

Monet and Van Gogh reborn as hi-tech magic brings back ruined masterpieces

Water Lilies and Sunflowers among paintings being resurrected using 3D scanners



Van Gogh's Vase with Sunflowers being re-created in Factum Arte's lab.

Dalya Alberge

Artists using cutting-edge technology and forensic analysis have reconstructed a series of lost masterpieces, including versions of Monet's *Water Lilies* and Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*.

The re-creations are the work of Factum Arte, a group of artists and technicians whose projects have included an exact reproduction of the burial chamber of Tutankhamun. *The Concert*, a 17th-century work by Vermeer which was stolen in 1990 in the biggest art heist of modern times, has also been re-created, along with a 1954 portrait of Winston Churchill by Graham Sutherland, which the wartime leader's wife, Clementine, destroyed in disgust.

Factum Arte uses 3D scanners originally developed for medical purposes to record the surface of a painting or an object down to the finest brush-mark or crack. It detects details that the naked eye cannot, recording surface not colour. "By removing the colour from the surface, you can see things completely differently," said Adam Lowe, director and founder of Factum Arte. Other tools include 3D scanners to record shape.

The Guardian



Johannes Vermeer's The Concert, stolen in 1990, has also been remade.

One of Monet's smaller *Water Lilies* canvases was hanging in the Museum of Modern Art in New York until 1958, when it fell victim to a catastrophic fire. Despite bad smoke damage, forensic analysis extracted crucial details of its colour and surface, allowing the painting's rendering of the movement of light on water to be re-created.

"It's absolutely breathtaking," said Lowe. "I think Monet would believe it was his painting."

Van Gogh's lost *Sunflowers* picture was one of seven painted in 1888, and was bought by a Japanese collector. It was destroyed during the US bombing of the city of Ashiya in 1945.

The National Gallery allowed Lowe's team to scan its *Sunflowers* painting, enabling them to reconstruct the artist's brushstrokes in painting at speed.

Lowe said: "We had a very poor colour photograph and some other reference material, but we were able to identify the position of the brush-strokes and distort the individual strokes from the National Gallery painting to fit the lost painting. We relied on knowledge of Van Gogh's palette and the paints he was using at the time to reconstruct the colour. Van Gogh would be very happy."

Lowe is particularly excited by the Vermeer reconstruction, as the original could still surface one day: "I hope we'll be able to see how close our 'performance' was."

The Guardian

The Concert tops the list of the world's most-wanted paintings. Valued at \$200m, it was among 13 works stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the US city of Boston. Relying on a couple of poor photographs, Lowe's team was also able to scan a Vermeer from the same period in the Royal Collection.

The Churchills thought they had seen the last of Sutherland's portrait. Commissioned by parliament for Churchill's 80th birthday, it was loathed by its subject, who said it made him look "half-witted". Clementine had the painting burned, which Sutherland condemned as an "act of vandalism".

Asked how the Churchills would feel about the reconstruction, Lowe said: "They would be horrified because it has come back from the grave. They were completely wrong to destroy it. It wasn't theirs to destroy. It was painted to hang in Parliament. It's a very powerful, tender portrait."

The replica has been made possible partly through a high-resolution photograph never released before. It was taken by Larry Burrows, the great war photographer. Lowe said: "Burrows followed Churchill and had taken a good photograph of the painting. It's never been seen."

Other reconstructions include Klimt's vast *Allegory of Medicine*, which was seized by the Nazis and taken to an Austrian castle where, in 1945, a retreating SS unit destroyed the castle with the Klimt inside.

"It's a very dramatic tale," Lowe said. Using one black-and-white photograph and a coloured detail, his team remade the entire work.

The re-created masterpieces will feature in a series, *Mystery of the Lost Paintings*, on Sky Arts from 2 May. Philip Edgar-Jones, director of Sky Arts, said the project was unprecedented: "The stories of how such colossal masterpieces were lost, stolen or destroyed are as compelling as any detective series. The process of bringing them back to life gets deep under the skin of the artists' craft."