

Market Research



A scientific analysis
of Karl Waldmann's
production

Part 1



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Brief

Analysing scientifically the accusations of forgery

Each argument presented in the case to support the claim that K.W. is an invention are reviewed in the context of art and art history.



At the occasion of the ARTIFICIAL FACTS - BOUNDARY OBJECTS exhibition organized by the Kunsthaus Dresden, claims that the dada collage works by Karl Waldmann (K.W.) were a fabrication emerged in the German press. International press followed suit, eg:

- Henri Neuendorf, Tuesday, September 1, 2015, "Meet Karl Waldmann, the Made-Up Dada Artist Who Fooled the German Art World", artnet news.
- Leonid Bershidsky, September 4, 2015 "The Renowned German Artist Who May Not Exist", Bloomberg View.

The claims led to the withdrawal of the works at the exhibition. A criminal complaint was filed in Germany against X, putting a judicial turn to the accusations of forgeries.

This report aims analysing scientifically the accusations of forgery. Each argument presented in the case to support the claim that K.W. is an invention are reviewed in the context of art and art history.

- The artist is undocumented and no biography nor trace of his artistic existence prior to 1989 is known.
- The amount of works is abnormally high.
- The works are focused on popular political topics that would made them appealing to contemporary collectors.
- It is impossible an artist independent from the Berlin dada group would produce aesthetically similar artworks to those unknown to the public at the time.
- The works have been fabricated.
- The forgeries have been made in view of personal enrichment.

The first part of this report reviews these critiques in light of statistical analysis of the art market and art history. The second part of the report investigates the likelihood that the production of the K.W. artworks be forgeries.

Claim #1

The artist is undocumented and no biography nor trace of his artistic existence prior to 1989 is known which leads to the conclusion that the artist did not exist

That an artist leaves no documented evidence of his biography is by no mean an exceptional situation. Actually, art history is filled with examples of pseudonymous, anonymous or rediscovered artists who left nothing but their artistic production as testimony to their existence.

Antiquities to Middle-Ages: anonymous artistic production is the norm. The overwhelming majority of artistic styles are represented by unknown artists.

Old masters: 14th to 18th century

A total amount of 455 old masters are identified¹. These artists were active between the 14th and 18th century but their identities are entirely unknown and their existence in the artistic literature is exclusively based on their artistic production, without any documented detail over their life. These artists are universally recognized as genuine artists offering actual artistic production. The dates used to estimate their artistic productions have been determined using both scientific analyses (Carbon 14 measurement) and stylistic analysis. These methods, especially stylistic analysis, allow to differentiate different artists from each other and situate their historical context, without the need for a documentation contemporary to the artist.

XIXth and XXth century

As far as the XIXth and XXth century are concerned, it is common to find pseudonymous artists, or artists whose names are totally undocumented. 2498 artworks sold at auction worldwide between 1990 and 2015 are identified as part of one of the following XIXth or XXth century schools, without detailed information on the artist, or with initials/signatures that cannot be linked to a documented artist. They are generally gathered under a common umbrella:

- American School
- Antwerp School
- Empire School
- English School
- European School
- Flemish School
- Florentine School
- French School
- French-German School
- German School
- Italian School
- Italian-Flemish School
- Lombard School
- Neapolitan School
- Nuremberg School
- Philippine School
- Spanish School

¹ See Appendix I

Claim #1

It can be affirmed with high confidence that between 100 and 500 political prisoners were visual artists active under pseudonyms amongst the 257000 political prisoners of Soviet Union, in 1952 alone.

These thousands of examples refute the idea that artistic recognition is dependent on documentation of the artist's life or identity. These numerous examples clearly reject the notion that artistic production cannot be universally considered genuine in absence of proper documentation of the artist's identity or evidence about his life. Nevertheless, a more precise analysis of art history related to the context of the discovery of the works is needed. Indeed, the works signed "K.W." or "Karl Waldmann" were discovered at the Polish market in Berlin and the most of them were acquired in the neighbourhood of Dresden in 1989, situating the discovery of the works in Eastern Europe. An estimate of the amount of pseudonymous artists in XXth century in Eastern Europe is needed. The historical particularity of this period is the communist rule. The Soviet Union was a powerful political force during the course of the XXth century, with a decisive influence over sovereign states of Eastern Europe through the Warsaw Pact that covered Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Albania (until 1968).

The Soviet Union had a strong political influence over countries members of the Warsaw Pact, the group being known in Western Europe as the "Eastern Bloc". Systems of secret polices existed in the different states, for instance the KGB² in Soviet Union, and the Stasi³ in Eastern Germany. An activity of these secret polices consisted in the arrest of political dissidents. Because of the opaque nature of these communist regimes, little to no information exist about the political arrests under the

regime.

The "Biographical Dictionary of Dissidents in the Soviet Union: 1956 - 1975"⁴ is a precious source to estimate the nature and profiles of people deemed "dissidents" under Soviet rule. Based on records of 3400 criminal cases of dissidents, we compute that in this sample of political cases, an average of 9.9% of dissidents wore pseudonyms during their dissident activities. 1.1% of the cases were visual artists. Using this sample of 3400 cases, it can be affirmed with a high confidence level⁵ that between 0.04% and 0.20% of dissidents in the Soviet Union were visual artists active under pseudonyms. Computing the total amount of people having dissident activities under the Soviet regime is not easy. Political prisoners were usually sent to Gulags (forced labor camps) along prisoners condemned for other crimes, rendering difficult the precise enumeration of political criminals. However, between 1949 and 1952, political prisoners were sent to separate camps (special camps known as "osoblags"). This special treatment allows historians to retrieve the number of political prisoners from the Soviet Union during these years. In 1952, an estimate of 257000 persons jailed in osoblags has been documented⁶. By extrapolation of the computed percentage of pseudonymous visual artists, it can be affirmed with high confidence that between 100 and 500 political prisoners were visual artists active under pseudonyms amongst the 257000 political prisoners of Soviet Union, in 1952 alone. This figure does not even cover other member states of the Warsaw Pact and concerns only visual artists caught by the secret police. Obviously, pseudonymous artists free and successfully escaping the political police stay undocumented and out of our sample.

² *Komitet gossoudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*

³ *Staatssicherheit*

⁴ De Boer, S. P., Driessen, E. J., & Verhaar, H. L. (Eds.). (1982). *Biographical Dictionary of Dissidents in the Soviet Union: 1956-1975*. BRILL.

⁵ 95% certainty

⁶ Applebaum, A. (2003). *Gulag: A history*. Random House LLC.



Between 1949 and 1952, political prisoners were sent to separate camps (special camps known as “osoblags”).



To summarize, 455 artists from the Renaissance era are used as an example of art history embracing stylistic analysis to define an artist without the need for further documentation. Similar examples for the XIXth and XXth are illustrated through a total amount of 2498 artworks sold at auction between 1990 and 2015 without an explicit attribution other than “school” when initials or signature could not be linked to documented artists. Focusing on the XXth century Soviet regime, an analysis is made based on 3400 political arrests in Soviet Union between 1956 and 1975. It is estimated that between 0.04% and 0.2% of political prisoners in Soviet Union were visual artists producing works under a pseudonym. In 1952, it is documented

that 257000 individuals were jailed in osoblags for political crimes, leading to a minimum estimate of between 100 and 500 pseudonymous visual artists jailed in the Eastern Bloc that year of 1952 alone.

As a conclusion, affirming that an undocumented artist from the Soviet era is an abnormal occurrence contradicts statistical and historical evidences demonstrating the existence of at least several hundreds of such profiles.

Claim #2

The amount of works is abnormally high

The variance of artistic production between artists is relatively large, from 12 artworks/year for Hannah Hoch to 87 artworks per year for Kurt Schwitters.



A comparison is made between the amount of known works on paper signed “K.W.” or “Karl Waldmann” and authenticated works on paper (excluding prints) by documented photomontage artists affiliated with photomontage in the dada movement. Only a handful of these artists have a catalogue raisonné. Three artists to which K.W. is usually compared are analysed: John Heartfield (German, 1891 - 1968)⁷, Hannah Hoch (German, 1889 - 1978)⁸ and Kurt Schwitters (1887 - 1948)⁹. Newspapers used in the works signed K.W. date from 1930 to 1958.

Excluded from the analysis: Raul Hausman (Austrian, 1886 - 1971) who has no documented catalogue raisonné to this day.

Because the catalogue raisonnés cover specific periods for each artist, the data are standardized as artworks per year in order to compare different productions on the same scale. The following graph compares artistic production of the mentioned artists.

There is no evidence that Karl Waldmann artistic production be especially important compared to other photomontage artists. The variance of artistic production between artists is relatively large, from 12 artworks/year for Hannah Hoch to 87 artworks per year for Kurt Schwitters¹⁰. The discovery of 1233 artworks, though impressive with respect to photomontages in circulation in the art market, cannot be judged abnormal as far as a lifetime of artistic production is concerned, at least with respect to German photomontage artists.

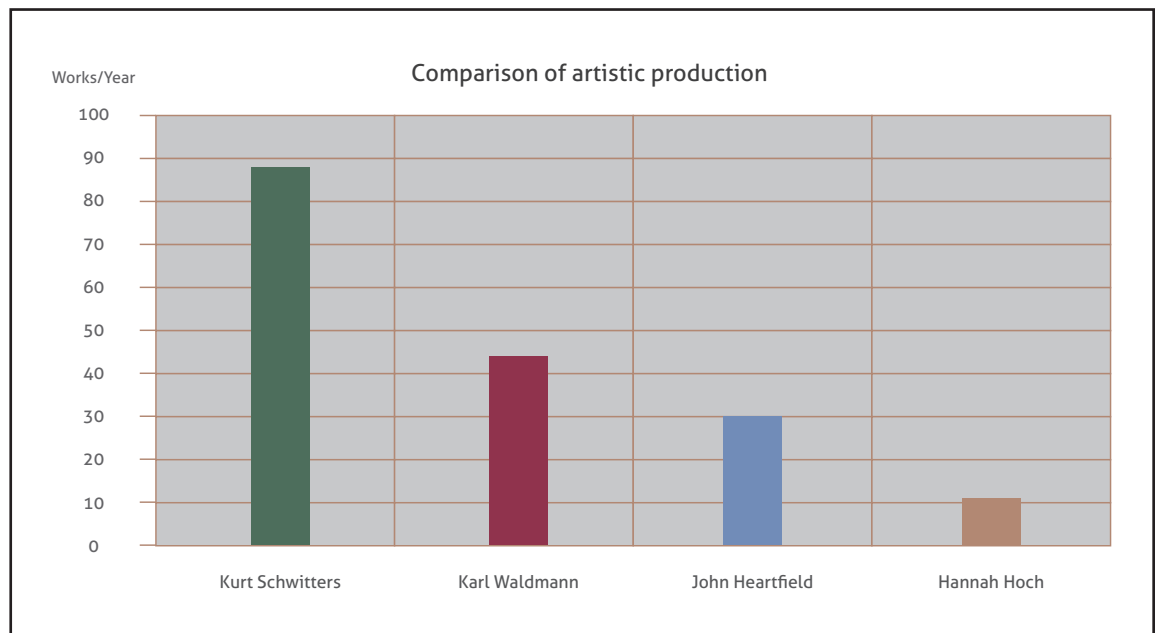


Figure 1. Comparison of artistic production.
Sources: Tutela (art data).

⁷ John Heartfield; Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung Volks Illustrierte 1930-38

⁸ Cut with the Kitchen Knife : The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Hoch

⁹ Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue raisonné, Volume 1, 1905-1922, Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue Raisonné, Vol. 2, 1923-1936m, Kurt Schwitters: Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 3, 1937-1948

¹⁰ For comparison, Kurt Schwitters produced about two thousand collages during his artistic existence (cf. Dr. Karin Orchard, Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, Hannover).

Claim #3

The works are focused on popular political topics that would made them appealing to contemporary collectors

A complete enumeration of political works signed K.W. is established. A political work is identified if it includes either political symbol (swastika, soviet symbols etc.) or political figures. Photos of the works posted on the "Karl Waldmann Museum" website are used to identify the political works. 51 artworks are identified with presence of political figures or political symbols in the composition. Out of 1233 works, the proportion of explicitly political artworks is of 4,1%. With 95.9% of artworks not involving explicit political references, the claim that the works are focused on popular political topics of the XXth century must be rejected (e.g.: Out of 1.233 works in total - 170 are abstract, 397 are female portraits, 82 represent ethnic themes,

60 refer to the cinema, 97 display New York City, 25 are inspired by Alice in Wonderland, 170 show architecture etc.).



Claim #4:

It is impossible an artist independent from the Berlin dada group would produce aesthetically similar artworks to those unknown to the public at the time



In 1923, three years after the end of the dada group in Berlin, Alexander Rodchenko published dada-inspired photomontages such as the illustration for a book by Vladimir Mayakovsky.

Kurt Schwitters, famous, among other works, for his dada collages, lived in Hanover. According to Raul Hausman¹¹ the dada group in Berlin rejected his application to join them. He pursued his own way, independently from the group but with a definite dada style, maintaining correspondences with members of the group. Kurt Schwitters, without being affiliated to the dada group, managed to produce a very large production of photomontages and collages, well after the end of the dada group itself.

Actually, the dada group in Berlin was far from being an isolated, intimate group. In addition to the tours by members of the dada group in Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia, a journal *dada* was published and circulated between 1918 and 1920¹². In 1920, prior to the end of the dada group, the members organized a commercial exhibition entitled *Erste Internationale Dada Messe* (First International Dada Fair) presenting many photomontages to be seen by the public, including those by Hannah Hoch, Raul Hausmann and John Heartfield. Maud Lauvin¹³ describes the atmosphere of the fair:

“To visit the First International Dada-Messe (Dada-Fair) of 1920 was to step into the confrontational yet bitterly ironic world of the Berlin Dadaists. The walls of Dr. Otto Burchard’s art gallery, a converted three-room apartment at Lutzowufer 13, were covered floor to ceiling with a disorienting display of photo-montages, posters, Dada periodicals, paintings, drawings, and

assemblages by young, largely unknown artists. Here and there on the walls were pasted large posters with slogans like “Dada ist politisch” (Dada is political) and “Die Kunst ist tot / Es lebe die neue Maschinenkunst TATLINS” (Art is dead/ Long live the new machine art of Tallin).”

Russian constructivist artists such as Alexander Rodchenko produced dada-inspired political posters, movie posters and advertisement material widely distributed in the 1920ies, well after the end of the dada group in Berlin. For instance, in 1923, three years after the end of the dada group in Berlin, Alexander Rodchenko published dada-inspired photomontages such as the illustration for a book by Vladimir Mayakovsky. In 1935, Stalin proclaimed Mayakovsky a hero of the revolution, adding that “indifference to his memory and to his work is a crime.”¹⁴

By 1930, dada photomontages and constructivist photocollages had been distributed for ten years across Eastern Europe.

¹¹ Raoul Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, 3rd edition, ed. Karl Riha and Günter Kämpf (Giessen, 1992), p. 63.

¹² I. E. Hofmann, “Documents of Dada and Surrealism: Dada and Surrealist Journals in the Mary Reynolds Collection”, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago

¹³ *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Hoch*

¹⁴ The Museum of Modern Art, New York, “Portraits of Mayakovsky”, https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/1998/rodchenko/texts/portraits_mayakov.html

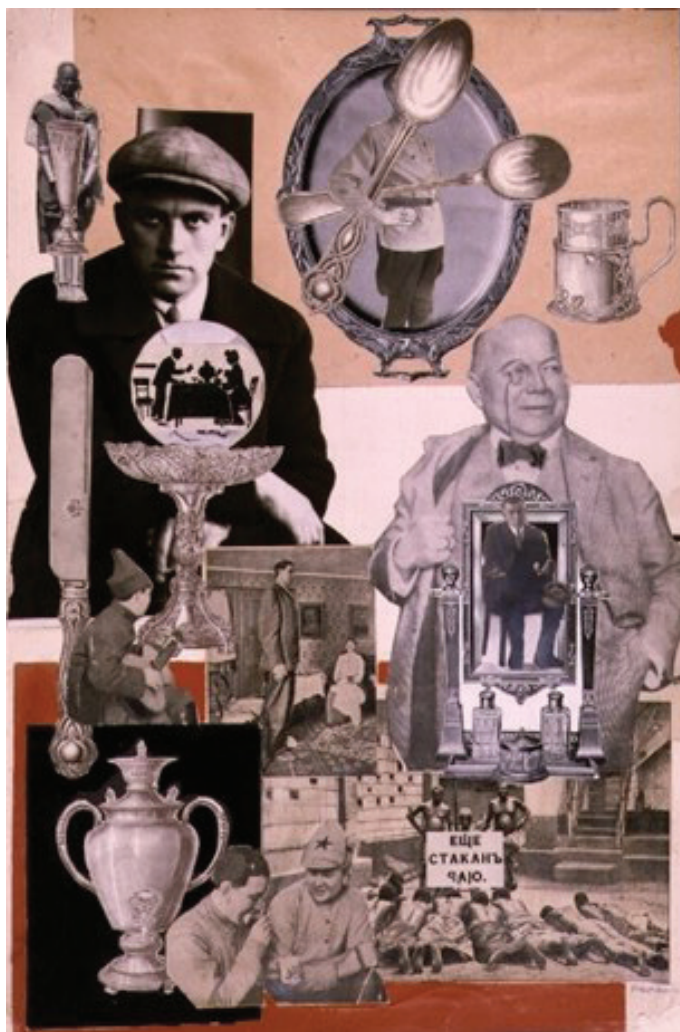


Figure 2. *Maquette for an illustration for About This (Pro eto), a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky. 1923. Cut-and-pasted printed papers and gelatin-silver photographs and gouache on cardboard, 16 3/4 x 12 15/16" (42.5 x 32.5 cm). State Mayakovsky Museum, Moscow*

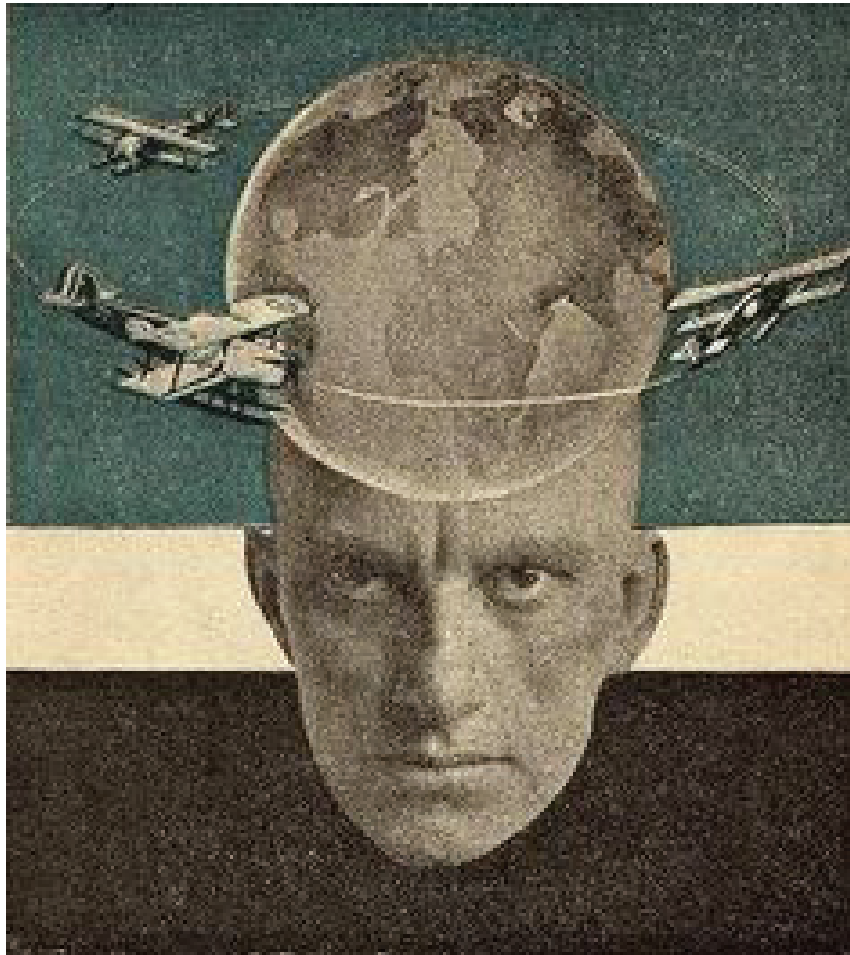


Figure 3. Back cover of the book "Conversation with the Finance Inspector about Poetry" (*Razgovor s fininspektorom o poesii*), by Vladimir Mayakovsky. 1926. Letterpress, 6 7/8 x 5" (17.4 x 12.9 cm).



Figure 4. 0561 | 87 x 62,5 cm | Collage on the cover of a hardback book –
circa 1941 - 1945

*Title: German Art Celebration In The Capital City Of Evolution
Situation: Galerie Pascal Polar, Belgium*



Figure 5. 1068 | 26,5 x 26,5 cm | Collage on cardboard

Title: Ohne Titel/ Untitled/ Sans Titre
Situation: Karl Waldmann Museum, Belgium



Figure 6. 1205 | 36 x 26,5 cm | Collage on paper

Title: Ohne Titel/ Untitled/ Sans Titre

Situation: Private collection, Verbeke Foundation

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