

Is it real? How to ascertain the authenticity of art

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Cezanne's The Card Players

In the art world, being able to distinguish between a masterpiece and a copy can prevent a multimillion-dollar mistake. In 2011, art forger [Wolfgang Beltracchi](#) was sentenced to six years in prison for producing hundreds of fake paintings, one of which later sold for \$7 million. His paintings duped hundreds of people, including Steve Martin, who hung a forgery in his home for years.

However, a year later, in 2012, Cezanne's painting "The Card Players" was sold at auction for [\\$250 million](#), the most ever paid for a work of art. Obviously art collectors are prepared to pay a high price for a verified work. How does one tell the difference?

For better or for worse, original art has been copied for centuries. Art students learn the trade by copying masterpieces and often reproductions have been used to provide a less expensive version of a popular painting. With the advent of advanced digital copying techniques, it can be hard to distinguish a reproduction from an original.

For some works the signature will be a dead giveaway. Inconsistencies in style, fashion, or period will quickly reveal which works are valid and which are not. Other times the artistic style will reveal a piece's true identity. Various brush strokes, or lack of them, can also be used to distinguish the fake from the true.

Perhaps most important to determining the identity of a painting is to establish provenance through documentation. This documentation confirms the work's authenticity and often includes receipts, exhibition stickers, and names of previous owners. Good provenance leaves no doubt that a work of art is genuine and by the artist whose signature it bears.

An upcoming webinar, "Recognizing Fakes, Frauds and Forgeries in Fine Art Claims" on [Thursday, February 26](#) will review what to look for when determining a painting's authenticity including artist signatures, artistic styles and abilities, machine-made paintings versus hand-painted canvases and originals versus copies. Afterwards, claim adjusters will be given the basic tools to distinguish a priceless work of art from a comparatively worthless forgery.

The webinar will also provide examples of insured claimed works and the steps taken to determine their true identity, including some believed to have been done by Picasso, John Singer Sargent, and Ted DeGrazia which sold for thousands of dollars and were later revealed to be copies.