

Art Appraisal vs. Art Authentication

It is a common misconception in the U.S. to equate art appraisal with art authentication. However, these are two distinct processes with different purposes and implications:

Art Appraisal

An art appraisal is an assessment of an artwork's value, typically expressed as either **fair market value** or **replacement value**. It does not determine or guarantee authenticity, nor does it hold the appraiser responsible if the item is later found to be a forgery or a copy.

- **Fair Market Value (FMV):**

The price for which the item would be sold in a voluntary transaction between a willing buyer and seller. Auction prices are often considered FMV.

- **Replacement Value:**

The cost to replace the artwork at current market prices, often sourced from galleries. Gallery prices are frequently higher—sometimes double or triple auction values.

Art Authentication

The art authentication process is a rigorous examination to verify an artwork's legitimacy. Unlike appraisals, it involves:

- **Comparative Analysis:**

- Comparison with other works by the same artist and from the same period.
- Comparison with works of similar style or movement.

- **Historical Research:**

- Tracing provenance and reestablishing the painting's history.
- Examining records to place the work in the artist's official "catalogue raisonné."

- **Scientific and Physical Analysis:**

- Signature and handwriting analysis.
- On-site examination of painting materials, including pigments, supports, and brushwork.

- Specialized tests, such as UV (Wood lamp) inspection.

Key Distinction

Art appraisal provides a monetary value but does not confirm authenticity. Authentication, however, seeks to establish an artwork's genuineness through meticulous research and expert analysis.

Authenticity and Sole Recognized Authenticators

Each significant artist has a **sole recognized authenticator** responsible for certifying their works. Neither Sotheby's, Christie's, nor any major gallery can independently authenticate an artwork. Instead, they consult recognized authenticators before accepting items for auction.

Challenges in the Authentication Process

In the U.S., the risk of legal action has led some foundations, like those for Warhol, Pollock, Haring, and De Kooning, to cease offering authentication services. If an artwork lacks prior authentication, building a robust file with verifiable evidence becomes the only viable alternative.

This file may include indisputable documentation and analysis to support its authenticity, but without recognition from the sole authenticator, the status of the artwork remains uncertain.

Understanding these distinctions ensures clarity when seeking professional assistance for your artworks.