



Investigating Art

So how do you investigate art? Start by examining the artwork, looking at its size, coloring and frame. Are there any marks that identify the artist or the name of the piece - a signature, title, copyright or studio imprints? You can use a magnifying glass or jeweler's loupe to look for finer details and a UV or "black light" to look for repairs or small alterations. Look for clues in the techniques used to create your artwork; painting styles, the type of paint and even the use of color can be all be used when trying to date a painting.

Watch out for an overall green glow which is the hallmark of a masking varnish and paper glued over the back of a painting, which often hides evidence of tampering or damage. Also, when analyzing work from the 19th century, watch out for chromolithographs that appear to be oil paintings. A chromolithograph is a technique of producing images, available to the middle classes in the 19th century, which uses rich layers of color that can easily fool the untrained eye. Use a magnifying glass to examine the colors in a light area of tone. If you can see a random arrangement of irregular-sized dots you have a chromolithograph.

If it is a piece that has been given to you, find out the known history. Where was it bought and how much did it cost? Perhaps you have an item that has been passed down through the family. Asking previous owners or family members can reveal interesting facts and stories.

If your piece has any markings that identify the artist, the next port of call is a local library or online search. See if you can find any more information about your artist, like their history, other work, sales and auction information or even any exhibitions they have been in. Maybe they were a key part of a movement or you have a rare piece?

As with other types of investigation, you may want to consult an expert. You may also want to run some tests on your item. If your item is old and potentially valuable, you may want to consider carbon dating it to find out how old it actually is. In some cases the opinion of an expert may not agree with the evidence you have and you will have to get an additional opinion or carry out more tests. Ultimately you will have to use your own judgment to make a decision.

Remember, when attempting to authenticate your artwork you should not be expecting to prove it is by an artist but to disprove that it is.