

Fourteenth St. Jerome Translation Contest

Sponsored by the Conference Management Service of the United Nations Office at Vienna

Remarks by the judges - Ms. Diane Frishman and Ms. Sally Reading

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First of all, we would like to congratulate Saint Jerome and his representatives here on Earth for the very good choice of a text for translation from Spanish.

This rather playful Spanish article from El País linked together three episodes from the art world to paint a picture of the ambivalent and complex relationship between art and money. The artists in question are Picasso, Banksy and Steve Boggs. Everyone has heard of the first two, of course, and most will know of Picasso's large-scale monochrome depiction of the Guernica bombing raid. Banksy was a household name even before the recent shredding of his work at an auction. But the American artist Steve Boggs may be unfamiliar to some. His work consisted in sketching banknotes and attempting to use them as legal tender, not for any fraudulent purpose, but in order to play with the concept of value, especially the value of art compared with the value of money. You could say that his life's work was a kind of performance art.

Many of our candidates found creative ways to convey the ironies and paradoxes presented in the article and some of the translators showed flair, imagination and maturity in the way they dealt with some tricky problems. We would like to just mention the main difficulties that were overcome by many of our applicants.

The first problem was that of research. Many translators who otherwise acquitted themselves well fell into the trap of keeping the word "editor" for the Spanish word "editor", when the person in question was in fact a staff writer at The New Yorker magazine. This raised the question of how far to go in correcting a text when the original is misleading. The titles of the books and publications mentioned in the text also tripped up some people who mistakenly translated the title of *Contra el Guernica*, which doesn't exist in English, or did a free translation of the title of the book about Boggs, which was originally written in English and so does have an English title.

The text also presented the challenge of whether to add and whether to take away. For instance, we were quite happy with adding a description of Rosalind Krauss as an art critic, since the Spanish merely refers to her as "the influential Rosalind Krauss". At the same time, we were happy to omit the reference to Málaga in connection with Picasso in order to avoid an awkward

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mouthful. One translator moved the reference to a previous sentence, which we felt was very inventive. Many candidates assumed that “la Hacienda” was the IRS, whereas it was the US Treasury Department. This shows how helpful it can be for translators to be familiar with the country or place that serves as the setting for a text – and how many pitfalls lay in wait for those who aren’t. The moral of the story is that you can’t do too much research!

The ability to rework the text to make it more readable was a talent shown in abundance by our candidates. Many tackled the very conversational sentence structure of the first paragraph (“Primero a cuenta de lo que ... Más tarde, cuando ...”) with great aplomb, forming complete sentences in English, introducing the idea of ‘we’ (“First, we discovered ..., Later, we saw how...”) and getting round the potential awkwardness in various clever ways.

There were a couple of traps that were not sidestepped by everyone, unfortunately. We had some references to “cowboys” and “outlaws” when the author was referring to jeans. The translation of the phrase “nombre de banco infantil” to refer to Banksy also produced some ‘interesting’ solutions. However, we were impressed by the many artful ways of avoiding silliness and producing plausible ideas.

As well as traps, there were opportunities to sparkle. Many candidates made good use of the parallelism of “grandes beneficios” and “grandes libros” in the third paragraph. One particularly brave translation gave us: “lined the purses of auction houses and the shelves of libraries”, while another had: “auction houses have been enriched with hefty profits and libraries with equally weighty tomes”. Many repeated whichever word they had chosen for “grandes” in order to reinforce the comparison.

We were also interested to see how candidates translated the word “peripecias” in order to convey the vagaries of Boggs’ career. We liked the translations that gave an impression of mischief, such as ‘antics’, ‘escapades’ and ‘adventures and misadventures’.

The very last sentence – Quedó convertido en un picasso – was also telling. Even the automatic spellcheck in Word gives you a hard time if you want to write Picasso in lower case! We liked the translations that got over the idea of a mere Picasso or just a Picasso, rather than using the lower case as the Spanish does.

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We judges, Diane and Sally, were delighted to be part of this fun contest. The newspaper article, light-hearted in tone but serious in content, provided an excellent vehicle for showcasing an impressive range of translation skills on the part of the contestants, both UN staff and students.

We offer our heartfelt congratulations to our winners and wish all the contestants every success.

We hope you'll stay with translation, whatever the "peripecias" of our chosen career!