X-ray machine from Prague helps verify authenticity of works by van Gogh, Raphael and other artists

The Czech company InsightART developed a unique x-ray machine for verifying the authenticity of artworks. At the ESA BIC Prague space incubator, which is managed by CzechInvest, the company overcame a key challenge together with mentors in the early stages of its business. That challenge involved bringing its unique technology to the global art authentication market. In the course of the incubation programme, the company succeeded in gaining an investor and connecting with world museums and auction houses.

InsightART is a subsidiary of ADVACAM. Its founders are physicist Josef Uher, entrepreneur Jan Sohar and restorer Jiří Lauterkranc. The company verifies the authenticity of artworks using a special x-ray machine. A unique feature of the machine is the sensitivity of its analysis, which it can also perform in colour without disturbing the structure of the image. For a fraction of the cost of a work, the device can help verify its authenticity.
Cooperation with the ESA BIC Prague space incubator, which is subordinate to CzechInvest, consisted in mediation of business contacts, financial support and assistance with project promotion. The ESA BIC Prague incubation programme was focused on creating a product strategy with the assistance of external mentors, as well as a marketing presentation with the aim of opening communication with the Sotheby’s auction house. This was achieved by connecting with the embassy and CzechInvest’s foreign representatives.

The company did not wait long to find success, as its device revealed a treasure hidden beneath the surface of the landscape painting La Crau with a View of Montmajour – the silhouette of a woman that was most likely painted by Vincent van Gogh himself. The authenticity of the work is currently being verified by Dutch art historians.

Although the company has already successfully completed its incubation, cooperation continues. ESA BIC and InsightART presented another outstanding new development to the world at a press conference at the Žižkov Tower in September 2020. An analysis performed by the startup contributed to the fact that the long-secret painting The Madonna and Child was declared by the international expert committee to be an authentic original work by Raphael. “The resulting scans revealed the detailed structure of the image. It is evident that Raphael personally thought out the concept of this painting in the smallest detail and with a clear vision of its final form. The individual aspects based on the performed analyses thus confirm that this work was painted by Raphael himself without contribution from his workshop assistants and students,” says Jiří Lauterkranc, art restorer and co-founder of InsightART, commenting on the results of the analyses.
The exceptionalism of the Holešovice startup is also evidenced by the fact that it incorporates outreach into its business through, for example, cooperation with its own expert advisory board, which is composed of experts from the galleries around the world and serves to strengthen communication between major institutions in verifying the authenticity of artworks.

The founders of InsightART are currently working on additional applications of the technology, for example in aviation or medicine. “We are very glad for the cooperation with ESA BIC Prague. It helped us not only to establish contacts with institutions and experts, but also to promote our project. We value the professional and flexible approach, which was a considerable part of the success of our cooperation,” says co-founder Jan Sohar.

“What did InsightART get from the ESA BIC incubation programme?

By connecting with major players in the market, such as the Sotheby’s auction house in London, the company managed to raise the visibility of this unique technology, which is not used in this form for authenticating works of art by anyone else in the world.

**ESA BIC Prague**

The ESA BIC Prague space incubator was established in May 2016 as part of the European Space Agency’s network of Business Incubation Centres. The incubator is under CzechInvest’s management. Twenty-nine startups have entered the incubator over the past four and a half years. Eleven of them have succeeded in finding investors. The combined amount of investments is more than CZK 240 million.
The device is able to scan in 3D and can thus analyse sculptures.

When the scanner x-rayed the image of the landscape painting La Crau with a View of Montmajour, it revealed a silhouette of a woman hidden beneath the surface.

Together with the artist’s signature, “Vincent”, it is probable that it is a work by Vincent van Gogh. The painting is now being examined by Dutch art historians.