



Studio Practice of Paul Delvaux: the Early Years

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The history of technical art offers the means to apprehend the personality of an artist in a different way and contributes to the knowledge of his work. An important figure in 20th century painting, the Belgian surrealist Paul Delvaux (Antheit 1897-Veurne 1994) was reluctant to talk about the techniques and materials he was fond of. It is, however, by nature, a fundamental aspect of its artistic production which conditions its preservation. The result is a certain misunderstanding of a whole section of Delvaux's artistic personality.

The objective of this project is to overcome this lack of knowledge by collecting information on Delvaux's palette and execution technique through scientific, non-invasive and complementary imaging and analytical methods. This study is structured around three research axes:

- the characterization of the artist's palette and the reconstruction of the production stages, including the setting up of the composition and the coloring;
- the identification of the phenomena and compounds at the origin of the uplifts and gaps observed on the paintings of Delvaux;
- the detection of reuse works and the study of the associated underlying compositions. Indeed, some works from the early 1930s, destroyed by the artist or disappeared, could be rediscovered.

Investigative methods that have been used include high-resolution visible, ultraviolet, and infrared light photography, digital microscopy, X-ray radiography, hyperspectral imaging, X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, and Raman and FT-IR spectroscopies. These different imaging and physico-chemical analysis techniques are favored because of their proven effectiveness, their complementarity and their non-invasive nature. All the examinations have been conducted in situ using the portable instruments available at the Centre Européen d'Archéométrie.

First results on seven Delvaux's paintings from the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium will be presented.

Key words: Delvaux, Surrealism, Painting, Non-invasive