

Warhol Brillo boxes could be fake

Allegations circulate that curator Pontus Hultén created unauthorised replicas

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Wooden Brillo boxes worth up to \$1.3m, circulating as the work of Andy Warhol, could be fake, according to the Swedish newspaper Expressen. It claims that the source of the alleged “fakes” may be a widely admired curator. The late Pontus Hultén (1924-2006) was the founding director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art.

Hultén curated a major Warhol exhibition at the Moderna Museet in 1968. In his 2004 book, *The Pontus Hultén Collection*, he said he had commissioned local carpenters to produce about 100 wooden boxes with Warhol’s authorisation. But Expressen says that it can find no evidence that the artist authorised these replicas, nor that they were made in 1968. It alleges the carpenters produced about 100 Brillo boxes in 1990. It is possible that Hultén had these made for a show in St Petersburg in 1990, three years after Warhol’s death. There are now concerns that these may have entered the market under the guise of being 1968 works.

It is accepted that Hultén was authorised by Warhol to make a run of Brillo boxes for the 1968 exhibition. According to Paulina Solokow, spokeswoman for the Moderna Museet: “All we know is that ten boxes were made straight after the show with Warhol’s agreement.” Director Lars Nittve added: “We are starting a dialogue with the Warhol Art Authentication Board and doing research on the six boxes Hultén donated in 1995.”

In April, a box estimated at \$83,200-\$110,500 was withdrawn by Auktionsverk in Stockholm after the family of the consignor said they had not owned the piece before 1990.

The Belgian dealer Ronny van de Velde bought 40 boxes for \$240,000 from Hultén in 1994. He told The Art Newspaper that Hultén gave him certificates stating that the boxes were produced in 1968, saying he had the artist's permission to extend the series. Mr Van de Velde now believes they may have been made in 1990. Between 2004 and 2006, he sent his boxes to the Warhol board asking if they were genuine. The board said they were Brillo Soap Pads Box [Stockholm type], 1968 and stamped them with catalogue numbers. The catalogue raisonné dated February 2004 lists 94 of this type of Brillo box.

The London dealer Brian Balfour-Oates of Archeus Fine Art said that he bought 22 boxes from Hultén in 2004. Hultén also claimed that these were produced in 1968 and the Warhol Board authenticated them as such. Mr Balfour-Oates told us: "This was the established expertise protocol at that time."

The board was unable to provide us with a statement before going to press, however, it forwarded its response to the Expressen newspaper which says: "Your comments have raised questions of serious concern. We are undertaking a complete review of the research pertaining to these works and gathering further information. The board welcomes any additional information that might assist us in our research."

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