, instead, to underline the joint venture of the Ministry of Culture's territorial branches in its organisation. They collaborated at various levels to ensure the effectiveness and visibility of the exhibition.

Notably, the Direzione regionale Musei Veneto played a key role by managing state cultural sites in the Veneto Region and providing logistical support. They worked alongside the Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna, providing the artworks to put on display, previously recovered by the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit.

The Segretariato regionale per il Veneto coordinated and facilitated the necessary administrative procedures for all participating bodies.

Marta Mazza

Segretario Regionale del Ministero della Cultura per il Veneto

Daniele Ferrara

Direttore Regionale Musei Veneto

Fabrizio Magani

Soprintendente Archeologia belle arti e paesaggio per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna

Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage – Carabinieri Venice Unit

In the 1960s, Italy entrusted the care of its cultural heritage to the General Directorate of Antiquities and Fine Arts of the Ministry of Education. However, that period, marked by significant economic recovery, was characterised by the intensification of clandestine exports of stolen or illicitly excavated cultural artefacts to enrich museums and private collections around the world. Recognising the alarming phenomenon and the consequent perceptible risk of dispersion of the national cultural heritage, the Dicastery requested and obtained from the General Command of the Carabinieri the establishment of a group of officers primarily responsible for the protection of paleontological, archaeological, artistic, and national historical heritage. On May 3, 1969, the Artistic Heritage Protection Unit started its activities. In 1971, it was subsequently elevated to the status of Command of a Carabinieri Division. Thus, Italy became the first nation in the world to establish a dedicated police department for combating this specific criminal sector. This move preceded by one year the recommendation contained in the UNESCO Convention which was signed in Paris on November 14, 1970. In this convention, Member States were encouraged to adopt appropriate measures to prevent the acquisition of illicitly exported goods and promote the recovery of stolen ones. It also urged the establishment of

services staffed with specially trained personnel tasked with ensuring the respect and protection of art goods.

The activity of the Carabinieri TPC is characterised by its specific and unique *modus operandi*, often referred to as the 'Italian model'. In this approach, investigative actions are conducted in coordination with the Judiciary, maintaining constant communication with the Ministry of Culture, the primary entity responsible for the protection and valorisation of cultural heritage. Therefore, the Carabinieri TPC Command was pleased to accept the proposal of an exhibition by the Segretariato regionale per il Veneto, aimed to valorise both the recovered cultural goods and the investigative activities carried out by the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit that enriched the collections of the Direzione regionale Musei Veneto and that of the Museum of St. Mark's Basilica over the recent years.

The artworks on display at the Museo di Palazzo Grimani in Venice show just a few examples of the activities conducted by the Venice Unit, which has been dedicated to safeguarding cultural heritage since 1995.

Emanuele Meleleo

*Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit
Commander*

Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology (Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia)

The *Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology* (CCHT) of the Italian Institute of Technology (IIT) was founded in 2019 with the aim of promoting the development of new technologies for the analysis, conservation, and protection of cultural heritage. The research infrastructure is highly multi- and interdisciplinary: the Centre boasts a rich range of skills and experiences, from computational sciences to material sciences and the humanities. The integration of these fields allows us to carry out innovative and cutting-edge research. A distinctive feature of the Centre is the ability to dedicate itself to previously unexplored areas, with the goal of both implementing and improving existing technologies and creating innovative and effective tools capable of addressing problems inherent to cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

The Centre primarily focuses on the application of digitalisation, artificial intelligence, and satellite image analysis, as well as molecular sciences and nanotechnologies for cultural heritage.

Through a series of dedicated projects, including those funded by the European Commission, among which is the HE RITHMS project (GA 101073932) conducted in partnership with the Carabinieri TPC, the Centre is at the forefront of research aimed at combating

crimes against cultural property. In addition to developing innovative methodologies for the automatic analysis of remote sensing data to identify clandestine archaeological excavations and buried ancient structures, a second investigative line aims to use artificial intelligence to create advanced IT tools for identifying illicitly traded objects in the art market.

In conjunction with the diagnostic studies focused on characterising and protecting ancient materials, another research line aims to develop standardised analysis technologies for identifying forgeries, especially concerning coins, paintings, and glass artworks.

It fits perfectly within the Centre's mission to collaborate actively in the concept and design of the *Arte Ritrovata. Ritorni in Laguna* exhibition, which showcases recovered cultural goods and highlights the scientific and investigative work behind these recoveries.

Arianna Traviglia
CCHT Coordinator

ARTE RITROVATA

Ritorni in laguna

Therefore, most holy father, it must not be among the last thoughts of your holiness to take care that what little remains of this ancient mother of Italian glory and greatness [...] is not eradicated and ruined by the evil and ignorant: because unfortunately up until now, injuries have been done to those souls who, with their blood, gave birth to so much glory in the world.

Raffaello Sanzio, Letter to Pope Leo X, Rome 1519

Raffaello Sanzio's heartfelt words to Pope Leo X evoke the image of an architectural and artistic heritage, specifically that of ancient Rome, which had been impoverished over the centuries and had reached a precarious state of conservation at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The artist implores the pontiff to become its guardian, to prevent the ongoing devastation caused by barbarians and, subsequently, by those who exploit ancient buildings as material quarries. The awareness of the essential need to protect

our artistic heritage, a concept rooted in the Renaissance, transcends time and now reaches us.

The history of humanity is punctuated by instances of vandalism perpetrated against works of art and architecture – stolen from their integrity, context, or function – often reduced to fragments.

Not only is the physicality of these works affected, but so too are their meaning and identity.

Today, the illicit trafficking of cultural goods, a phenomenon driven by the pursuit of profit, significantly contributes to this mutilation. When stolen works of art or archaeological finds are placed on the market, stripped of any connection to their provenance, heritage loses its vital essence and becomes *nothing more than skeletal remains*, to borrow another prophetic expression from Raphael in the same letter.

This heritage belongs to all of us. It is the bond that unites us with past generations and guides us toward the future. It reflects our collective identity and shared history, and as such, it is the subject of protective actions by various state institutions.

The exhibition, titled *Arte Ritrovata. Ritorni in Laguna*, allows us to explore various episodes related to the recovery and restitution of cultural heritage. It highlights the commendable collaboration between the Carabinieri Command for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and various bodies of the Ministry of Culture. These organisations work diligently to identify, safeguard, and enhance works of art removed from national heritage, in this case with a special focus on the metropolitan area of Venice.

Organised by the Segretariato regionale per il Veneto of the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Direzione regionale Musei Veneto, the Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna, and the Italian Institute of Technology, this exhibition illustrates various case studies related to art crimes. These cases range from forgery to illicit export and from clandestine excavation to fraud.

The exhibition highlights the significant efforts in recovery, restitution, and protection made by the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit over the past few years. It also serves as an opportunity to understand the protection procedures implemented by the bodies of the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the Unit, including the enhancement of the recovered cultural goods within their original contexts or state-owned museums.

Arte Ritrovata. Ritorni in Laguna is a journey that underlines the dangers to cultural heritage, but, above all, the perseverance and dedication of those who tirelessly work to protect it, ensuring that it continues to inspire and enrich future generations.



Jacopo Sansovino, 1486-1570

Wooden inlays, mid-16th century

St. Mark's Basilica, Venice

Wood, 117 x 155 cm

In the heart of Venice, the magnificent complex of St. Mark's Basilica concealed, until the second half of the twentieth century, a treasure within a treasure. The presbytery was, in fact, adorned with splendid wooden panels – the inlays that you can admire in the video. These panels were the result of the extraordinary creative genius of Jacopo Sansovino, who, at the time, served as the *proto* (chief architect) for St. Mark's Basilica. The intricate inlay work was executed by the skilled hands of the craftsmen Antonio de' Grandi and Nicolò Zorzi.

These originally consisted of eight panels with a fir bottom and a walnut frame, measuring approximately 117 x 155 cm. They were inlaid with strips of various woods, including oak, cypress, maple, ebony, plane tree, alder, beech, pear, rosewood, and apple tree. Each piece is a masterwork, attesting to the artist's extraordinary craftsmanship that weaves precious woods into timeless images, telling stories of virtue and spirituality. These inlays, inserted into the wooden back screens of the presbytery, featured depictions of the

seven Virtues, symbols of faith in God and good governance, flanked by the two patron saints of Venice, San Teodoro and San Marco. The *Justice* inlay, originally set on the back of the 'Dogal Throne', was removed by Napoleon's troops in 1797. Since 1852, it has been on display in the Museo Correr collection.

In the 1950s, the presbytery of St. Mark's Basilica underwent a reorganisation aimed at making the area where sacred rites were carried out more visible to the faithful, anticipating liturgical norms that would later be defined by the Second Vatican Council. The wooden panels were then removed and stored for a long time in warehouses from where they were eventually removed by an unknown hand.

It is probable that the theft of the inlays occurred when, following the flood that hit Venice in 1966, the city found itself in a state of vulnerability that put the protection of the entire artistic heritage at risk: the precious wooden panels were stolen, and they were lost in the shadows.

In the 1970s, the inlays depicting *Faith* and *Fortitude* were found by the director of the Museo Diocesano, who rearranged them there.

Of the remaining inlays, the trace was officially lost until recently, when the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit became aware of a publication dedicated to the pieces, commissioned by a Roman antiquarian. Two inlays – the *Divine Hope* and *San Teodoro* – were apparently available for sale at the same dealer's shop. The support of the Soprintendenza A.B.A.P. per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna and the Prosecutor's Office of the St. Mark's Basilica boosted the Carabinieri's investigations eventually leading to the recovery of the two precious works. The story un-ravelled further when the Carabinieri identified two other inlays – *Prudence* and *Temperance* – jealously guarded in a Tuscan villa.

By tracing the artworks' sales and the economic transactions, the Carabinieri discovered that the six inlays had been sold at auction in Florence, at a villa called 'L'Imperialino', back in 1969. The auction catalogues from the period revealed a well-orchestrated deception: the pieces, in fact, had been attributed to minor authors, rather than to the well-known Jacopo Sansovino. The ruse had thus effectively hindered the traceability of the stolen goods.

However, the commitment and perseverance of the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit have borne fruit. Six inlays, an integral part of a unique artistic heritage, have been reunited in the Museum of St. Mark's Basilica since 2014. Their story, though, is not over yet, as the investigations continue into the two missing artworks: *San Marco* and *Charity*, which remain lost to this day.





Copy by unknown forger
Tiger with Snake

Oil on canvas, 70 x 50 cm

[Antonio Ligabue, 1899-1965

***Tiger with Snake*, 1953**

Oil on *faesite* board, 80 x 66 cm

‘Antonio Ligabue’ Archive Foundation, Parma]



Canvas from the contemporary era, recognised as a forgery, and subject to confiscation following criminal proceedings. Entrusted in July 2023 to the Centre for Cultural Heritage Technology of the Italian Institute of Technology for study and research activities, the work underwent initial non-invasive diagnostic investigations which converged in suggesting the industrial nature of both the canvas and the pictorial material, compatible with commercial oil paints in tubes, widely used by artists in the twentieth century. The back is occupied by a ‘declaration of authenticity’ placed in handwritten form directly on the canvas and bearing the forged signature of Sergio Negri, the greatest connoisseur, authenticator, and cataloguer of Ligabue's work. This feature, combined with the evident stylistic discrepancies detectable by visual analysis, excludes the possibility that we are dealing with a duplicate made by the author on a different support, with respect to the well-known oil on *faesite* board, or a copy not intended for the market: the piece therefore can clearly be identified as a ‘fake’.



Giandomenico Tiepolo, 1727-1804

Holy Family, ca. 1770-1780

Oil on canvas, 38 x 45 cm



Artwork recovered during a search conducted following fraudulent bankruptcy; subject to *compulsory acquisition* by the Ministry of Culture in 2022, it has been assigned to the permanent collection of the Giorgio Franchetti Gallery at Ca' D'Oro, a state museum in Venice.

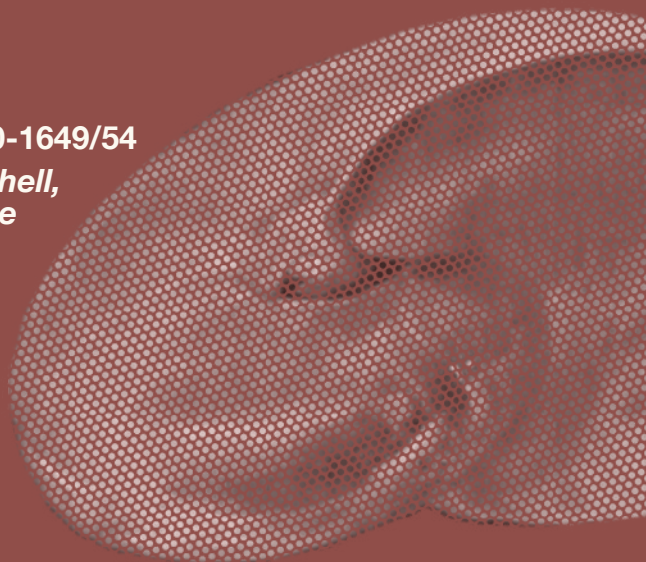
In the precious painting depicting the Holy Family, Giandomenico Tiepolo captures the viewer's attention with an exchange of graceful gestures between the Child and the Mother while Saint Joseph appears half-hidden in the background. The modulations of light give prominence to the figures in the foreground, helping to create an atmosphere of domestic serenity. Due to its extremely high pictorial quality and notable historical and artistic interest, the canvas was recognised as worthy of protection and special attention by the State, attesting to Giandomenico Tiepolo's mastery and his ability to infuse spirituality into sacred images. The Ministerial Committee has indeed deemed the painting to be *one of the most successful examples of the successful and prolific production by the Venetian painter intended for private devotion*.



Jasper Geerards, ca. 1620-1649/54

***Still Life with a Nautilus Shell,
Lemons, Ham, and Chalice***

Oil on panel, 59 x 74 cm



Work created by Flemish painter Jasper Geerards, as indicated by the monogram *JG fecit*, clearly visible at the bottom left corner of the table partially covered by a velvet drape. Originally from Antwerp and likely living in Amsterdam between 1620 and 1654, Geerards is renowned as one of the greatest representatives of the *still life* genre during the ‘Golden Age’ of Dutch painting. He specialised in compositions that featured not only natural elements but also metal ornaments, table objects, and drapery. In this artwork, the artist showcases an abundance of earthly and man-made products: lemons, bunches of grapes, a leg of ham, and a glass of white wine, all accompanied by an extraordinary *nautilus* shell, which reflects beautifully on a pewter plate.

In 2023, after its seizure by the Carabinieri TPC, this valuable *still life* became a part of the permanent collection at the Museo di Palazzo Grimani. It will remain on display in this room, seamlessly integrating with the majestic decoration of the ‘umbrella ceiling’. This acquisition also allows us to enrich the collecting history of the Grimani family, evoking the presence of *still lives* in the dispersed collection of Cardinal Vincenzo, Viceroy of Naples, who lived during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



Displayed virtually, the finds reproduced here as 3D models were created with LiDAR scanners and represent portions of funerary monuments from the ancient Roman city of *Altinum*. They have been involved in two different incidents: a clandestine excavation and a mysterious theft.

Funerary Bloc with Carved Lions

1st century CE

Aurisina limestone, 49 x 41 x 30 cm

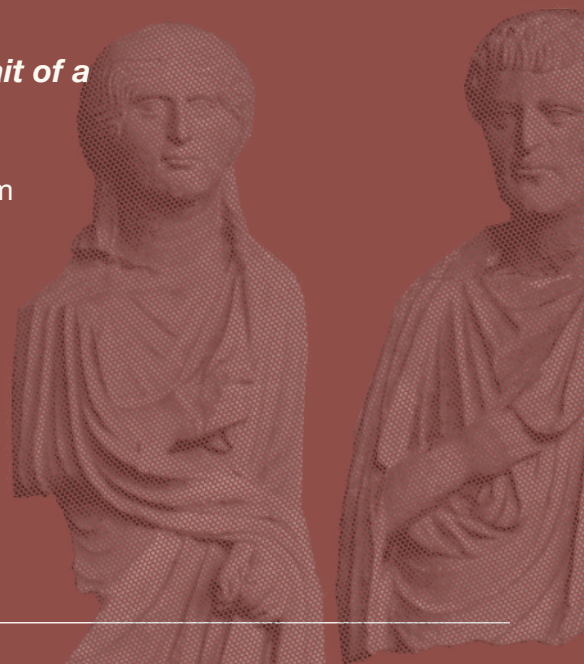
A small square stone, without inscription, is flanked by two crouching lions. Representations of lions were frequent in Etruscan-Roman funerary contexts and could also serve an apotropaic function. The upper part of the memorial stone shows the remains of a lead element, which was used to attach another stone element, perhaps bearing the inscription and portrait of the deceased, or an urn.



Funerary Aedicula with Portrait of a Couple

1st century CE

Aurisina limestone, 85 x 73 x 18 cm



This small stone *aedicula* bears the high-relief portrait of a couple, exceptionally depicted in full figure. The people to whom the monument belonged must have come from a high social class, as can be deduced from the artistic style of the shrine and the clothing of the couple. The woman is dressed in a tunic and a *palla* (a typical rectangular cloak used in the early imperial age) and combed in the fashion of the first half of the first century, with wavy hair separated by a central parting and curls tucked behind the ears. The male figure wears a *toga* with the long cloak exclusively worn by citizens. The *aedicula* probably constituted only a portion of a larger funerary monument.



'Leagros Group' (attributed to)
Attic 'Black-figure' Amphora

Last quarter 6th century BCE

Pottery, h. 36,70 cm



Belonging to the pottery production of Athens, this amphora has been attributed to the workshop of artists called 'Leagros Group', and it can be dated chronologically to the period between 525 and 500 BCE. The activity of this group of craftsmen represents one of the last successful phases of the 'black-figure' technique before the predominance of the 'red-figure' one. The painted decoration was produced with a highly diluted mixture of water and clay enriched with iron oxides, applied to the vessel before firing. The details were subsequently drawn with fine incisions. It was during the firing process that the 'varnish' assumed the typical brilliant black colour from which it gets its name.

Of remarkable quality is the depiction on the main side, which portrays Apollo *Citharoedus* standing between two Muses. On the opposite side, however, apparent firing defects make the figure of a hoplite standing with helmet, spear, and round shield, flanked by two Scythian archers, less appreciable. A distinctive feature of the vase is the alphabetical symbol (Σ) engraved onto the exterior bottom after firing: a rare detail likely related to the vase's commercial phase, perhaps to be interpreted as the mark of the merchant or shipowner who transported the amphora.



Archaeological Finds of Different Origins, from a Private Collection

On display in the centre of the room is a small fraction of the pieces belonging to an archaeological collection that was assembled in the last decades of the previous century. The collection comprises a rich assortment of ceramic classes and bronze artefacts associated with burial items from ancient Etruscan necropolises dating from the ninth to the fifth century BCE, Italian materials from the sixth to the third century BCE, and glassware artefacts from the Roman Imperial era. All the items in this collection were acquired by a Venetian family who believed them to be authentic and kept and valued them as such. In 2022, in close collaboration with the latest owner, the collection underwent a thorough examination by the Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per il Comune di Venezia e Laguna. The collection was found to lack any documentation that would legitimise owner-

ship, and as a result, it was confiscated by the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit and ultimately handed over to the State. The analyses carried out by the archaeological officials revealed the presence of numerous counterfeit pieces within the collection. Therefore, the display cases exhibit both authentic and forged objects, selected based on consistent typologies and disposed to highlight the differences between genuine and fake items, often recognisable even to an untrained eye.

Finds on display

Genuine Artefacts

Pontic black-figure chalice
(last third 6th c. BCE)

Buccaro scoop
(end 7th - half 6th c. BCE)

Tuff male head
(3rd c. BCE)

Attic red-figure cup
(first half 5th c. BCE)

Bronze lamp
(end 1st c. BCE - early 1st c. CE)

Buccaro jug
(second half 6th c. BCE)

Green glass balsamary
(1st c. CE)

Fake Artefacts

Pontic black-figure chalice

Buccaro scoop

Etrusco-corinthian jug

Attic black-figure cup

Attic black-figure amphora

Black-glazed *unguentarium*

Green glass bottle



The Recovery of Archaeological Items

For years, the Carabinieri TPC Venice Unit has been actively engaged in protecting our precious cultural heritage, particularly through the recovery of stolen archaeological artefacts or those resulting from unauthorised research or unexpectedly found and left unreported. Through constant checks at commercial establishments, including online sales platforms, and thanks to the reports from officials of the territorial Superintendencies and private citizens, the Carabinieri, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture offices, work to identify and counteract illicit activities involving archaeological assets.

These criminal acts against the national cultural heritage, which were already partially addressed in the *Code of the Cultural and Landscape Heritage* (Legislative Decree n. 42/2004), have recently been included in Book II, Title VIII bis of the Italian Penal Code (Law n. 22/2022) in accordance with the provisions of the *Nicosia Convention* promoted by the Council of Europe in 2017 and ratified by Italy in 2022.

The illicit trafficking of archaeological goods constitutes a crime that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to retroactively establish their place of discovery and historical context. According to the current legislation in Italy since 1909 (Law n. 364/1909, confirmed by the so-called 'Bottai Law', n. 1089/1939), anything found in the national subsoil belongs to the State; consequently, all artefacts found within the country

borders or of probable Italian origin are presumed to be the property of the State.

Anyone wishing to claim ownership must provide proper documentation, demonstrating that the items were awarded to them by the State as a reward upon a chance discovery, as a compensation or by a judicial authority's ruling; or that they were already on the market before 1909.

A lack of provenance documentation paves the way for transactions and exchanges that can be deemed illegal and challenged, even if they are traced and occur in broad daylight; the very availability of these assets on the market is irregular.

Regrettably, it is not uncommon that such lightly conducted and undocumented transactions lead – over time – to the formation of full collections, which often remain unknown, but sometimes, as in the present example on display, can be recognised, recovered, and returned to the collective heritage.

The Identification of Archaeological Forgeries

First and foremost, it's important to note that the crime of 'art forgery' (Article 518-*quaterdecies* of the Italian Penal Code) doesn't just pertain to modern and contemporary artworks, such as sculptures, paintings, or other artistic products. It also encompasses reproductions or newly created items that draw from artworks of historical or archaeological interest.

The falsification of archaeological artefacts is a particularly serious phenomenon, not only because it introduces goods into the market that are not worth the declared amounts, thereby contaminating economic transactions and giving the illusion of an abundant supply of legitimate archaeological items, but also because these counterfeit objects distort the narrative and our understanding of the past itself.

So, how can one recognise archaeological fakes?

There are various clues and characteristics to consider when identifying archaeological forgeries. As with modern and contemporary art, direct observation is crucial for detecting stylistic inconsistencies or misplaced, incoherent subjects reproduced by skilled forgers.

Depending on the type of artefact, you may notice the following indicators: raw and

deep incisions, particularly in the rendering of eyes and fine facial and limb details; an incoherent association between the shape of the vessel and the type of decoration; the presence of paint flaking and abrasions with sharp edges, distinct from the weathering and wear effects over time; the presence of concretions that appear superficially applied (often found in less decorated areas of the vessel, as opposed to natural salt deposits emerging from the ceramic body or hard-to-remove earth concretions resulting from centuries-long burial); the absence of lathe marks or indications of artisanal production and firing (such as lime particles known as *calcinelli* or anomalies in the colouring of the ceramic body and/or the painted coating); on artificially-aged glasses, the presence of a patina lacking natural iridescence, produced with bone gelatinum and easily removable, or the absence of natural bubbles in the glass body.

Similarly, excessive lightness of pottery and bronze items can be indicative of modern production, hence forgery, or of extensive manipulation and reconstruction based on authentic parts.

As with paintings, non-invasive or micro-invasive diagnostic investigations, such as infrared spectroscopy, Raman spectroscopy, or X-ray fluorescence spectrometry, can identify chemical elements or compounds that can confirm or refute an item's ancient origin. Until the last decade, thermoluminescence analysis was widely used on ceramic samples to provide a reasonably accurate dating of the last firing of the artefact. However, as it can be easily altered and falsified by subjecting modern

pieces to radiation using modern equipment, this technique is no longer considered reliable as the sole method for authenticating ceramic or brick production today.

The deception perpetrated against private collectors who purchase fake archaeological artefacts on the art market also affects society as a whole: counterfeit items make the fight against the illicit trade of cultural heritage even more challenging.





Arte Ritrovata. Ritorni in Laguna

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