

As false as a crow

The price of the work of Jan Altink, a member of the Groningen painters' circle De Ploeg, shot up. To the delight of the art teacher from Beilen, who shortly before had won a lot of landscapes of Altink. But suddenly ended the euphoria. False, they were all false, a gallery owner had established. The auction houses pulled one after another on their hands Altink. What not to say that now has been proven **Westerwolde Road** which is indeed the work of a new Van Meegeren. **Jos Slats**

The twisting of the art connoisseurs of Altink work

SIGN TEACHER Cor van Loenen from Beilen came twenty years ago for the first time in contact with the work of the painter Altink (1885-1971). He traveled with a family art in Bergen, where his now deceased sister two gouaches of the Groningen Ploeg Painter bought from a private individual from Heerlen. One van den Berg. As he told more work Altink to have in house, Van Loenen gave him his address in Beilen and - he himself had no phone yet - the number of the neighbors.

A few weeks later, Van den Berg got in touch with him. Van Loenen bought six gouaches Squad Group: three Altink. Dijkstra's two and a Wiegers. He paid 250 guilders. End of 1974 Van Loenen and his wife involved a derelict farm in Holthe, a hamlet in Beilen. To finance the renovation did the art teacher in the years six gouaches of the hand that he had bought from Van den Berg.

Cutbacks was deemed to be his teaching job at risk. Every year, Van Loenen lost more hours. He leased part of his farm to ex-psychiatric patients who switched from the device to the company was too big. In addition, Van Loenen, now he began a daily basis in the classroom have to be, to act in antiques. At a viewing day of the year for auction at Sotheby's in Amsterdam, he was beginning Van den Berg last year bump. Which inquired whether Van Loenen he was still interested in the work of the team. Now he had passed his seventies, he wanted his collection ("same collection where you and your sister have previously bought out") to get rid of. It was about five paintings and gouaches of twelve Altink which he asked forty thousand guilders. Payment was in no hurry. Van den Berg still was about to visit family in Australia. He would stay away for a few months. Van Loenen then had nice opportunity in the meantime to get the money together. It worked thanks to a legacy (eight thousand guilders from the estate of his sister) and loans (13,500 guilders) Rabobank in Beilen. Selling antiques, including a number (region) jewelry, the rest of the amount required yield.

In late July, Van den Berg called when he could come along with the Altink? In mid-August the sale was concluded. "It was a great job, I did not hesitate a second," says Cor van Loenen. "Intuitively, I just knew it was right." Why would he have doubts? **Van den Berg was indeed a trusted relationship. Hence, no letter is also put on paper. " I do not even know where he lives "Says** Van Loenen. "In hindsight, I had of course they can ask better." About September 20th one called "Smith" from Amsterdam to Van Loenen. If they were interested in further work Altink. The man said to have gotten their number of van den Berg ("good knowledge"). He had also learned from him that the family had some jewelry and antiques and set to make a return. Jansen wanted to have more than 27,000 guilders for the thirteen five gouaches and oil paintings.

The meeting took place five days later at the coffee house opposite the Central Station in Amsterdam. After Van Loenen him some antiques, jewelry and had shown the corresponding valuation reports, she walked to the white van Jansen which was parked right next to the main entrance of the station. The Volkswagen Van Loenen had to watch quietly collection. "Good work." An hour later he got four packages under his arm on the train to Beilen. A fellow traveler was kind enough to put him off that evening with the taxi door. Jansen had left neither address or telephone number. Again it was not Van Loenen emerged to ask there. "I had no reason to be suspicious." The course of business in the van far seemed to him strange. "I've done things in the strangest places. Last year for example, I had an appointment with a very large collector in the emergency building of the station restaurant in Hilversum. "Van Loenen admits he appearances considerably by now, he can not provide sufficient clarification about the exact origin of the disputed paintings and gouaches.

The couple Beilense decision late last year to do it again the hand part of the newly acquired Altink collection to finance the construction of a hobby room, for the boarders, which the municipality has already granted the license. They expect to make modest profit, because there are good prices offered for the work of the team (above expectation even, as will be seen later on auctions, where the introduced work Altink sometimes far above the target price listed in the catalog hand goes). Initially Van Loenen place an ad, which among others Smithuis Reneé responds, a gallery owner in Heiloo. They make an appointment. The meeting on November 15, takes place in a restaurant in Schoorl. Van Loenen late Smithuis see two gouaches: a mountain landscape and marsh landscape. to diverge from the lectures begin here.

"She was very enthusiastic," Van Loenen. "But also very businesslike. She did not buy the gouaches, but offered to take them on consignment to try to find a buyer through the gallery. When I said that I would rather immediately wanted to get down to business, because we urgently need the money for our reforms, they gave me the name and address of a client who would be interested. "Gallery Holding Smithuis has a different version of events. A rather remarkable lecture, which she put on paper later at the request of the lawyer Telegraph. When Van Loenens had already filed a lawsuit against the newspaper because they were there

portrayed as a notorious couple hundred false Altink had circulated in the art world.

Smithuis writes about the appointment in the roadhouse "I was shocked because I immediately saw that they were false, but (although I almost always say that something is false) I kept my mouth shut, because you have to note

"That's not Altink 'always causes a lot of misery and disappointment. I gave the name of a man who is attached to a museum and had assured me several times that he had knowledge of the Team Painters and had work. I genuinely thought: Then that man but the bringer of the bad message. "

That man is prof. A. Dingenagers of Hillegondsberg, pediatrician in Blaricum, art collector and member of the board of the Singer Museum in Laren. Still can record for Van Loenen contact with him, he hangs itself on the line. On November 19 he brings in Beilen an enjoyable day with family, being clinched with the purchase of two gouaches: a corn landscape and the mountains which Smithuis afterwards said they had seen immediately that it is false. The new owner is so excited that he's a day or so later calls with Smithuis to bring her the happy news updates. "Thank you very much for your tip on the Altink. I bought them both, but not for the requested price. Considerably lower. "

The Noordhollandse gallery owner in her letter to the Telegraph, the lawyer: "I just went through the floor. That was never my intent. I REALLY thought that the man himself had knowledge of the facts and therefore would see immediately that had nothing to do with Altink. "But again the cock crows in Heiloo. Smithuis keeps her mouth against elated Van Hillegondsberg. "I could say nothing to him at that time because there were hundreds of people inside," reads her excuse. She's not the idea to call back the professor on a lake time to help him out of his dream. "I've never heard of Mrs. Smithuis" confirms Dingenagers of Hillegondsberg.

But what the gallery owner told him last year when she called him on the Altink Van Loenen? "She does not to me doubt about the fact that she did an excellent job. I completely relied on the judgment of Mrs. Smithuis. "From Hillegondsberg seems rather **embarrassed by the affair.** "The name of the Singer Museum *allowed* not mentioned in this regard, my government has membership here *nothing*

To make it, it would do no good case. "On the authenticity or falsity of the purchased by him

Altink he dares to make any statement. "I formed no final verdict yet." Continued

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The landscapes of Altink

In addition, the Blaricumseplein collector, at least according to the above-mentioned letter of Smithuis, the conscious gouaches already sold to another. "Less than a month (mean.: One month after the call acknowledgment, ed) later a semi-dealer from Amsterdam in to me, Mr. Ger French, and offered me two Altink to. I immediately asked if he had purchased the gentleman in question (Dingenagers of Hillegondsberg, ed.) And that was

so. I also said to have absolutely no interest in the Altink. On the question whether they were perhaps false, I have not responded. The man is a merchant and must be subject but understood. "After her initial stubborn silence Smithuis it six months later, on May 16 this year, turning like a leaf on a tree and suddenly raise the conscience of kunstkennd Netherlands. Because it is Smithuis, which denounces the "massive falsification scandal" around Altink by De Telegraaf. The gallery owner is due to a holiday abroad unavailable for further explanation.

But in the winter of 1990 absolute tranquility prevails still the Altink front. Only the prices for his work skyrocket. At an auction in Norg are considerable amounts last year bid for the paintings which have been introduced by Van Loenen. One of those present in the hall is rich art restorer and connoisseur Lammert Muller. Initially he offers it, but soon goes far beyond his budget. Afterwards he asks the seller if he has more Altink in his possession. Or in this case, Muller should come and see with a potential buyer.

In December, the rich art restorer makes an appearance in Beilen in the company of Arnold Block, an art dealer from Haren. The latter buys on the advice of the enthusiastic work of two Muller Altink, including salt marsh landscape, which Smithuis - **at that time still in silence - thinks it is false. In late March this year, Van Loenen *Country Road Westerwolde* an oil-cloth auction at Venduhuis Van den Hende in Groningen. J. van den Hendericus is an expert on the work of Altink. After the death of the wife of the artist, he auctioned in 1980 the artistic legacy of the artist, which consisted of more than eight hundred drawings and paintings. Recognized auctioneer Van den Hende know clearly that he holds a particular piece, as he puts Road Westerwolde in color on the cover of its auction catalog. You do not do a mediocre painting.**

Later that month is when Notarishuis Rotterdam depicted is also prominent in the catalog *Farms on Country Road* for a princely sum of the hand. In April, Van Loenen another auction four works respectively Eland in Amsterdam and Venduhuis of Notaries in The Hague. The experts at auction houses are invariably enthusiastic. In almost all cases, the Altink are depicted in the catalog.

The painter also includes the public's taste. On May 14 on the auction Loth Gijs Elman in the Singer Museum in Laren but offered no less than nine thousand guilders for Gouache *Koren village Groninger landscape*.

The spring auctions of the major auction houses should then begin. Van Loenen brings Altink at Christie's, where modern art, Drs. Jetske Homan van der Heide, overflowing with artistic enthusiasm at the Groninger Ploeg promoted expert. Later they claim they will work but "lame". Also at Sotheby's and Glerum Van Loenens is merchandise taken eagerly. And once again works with photos are highly recommended in the respective auction catalogs. Hundreds of interested parties, including major private collectors, representatives of museums and other connoisseurs, visit the viewing days in May. No man demonstrates a shadow of a doubt.

UNTIL THURSDAY May 16 gallery owner Reneé Smithuis appears on each viewing at Christie's believes to recognize as fakes in Amsterdam and three exhibited Altink. She warns the expert modern art Christie's, Drs. Homan van der Heide. Who decides to take any risk and removes the conscious lot numbers of the program. After which results in a chain reaction. When Sotheby's come to my attention which Smithuis has now enabled the press, also explains in this reputable auction confidence in their own knowledge against the risk of excited pieces in the newspaper. On Thursday, May 23 decision Rob Snape, contemporary art expert at Sotheby's, two minutes before the auction to dissipate the numbers 5 and 23 of the list. Without further explanation. Collectors,

"Fake Virus infected art world," honks De Telegraaf on Saturday 25 May. The following Monday is television personality / auctioneer Jan Pieter Glerum not remain the same auction. Minutes before the auction, he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, all of you obviously have read the newspaper, you understand that our two Altink be withdrawn. They are as false as a crow. "

The domino effect then takes place also in the reverse direction. Retroactive suddenly doubted the authenticity of the Altink which are traded earlier this year. The suspicions are stronger if it appears that Van Loenens almost everywhere have introduced the work under a false name. That's because tax or privacy considerations certainly not unusual in the world - confirm all auction houses - but now only generates but more suspicion. Buyers, alarmed by the excited reports in the newspaper, demanding their money back. The forgery affair is a fact.

Auction houses and their expert staff bend over switchbacks to find an explanation for their collective blindness. Auctioneer and Team scholar Van den Hende front of the eponymous Venduhuis from Groningen. The painting *Country Road Westerwolde* he put on the cover of its catalog in March, there appears suddenly "by the crowds slipped in between". Van den Hende had his eyes in his pocket when he visited each viewing of the Hague auction Glerum on Friday 24th May. "There, two works were exhibited Altink, which I found that they are false to the category."

But a warning to fellow Glerum could then obviously not finished. "Neither I nor the lady who attended our open day, made his statements about false Altink" says Jan Pieter Glerum. "But nothing surprises me in this world. There are people who find it embarrassing to point to another on their mistakes, there are people who like it when someone makes a mistake. "

Glerum IS THE ONLY which frankly admits that the affair Altink especially reveals the "incompetence" of art connoisseurs. "Our auction houses apparently not critical enough look at what they eat. We have all been smelly. "

But that is certain that the collection Van Loenen is as false as a crow? Or refers the case to a form of collective psychosis on the Groningen Ploeg painter Altink? Noteworthy is that everyone claims to have unmasked the culprits, but no man or auction turned on the police.

Glerum: "I got a call from the director of Sotheby's if I wanted to work with reporting a crime. But I think the thing really is not important. **Who the hell is Altink?**" In reality, the auction dare *master* There are no hand for stabbing into the fire that Altink indeed false. " *To the best of my knowledge* I say false. But I have not been standing next to when they were painted. "

Sotheby's doing well, despite earlier reports, no declaration. Director Van Schaik: "We later an expert from the Netherlands Institute for Art History plus some private experts to look at the work, but that does not reach a unanimous verdict. Only Chris Ongerling, the son of the fixed list maker Altink knows pertinently sure that they are fakes. As a little boy he sat still on lap Altink. That does not say anything, but it's someone who can empathize with such a painter. The man RKD found it hard to do judgment. In essence, we thus have no result "

A "disgrace" Van Schaik wants nothing know, a matter of smart part: "The three major auction houses are involved in plus some other out of the country."

The Venduhuis of Notaries in The Hague, which did compensate a buyer (after all alarmist) believed to have acquired a fake Altink, dare months later also not pass clear judgment. Is now a doubt that the painting in question is false? "That kind of statement sounds so absolutely," soothes expert C. Vellinga. "Emotionally, I'm gonna find out, but you can do no absolutes in this world."

"Do you know how many paintings go through my hands every year? Ten thousand! I sometimes feel that the task of the auction will be covered. One is to see us as authenticity interpreters ", J. Hagen complains of auction The Sun in Amsterdam, which in May through Loth Gijs Elman in the Laren *Koren village Landscape* was auctioned. This transaction is rolled back. "I'm 99 percent sure that it is false," says Hagen. On what basis then? "It simply can not be offered as much as one man."

Also Christie's, which in May as the first got introduced works from the auction by Van Loenen, not to mention able redeeming word. "Nothing is certain except for one thing: the doubt," says Jetske Homan van der Heide. "It is simply not mathematics. We can not guarantee anything. "In Beilen is the renovation postponed while.

JOS slats