Connoisseurship in a Globalised Art Market: Reconciling Approaches to Authenticity

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Abstract: The circulation of forgeries within the secondary art market is an increasingly prevalent condition that betrays trust, damages reputations and distorts our collective cultural narratives. Interested observers of this phenomenon report that the transformation of art from object of aesthetic and formal appreciation to an instrument of wealth creation is the source of the problem. This has led to an argument that our preoccupation with art’s commodity status has cultivated an atmosphere of opportunism and greed. In contrast, this paper argues that the commodification of art was a necessary precondition for its venerated status today. Larry Shiner is a scholar whose work challenges the accepted status of art as a transcendent, universal and inevitable cultural category, reframing it as an Enlightenment invention linked to the development of the free market and a middle class consumer economy. This contention provides the basis for my argument that a reconsideration of the relationship between artistic and economic values would bolster the art market’s defence against the incursion of fraudulent art works. This article frames the integration of commerce and aesthetics in eighteenth-century Europe as the origin of the way the plastic arts are treated across the global secondary market today. Due to this historical context, visual art works that come to the market are assessed for attribution, authenticity and value according to a Western ontological structure, regardless of their cultural origin. By taking into account the historical and geographic specificity of art's ontological status, connoisseurs would be better prepared to make accurate and incisive determinations, preventing forged or questionable works from reaching the market.

Keywords: connoisseurship, art market, art forgery, ontology of art

* I would like to thank my two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.
INTRODUCTION

The circulation of forgeries and art works with false attributions within the secondary art market is a destructive and increasingly prevalent condition that betrays trust, damages reputations and distorts our collective cultural narratives. Interested observers of this phenomenon report that the transformation of art from object of aesthetic and formal appreciation to an instrument of wealth creation is the source of the problem. This has led to an argument that our preoccupation with art's commodity status and value has cultivated an atmosphere of opportunism and greed, providing the deceitful and unscrupulous with the opportunity to exploit a market in which the demand for high-value art works far outstrips supply. Larry Shiner's challenge to the notion of art as a transcendent and universal constant provides a strong foundation for an interrogation of these articles of faith. His positioning of fine art as an Enlightenment invention linked to the development of a free market provides an understanding of art as a cultural economy embodying both traditional artistic values and economic values. Using this framework, the following article will investigate the historical link between the emergence of art as an object of refined contemplation and taste, and its fashioning as an aspirational object of consumption, status and wealth. Rather than a symptom of cultural decline (with the fraudulent work standing as the central emblem of the corruption of art world values), I will argue that the commodification of art was a necessary precondition for its venerated status today. This contention provides the basis for my argument that a reconsideration of the relationship between artistic and economic values would bolster the art market's defence against the incursion of fraudulent art works.

My argument will be developed in four parts. In the first section of this paper, I will examine some of the assumptions that have emerged in recent commentary and debate surrounding the regular appearance of forgeries and fraudulent art works on the rapidly expanding international secondary art market. Part two will address the historical link between the development of fine art as a discrete category of creative expression and the concurrent emergence of art as a market commodity. In the third section I will outline how a reconsideration of economic and artistic values as complementary rather than antagonistic allows for an understanding of art works in the context of their production, offering new ways of looking at works produced for the market. In part four, I will discuss the implications of these new ways of looking at and assessing art for connoisseurs working in the global market. The first issue to be addressed, however, is the way in which a few key assumptions pervade the usual commentary surrounding this issue, attributing the encroachment of forged or questionable art works into the secondary market to a fundamental collision of values.

THE GROWTH OF THE SECONDARY ART MARKET AND THE INCREASE IN FORGERY

In order to begin reconciling the perceived conflict between artistic and economic values, this section will examine why art market observers believe that economic values have intruded upon and compromised artistic values. Commentators in the art world and the popular press have explicitly pointed out a correlation between art market inflation, increased participation (especially in emerging economies), and the rise in detected instances of art forgery and fraud. In general, this trend is observable only in relation to object-based art works whose uniqueness, fungibility, and scarcity combine to make them especially vulnerable to forgery and misattribution. For this reason, the discussion of art works in this article refers to visual media only. Whilst it is possible to forge a multiply instantiable art work, such as that produced in musical, literary or theatrical form, this is not encompassed by this article as it does not constitute a significant problem for the market. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that the number of forgeries and false attributions appearing on the market from the visual arts has risen at a sharp rate in recent decades.² It is also apparent that, aside from some contraction following the 2008 financial crisis, the global secondary market in the visual arts is a thriving industry, growing in both profit and volume to generate over AU$12.2 billion annually and a growth rate in turnover of 19% since 2003.³ As the market expands and a surplus of speculative investors inflates demand, ever fewer high value art works, forgeries and misattributions enter the market to address the shortfall: “[w]ith the growth of the size of the art market and the huge increase in market value of many works of art, the incentive to forge copies of objects and pass them off as originals has increased enormously.”⁴ Assertions such as these have been made across the media, the financial professions and the art world, inferring a connection between the secondary art trade and the commodities market. The entry of new, inexperienced players and the steep rise in the circulation of questionable art works leads to the conclusion that “the increase in international art transactions has incubated a booming market for stolen and fraudulent art” and that “the explosion of new ways to buy art online - particularly through auction sites such as eBay

- has brought flocks of inexperienced buyers into the market and made it easier for counterfeiters to find them, fool them, fleece them and forget them.”

Tom Flynn's admonition that rates of forgery are rising with art market inflation specifically references China's rapidly accelerating economy as a point of concern, reporting that “its business structures and institutions continue to be dogged by accusations of corruption and the industry in fakes and forgeries is proliferating.” From this account there is a direct connection to be made between the transformation of art into an alternative asset class in China (and similarly emerging economies), and the rise in instances of forgery and fraud. This connection has found its way into academic discourse on the topic without close scrutiny or interrogation, leading to a widely accepted narrative assigning responsibility for the growing problem of art fraud to a misplaced emphasis on investment value in what is an inherently functionless class of object “designed for disinterested aesthetic contemplation.” According to this narrative, economic interests have overshadowed and undermined art's traditional aesthetic values, casting fine art's growing commodity status as the culprit in an ongoing and rapidly escalating process of distortion of art's true purpose. According to this view, in addition to the devaluing of art's unique aesthetic status, the resulting influx of forgeries is threatening the credibility of the art market and subverting the rarefied position of fine art itself. Close examination of the art market's emergence, history and current status in the global economy seems to indicate, however, that this view establishes a false dichotomy in which art world values and economic values are judged as being entirely at odds.

The scholarly and media tendency to classify aesthetic and economic values in fine art as distinct and contradictory may be a vestige of the art world's general repudiation of crass commercialism and its stigma of compromised artistic integrity. From this perspective, the problem of art fraud is characterised as emblematic of a struggle between two opposing and antagonistic principles to define the purpose and meaning of art. According to this interpretation, criminal behaviour and fraudulent art works flourish when the art market is divested of its purely aesthetic, contemplative purpose and reshaped as a market commodity. For instance, in his 2004 article on art forgery and the

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6 Flynn, “Negotiating Authenticity,” 121.
8 Jon Huer, The Great Art Hoax: Essays in the Comedy and Insanity of Collectible Art (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 84.
law, Michael J. Clark draws an explicit connection between our current obsession with the financial implications of art and the growing prevalence of forgery, declaring:

Such astronomical commodity fetishism makes the art world ripe for swindlers of many sorts. As art works further undergo the transformation from object of aesthetic expression or formal beauty into a mechanism for increasing wealth, the likelihood of forgery increases. Most importantly, as this transformation continues, an understanding of art in its modern sense - as an object designed for disinterested aesthetic contemplation - diminishes in importance.¹⁰

This is an incomplete representation of the art fraud narrative, overlooking the inherent complexities of the market and its key players. Whilst it is certainly the case that greed and dishonesty thrive in any booming market, the implication in the above statement is that the one state of affairs (a preoccupation with the economic value of art) is the sole and direct cause of the other (a greater influx of forgeries onto the market). Such a characterisation assumes that artistic and economic values cannot possibly co-exist, and that the attachment of economic considerations to works of art corrupt and corrode their integrity. In addition, this widely accepted portrayal ignores the potential for economic interests to support artistic interests through their role in strengthening reputations, reducing artists' dependence on patronage of one kind or another, and defending against forgery and fraud. Examined in this broader context, it is clear that fine art inhabits a more complex, reciprocal environment involving both aesthetics and economics. Strategies to effectively address and forestall the circulation of problematic art works will find greater success if they acknowledge from the outset a strong compatibility between the aesthetic and economic considerations that are woven into the fabric of the art market.

Recent engagement by Olav Velthuis with the potential consequences of subscribing to an overtly adversarial understanding of art and commerce has helped to further define this complex and often fraught relationship. In elucidating two opposing models of interpretation, the “Hostile Worlds” model and the “Nothing But” model, Velthuis, drawing on earlier work by Viviana Zelizer, accounts for the close but often contradictory way the principles of market economics and the values of the art world interact.¹¹ The “Hostile Worlds” model casts market interests as intrinsically corrosive to the aesthetic, art historical or critical values of art works as their respective logical foundations are mutually exclusive. While the shared rituals, symbols, customs and behaviour comprising the institutional sphere of art are qualitative, involving creativity, imagination and other

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¹⁰ Clark, “The perfect fake,” 12.
unmeasurable values, the institutional sphere of the market is conversely quantitative, concerned with reducing human activity to its commodity or exchange value.\textsuperscript{12} The inherent incompatibility of these two worlds, as they inevitably interact, results in the reduction of art to a commodity fetish, the alienation of the artist from both her work and her audience, and the preoccupation of bourgeois audiences with “factors extrinsic to art, such as the signature and name of the maker.”\textsuperscript{13} Since the market reduces all values to monetary units of measurement, and as art works are unique, unquantifiable symbolic goods, the effect of the interaction of these two institutional spheres is society's estrangement from culture and its uplifting, regenerative effects.

The second model defining the relationship between art and commerce is identified by Velthuis as the “Nothing But” model, a model which disavows altogether the duality of competing logical frameworks established by the “Hostile Worlds” theory. Here, artistic value is conceptualised as “nothing but” a form of economic value.\textsuperscript{14} Hence, the art market is indistinguishable from any other market. Art works are commodities with value that can be measured and benefited from by its buyers and sellers. According to this model, art's commodity status is a neutral condition that has no discernible impact upon its cultural position or influence. Velthuis is critical of both views, suggesting a possible third alternative in which art and commerce are neither toxic to each other nor benign and neutral but, in fact, mutually reinforcing and actively engaged in each other's institutional spheres in a beneficial way. Economics is culturally charged and art has a self-interested, economic dimension. Thus, rather than an invasive, polluting influence directly causing distortions such as forgery, the application of market values and concerns to works of art serve to validate and elevate their unquantifiable, subjective qualities.

THE EMERGENCE OF FINE ART AND THE ART MARKET

In contrast to the “Hostile Worlds” narrative of degeneration that has been widely adopted by art world observers, and the “Nothing But” model that is more common in traditional economic circles, I argue that the special symbolic status of the authentic, original art work is underpinned by an interdependent, reciprocal relationship between artistic and economic factors. While art world principles such as quality, originality and authenticity legitimise financial values in the art market, economic considerations preserve and protect the intangible values of artistic quality by providing the measurable, observable evidence of price. A number of scholars have recognised the historic specificity of fine art and its development in close parallel with an open market for art and cultural activities. In his pioneering article, “The modern system of the arts: A study

\textsuperscript{12} Velthuis, \textit{Talking Prices}, 24.
\textsuperscript{13} Velthuis, \textit{Talking Prices}, 25.
\textsuperscript{14} Velthuis, \textit{Talking Prices}, 26.
in the history of aesthetics,” Paul Oskar Kristeller positions fine art as an aesthetic category that had no coherent form until the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{15} His treatise is further developed by Martha Woodmansee, who points more specifically to the emergence of competing bourgeois diversions such as popular literature to explain the consolidation of more refined, contemplative pursuits under the rubric of fine art.\textsuperscript{16} Larry Shiner's account of the eighteenth-century social and institutional changes that resulted in an integrated system of fine art provides a particularly compelling articulation of a model of reciprocity between economic and aesthetic forces.

According to Shiner, this model has its origins in Enlightenment Europe, during which art works produced under a nascent market system, in contrast to the traditional patronage system, were viewed as the expression of a gifted individual’s personality, creativity and imagination.\textsuperscript{17} The art market arose in close parallel with the acceptance of authenticity as a criterion of value synonymous with authorship and designed to legitimise and reinforce the financial value of inherently valueless objects. In this context, an art work was defined as such by its history of production and the identity of its creator.\textsuperscript{18} According to the principles outlined by Nelson Goodman, the autographic category of art works are identified not by the material that constitute them but by the context of their creation.\textsuperscript{19} This context is not reproducible no matter how faithfully a work’s likeness can be copied or replicated. Its authenticity, and thus its financial value, resides in its ontological condition as an object created by a person identified as an artist who intended that the object be interpreted as art. Hence, current understanding of art in the Western tradition as an object with an autographic ontological structure is an outcome of its emergence in the eighteenth century as a fungible commodity: an aspirational object of both conspicuous consumption and refined contemplation. Art world values encompassing creative freedom, originality, genius, and vision - values that repudiate forgeries, copies and fakes - arose in conjunction with a new understanding of art as an object of consumption that could be created for, and traded on, the open market. Its financial value was henceforth tied to its direct and irrefutable connection to a particular creator imbued with the essential qualities of individual genius and creativity by the art world. Recognising that the emergence, history and current structure of the art market necessarily embraces both economic and aesthetic forces is the key to understanding and combating the prevalence of forgery and fraud today.

\textsuperscript{17} Shiner, \textit{The Invention of Art}, 127.
\textsuperscript{19} Goodman, \textit{Languages of Art}, 118.
The value and emphasis accorded to authenticity and originality across the global secondary art market in its present form has its origins in the eighteenth century emergence of “fine art” as a discrete category of cultural production. A gradual unmooring of some categories of artistic endeavour - specifically painting, sculpture, poetry, music and architecture - from their artisanal, workshop-bound status was an outcome of the rapidly expanding European bourgeoisie and its growing appetite for leisurely diversions and activities. Along with some educated noblemen, many notable French, British and German writers and philosophers who were part of this new middle class agitated through journals, salons and other public forums for the elevation of purely aesthetic pursuits above the ‘ordinary’ pleasures associated with entertainment or utility. The gradual acceptance of fine art as an elevated category of cultural artefact, coupled with the growing level of interaction between the European nobility and the higher strata of the new bourgeoisie, had immediate repercussions for traditional ideas of originality, genius and the artistic temperament. The resulting association of fine art with the aspirational bourgeois qualities of taste, refinement and sophistication had a profound impact upon the practice of collecting and the idea of art as a market commodity. These effects can still be observed in the customs, habits and the treatment of art objects within the art market today.

Within his broader critique of the dominant art historical narrative characterising art as a universal and inevitable category of specialised human activity, Shiner positions the modern system of the fine arts as the result of a unique set of social transformations that occurred in eighteenth-century Europe. The separation of certain pursuits from other forms of skilled activity, subsequently re-classified as the products of innate talent and vision over practice and skill, reflected a corresponding separation of the new middle class from the peasantry. This emerging social stratum began enjoying aesthetic pursuits for their own sake rather than for a utilitarian, civic or religious purpose. Shiner treats this dramatic shift in perspective as a yardstick pinpointing the historical moment at which a handful of chosen activities acquired the descriptor of fine art and became a specialised category with an elevated cultural status. His conclusion, that the system of practices, activities and artefacts known collectively as fine art is an eighteenth-century invention, establishes a sound and useful basis from which to discuss the reciprocal relationship between aesthetics and economics in the art world. The autographic ontological status presently conferred upon the plastic arts can be traced to this era and explains the art market’s inclination towards monetising intangible properties such as genius, vision and creativity over the physical properties of the work itself. Other scholars, such as Stephen Davies, offer contrasting views, positioning art as “universal and foundational to human nature” and an outcome or by-product of adaptive survival behaviours, necessarily

21 Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 105.
leading away from the conclusion that art is a recent invention. While evidence supporting each of these viewpoints can be convincingly presented, Shiner’s account is the more useful in providing an explanation for the way that this particular autographic ontological framework for visual art has taken root in all the institutions of the art world, most significantly the art market.

The eighteenth-century shift in values leading to “the separation of artist from artisan and the work as creation from the work as construction,” established the paradigm of originality, authenticity and scarcity which currently regulates the global art market. With this shift, art works entered the province of luxury, becoming “positional goods”; objects whose financial value resides in their scarcity. Because generally only one individual can possess it, the art work assumes a declarative value affirming the collector’s wealth and taste. The act of selecting and paying extravagantly for a particular art work, therefore, has profound implications for the way its artistic values are perceived. This mutually-reinforcing mechanism drives a convergence of values, derived from the art market’s origins in Enlightenment Europe, whereby art world principles of creativity, originality and authenticity support the healthy functioning of what is essentially a commodity market. The laws and regulations related to the art market emphasise these values, not because of a righteous philosophical commitment to the artistic impulse, but because, in the absence of intrinsic value enjoyed by other fungible commodities, they underpin the financial values that make art works attractive assets for investment and trade. Through fundamental statutes such as copyright, *droit moral* and title, the veneration of creativity and originality is written into the legal frameworks underpinning the market. While many art world participants do, indeed, assert a righteous commitment to the artistic impulse - to the point of publicly denigrating any discussion of art’s investment or exchange value - fine art as an object of aesthetic and art historical significance nevertheless exists in the context of a market that relies upon equating authenticity and originality with quality and value. The extent and relevance of this synthesis is best understood when contextualised by an example from its earliest expression in modern history.

The legal and moral frameworks implicitly accepted across the art world today can be traced to the agitations of the English artist William Hogarth and a few of his fellow engravers, who pushed for legislation conferring exclusive rights to the creators of etchings, engravings and prints in the copying and selling of their works. Hogarth’s

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23 Shiner, *The Invention of Art*, 126.
actions built upon the passing of the Statute of Anne, the world’s first copyright legislation, in Britain in 1710. Despite being a watershed event that ratified a burgeoning alliance between commerce and individual artistic endeavour, it covered only literary works, as evinced in its formal title, “An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by Vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or Purchasers of Copies, during the Times therein mentioned.”26 Hogarth lobbied the British parliament for recognition of the authorial rights of engravers on similar grounds, submitting that the prevailing legal title holders, the print sellers, “insist upon a most unreasonable share of the Profits for selling the Prints.”27 According to the existing model, print sellers could make and sell cheap copies of an engraver’s original, undercutting the artist. Given that these counterfeits were usually variations of inferior quality, it is noteworthy that Hogarth’s petition remarked upon the effect the proliferation of copies had on an artist’s reputation and on the arts as a discipline of high standing. Current practices, he asserted, have functioned to “sink the Arts themselves into the low Condition which they are at present in.”28 Legislative protection of creators over print sellers would not only secure “to every one the Fruits of his own Labour,” but also improve the quality of artistic output in general, “encouraging more young Men of Taste and Genius ... to indulge their Love of Designing.”29 Consequently, the art public would have “a greater variety of Prints to choose out of.”30 Furthermore, he contended, as designing was “the Foundation of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, as well as all the Train of inferior Arts,” a resulting improvement in the quality of artistic production would enrich the nation and uplift its cultural standing across Europe.31

It is clear that Hogarth observed the emerging interdependence between commerce and art and recognised its significance for both the livelihoods of artists and for the progress of fine art itself. The 1735 “Engraver’s Act” (also colloquially known as Hogarth’s Act) invested “every Person who shall invent and design, engrave, etc., or work in Mezzotinto or Chiaro Oscuro,” with the “sole right and liberty of printing and reprinting” their work, “for the term of fourteen years to commence from the day of first publishing thereof.”32 Hogarth’s actions, and the spectacular success of the Act in curtailing piracy, wedded the Enlightenment notions of creative freedom, inspired vision and artistic integrity to the market principles of supply, demand, quality and reputation.33 Thereafter, the artist’s liberation from the constraints of patronage allowed him or her to exercise his or her own creative impulses, creating works in advance for an emerging art

27 Deazley, “Commentary on the Engravers’ Act.”
28 Deazley, “Commentary on the Engravers’ Act.”
29 Deazley, “Commentary on the Engravers’ Act.”
30 Deazley, “Commentary on the Engravers’ Act.”
31 Deazley, “Commentary on the Engravers’ Act.”
32 Deazley, “Commentary on the Engravers’ Act.”
33 Shiner, The Invention of Art, 118.
market. The illustrative power of this episode is twofold. Firstly, it establishes a point of origin for the connection between artistic value, economic value and autographic authenticity. Secondly, it demonstrates an emerging identification of originality as a primary quality in which economic and artistic value resides. Hogarth's battle for the recognition of engravers' rights planted the flag of value in the territory of both authenticity and originality, overturning previous assumptions that were formalised in law and anticipating later challenges, such as the inclusion of engravers in the British Royal Academy of Arts.

To engravers granted membership of the Royal Academy, the inferior status of 'Associate Engraver' was accorded to signify a distinction between the fine arts as disciplines involving invention, genius and originality, and the 'mechanical' arts associated with “mere skill and copying.” This division highlights the esteem conferred upon the philosophical notion of originality as a prerequisite of artistic quality and economic value in a fledgling market. The exclusion of engravers from full Academy membership symbolises eighteenth-century Europe's use of originality and authenticity as the primary tools with which to define fine art as a desirable, unique and, therefore, marketable commodity. The rise to prominence of these two qualities in this particular geographic and historical context brings into relief their culturally contingent nature. The correlation of originality with artistic virtue, exemplified by the demotion of engraving and other 'reproductive' arts to the “world of trade and manual work,” can be seen as an outcome of the early formation of a bourgeois, aspirational market and an art world to surround and support it. The positive association of originality with artistic and economic value arose alongside the significant changes to the conditions of artistic production and consumption that shifted the creative process from a patronage model to a market model. Under this new paradigm, an art work became an attractive asset if its uniqueness and scarcity could be assured. This condition influenced professional artists to cultivate and display in their work evidence of the Enlightenment ideal of the 'visionary genius', a mainstay of which was originality. Its importance to status, reputation and profit in this emerging market led to originality's conflation with authenticity, and resulted in the concept of authenticity as an autographic condition. Following these critical developments, such values have been reimagined as constant and universal aesthetic attributes. However, close inspection of the conditions surrounding their emergence have shown that they are not universal but historically and culturally contingent.

Shiner’s account of the modern system of fine arts, the treatment of engravers by the British Royal Academy of Arts, and the Hogarth legislation cementing artists’ authorial rights substantiate three claims. Firstly, that visual art works are assumed by the institutions of the art world to possess an autographic ontological structure. Secondly, that this structure is the result of significant social and institutional changes that took place in eighteenth-century Europe. Thirdly, that this ontological structure reinforces a compatibility and reciprocity between the artistic and economic aspects of art. The first claim is borne out by the rapid escalation of public regard for individual creative expression that accompanied the dismantling of the patronage system and its replacement with an open market for art. At the same time, the so-called ‘mechanical’ arts were discredited as lacking the hand of the artist. The second claim is validated, among other events, by the emergence of a middle class and its desire for purely aesthetic pursuits. This resulted in the veneration of individual artists and their demonstrations of creativity and genius. The third claim is supported by the adoption of Hogarth's Act which signified the public recognition of originality, creativity and innovation as essential artistic qualities through their formal attachment to the potential for profit. The convergence of these events created the circumstances in which art is treated as legitimate only by meeting a particular definition of originality and authenticity. This state of affairs confirms the geographic and historical specificity of visual art’s present autographic ontological condition.

ART FOR THE MARKET

As the previous sections have shown, the notions of authenticity and originality - as they are applied in today’s international secondary art market - are specific interpretations resulting from a set of European historical circumstances that cultivated an association of market principles with the elevated ideals of creativity, genius and vision. The uniformity of this application, however, has made it difficult for connoisseurs and other professionals to assess work that comes to the market from non-Western cultural settings. This has increasingly been the case since much of the work emerging from the European tradition has been priced out of the reach of all but the wealthiest collectors. In 2012, according to art industry observers, the Chinese art market exceeded the United States in volume and revenue for the first time, making questions surrounding the authentication of its works all the more pertinent. China’s cultural traditions value art as a mediator of spiritual truth, emphasising allegory, allusion, process and technique. The resulting proliferation of stylistically similar, often unattributed, art works has created some unique challenges

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for the Chinese art market as it has begun to attract the attention of Western and other non-Chinese collectors and art world professionals.

In 2012 and 2013, journalists began reporting that forgery and fraud were becoming a widespread problem in China’s booming art auction industry, and that “artificially-inflated prices and manipulated sales have so disrupted the values for Chinese art and antiques that the true value of many of them remains unclear.” As in the West, Chinese experts agree that the number of fakes appearing on the market has increased as overall participation has multiplied. However, estimates of the percentage of fakes coming to auction are far higher in China compared with equivalent auction houses in the West. Fakes and forgeries, often mass produced, have so flooded the market that regulators and observers have been unable to keep pace, and the trend has begun to infect the Western market. As the “pent-up consumerism of the newly rich” drives an explosion in the demand for luxury goods in China, collectors have sought to showcase their reverence for Chinese cultural heritage through the purchase of antiques, jade, archaeological artefacts, paintings and calligraphy. These circumstances have nurtured the ideal conditions in which a thriving demand for this type of material has collided with a culture in which high quality reproductions are in abundant supply, as supported by teaching traditions that prioritise precise copying and respect for traditional techniques. It takes little effort for these reproductions to make their way onto the market, where, once sold, they can acquire legitimacy and continue circulating in resale.

Copying, imitation and allusion are integral principles underlying the ontology of traditional Chinese art practices. The production and appreciation of art in China involves an awareness of, and reverence for, ancient techniques, the observation of highly codified workshop practices and a direct, unbroken lineage connecting the work of the past with that of the present. In contrast to the West, in which the 'shock of the new' narrative privileges originality in the form of novelty and innovation, Chinese art documents a sensibility that the masters of the past have distilled beauty in a manner worthy of emulation. Hence, while outright forgery with deceitful intent is not the aim, art schools and workshops heavily emphasise rote learning through imitation. Frequently, the student will use paper rubbings, woodblock prints and calligraphy copybooks as templates which he will copy or trace, providing expression in brush or ink. Through faithful practice and attention, the student will gradually learn his own autographic style.

39 Barboza, Bowley and Cox, “A Culture of Bidding.”
40 Barboza, Bowley and Cox, “A Culture of Bidding.”
41 Barboza, Bowley and Cox, “A Culture of Bidding.”
similar to the way in which the verbal expression of poetry reveals the identity and personality of the performer. The outcome of this is that these imitations find their way onto the market where they are mistaken for originals.43

The sixth principle of the much-celebrated 'Six Principles of Chinese Painting', written by the art historian Xie He in approximately 490CE, is 'transmission by copying', formalising the practice as an honourable and venerated aspect of scholarly artistic endeavour in China. Indeed, at least as far back as the fourth century, imitation and direct copying of the works of earlier masters was considered an integral aspect of artistic training and essential to maintaining technical knowledge and craftsmanship. The priority in most traditional Chinese art has been to capture the spiritual truth of its subject in a suitably reverential manner.44 To this end, a great deal of diligent practice is required of aspiring artists, in which the development of skills in tracing and direct copying of earlier masters, as well as imitation and pastiche, provides students with the foundations for the development of their own distinct style that, nevertheless, honours and preserves traditional wisdom. Over the centuries, this custom has matured into a visual culture that communicates a direct relationship between past and present, as well as between artist and the natural world. Art works function as a visible reminder of the artist's connection to an artistic tradition extending back to antiquity. As a result, the skills and knowledge required to produce a copy of a Song Dynasty silk painting, for example, remain highly regarded within Chinese culture, and, for this reason, many works that would be considered forgeries by the standards of Western connoisseurship and authentication practices are as equally treasured as originals in Chinese collections. This is not to say that all copies are valued in China. Once again, the context of creation and the ontological condition of the work in question largely inform judgements regarding authenticity.

Connoisseurs working within the rupture between the universalised Western art auction system and the non-Western origins of many of its artefacts will be better prepared to negotiate these differences in perspective if they approach works from the inside out, that is, from the perspective of their materially embodied, culturally emergent ontological status. Art works from a Euro-American context are readily identifiable with the system of authentication and connoisseurship currently employed by the auction industry as their ontological conditions are compatible. There is a vertical integration of ideas at work between Western conceptions of art as a manifestation of individual creativity and vision and its economic function as a fungible commodity traded for both investment and aesthetic purposes on the open market. The unmodified translation of this system to emerging economies such as China, however, presents difficulties because of the subtle but decisive ontological variations that colour the universal criteria against which art works are measured. Traditional Chinese art is largely valued for its timelessness: its depiction of a deep connection to tradition and history, the outcome of

43 Cahill and Silbergeld, “Chinese art and authenticity,” 18.
44 Ci, Chinese Painting, 8.
which is that many valuable art works, at face value, do not display the characteristics of originality and authenticity sought by Western collectors. Qi Baishi’s *Eagle Standing on a Pine Tree* (figure 1), for example, looks remarkably similar to any number of paintings on silk or paper created in the last 300 years (figures 2, 3 and 4). This twentieth-century artist draws heavily on the traditions and techniques of his predecessors to the extent that by Western standards this particular painting could qualify as plagiarism. This is a key ontological distinction not accounted for within a global art market lacking in nuance and easily affected by unfavourable assessments in its considerations of authenticity, originality and value. As objects of ‘embodied meaning’, art works are reducible to neither their physical nor their intentional properties, but an amorphous combination of both. In light of this, it is important for connoisseurs to bring to their assessments an understanding that the qualities they are expected to measure are intrinsic to the art work itself. Compelling works to fit the requirements of a particular commercial interest in a particular cultural context does not change their independent ontological status.

**Figure 1.** Qi Baishi (1863-1957), *Eagle Standing on a Pine Tree*, 1946. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 266 x 100 cm, private collection.
When discussing questions of authenticity in Chinese works, then, it is necessary to adopt the vocabulary and conceptual tools that facilitated their creation. While Western definitions of originality and authenticity, based on historical conditions favouring innovation, individual achievement and the profit motive, suit assessments privileging the hand of the artist, Chinese works may resist such criteria. Yet, by applying criteria sympathetic to their creative context, art works can still yield constructive insights and correct attribution. Attention to pictorial integrity (in painting), or the existence of the work independent of its creator, liberates the connoisseur from the onus of such considerations as inventiveness, genius or imagination. It is tangential, even irrelevant, to assess a Chinese art work as the outcome of an artist's motivation to express an individual creative vision and profit from it. A meaningful assessment of quality, authenticity and attribution is more likely to result if it is undertaken in faithfulness to its traditional purpose as a scholarly mediation between nature and human emotion. Contrary to the Western understanding of originality of expression, traditional Chinese calligraphy and traditional paintings on silk or paper are generally created and received as meditations that emphasise the creative act over the finished work, produced according to ancient rules for the moral and spiritual elevation of both the creator and the viewer and, in which,
the artist is positioned as mediator or conduit rather than creative agent. In this sense, authenticity and originality defer to the internal logic of the work itself and its faithfulness to ancient instructions. When examined from this perspective, Chinese art lends itself more to what Gregory Currie terms the “Instance Multiplicity Hypothesis,” according to which all art forms, including paintings and sculptures, are intrinsically multiple, in that they all possess a theoretical multiplicity of instances.

The global secondary art market problematises the unconditional esteem conferred upon originality and authenticity as intrinsically positive and essential artistic values. When examined in the context of present day international commerce, exchange and communication, the culturally-constructed nature of these values becomes apparent. Rather than universal aesthetic qualities, originality and authenticity are culturally specific historical values, developed and refined within the customs and institutions of European history. So completely have these values been assimilated, however, that their application today, especially within the secondary art market, are seen as universal and constant. The Western institutions that collectively constitute the art world legitimise and perpetuate this fixed definition of terms. The rapid expansion of globalisation, however, has inundated the market with competing interpretations of aesthetic quality and art world value.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONNOISSEURSHIP

While utilised today as only one of many available tools deployed in the assessment of art objects, connoisseurship denotes both a discipline and a sensibility derived from the seventeenth-century popularisation of the 'man of taste' or 'learned gentleman' as an ideal to which members of the European aristocracy were expected to aspire. Knowledge of art, the collection of decorative or exotic objects, and an ability to draw or paint were viewed as an indicator of good breeding and class status. By the early eighteenth century these habits and skills had evolved from a form of social currency into an organised practice in which this acquired knowledge was mobilised according to rational processes and principles for the purpose of appraisal, attribution and authentication. From the Latin 'cognoscere', to get to know, connoisseurship is founded on the idea that the concentrated study of a particular artist enables the practitioner to become so familiar with his or her style and technique that their work becomes immediately recognisable. This 'trained eye', a refined sensitivity to the subtleties of an art work's visible characteristics such as

45 Ci, Chinese Painting, 4.
composition, brushwork or subject matter, is deployed in a manner mythologised as virtually indistinguishable from instinct or intuition. Until the nineteenth century, it was considered the primary and most trustworthy form of appraisal, and its practitioners, drawn typically from the ranks of artists or 'gentleman collectors', were esteemed as scientists due to the rigorous application of meticulous study, analysis and classification which defined their practice. Its methodology relied entirely upon refined, astute observation, a practice superficially consistent with the principles of the scientific method that had recently gained influence among the educated classes of Europe. The use of documentary evidence or, later on, pigment analysis and laboratory testing to evaluate, authenticate and correctly attribute an art work was considered secondary to the insight that could be gleaned from the scrupulous inspection of a work's visible properties. In the twenty-first century, connoisseurship is a contested discipline, widely derided and discredited by many scholars as a pseudoscience, too subjective and arbitrary to be of any real value. However its reputation evolves, the discipline remains central to the due diligence practices employed by international auction houses. Even if called by another name and supported by evidence from scientific and documentary sources, connoisseurs are still traditionally acknowledged as the gatekeepers of art market integrity.

Looking broadly at just two artistic traditions, those of Europe and of China, reveals the breadth of conceptual terrain that today's gatekeepers must negotiate. As the art market becomes increasingly diversified, profitable and geographically diffuse, it is useful for connoisseurs to approach art works with a view that criteria such as authenticity, originality and aesthetic quality are coloured by the work's ontological condition, which is, in turn, dependent upon historical and cultural context. This being the case, treating all art works as ontologically identical would be unlikely to yield an accurate evaluation against such criteria. Equipped with the skills and language to discern the subtle, but often significant, ontological divisions between the creative output of different historical and cultural traditions, connoisseurs would have a more appropriate vocabulary with which to apply the necessary assessment criteria for authenticity and to evaluate quality. While the international art market, as a whole, tends towards a homogeneity of rules, standards and customs due to its Euro-American origins, the universal application of absolute values such as authenticity and originality are informed by qualities that are themselves conditional, culturally emergent and embodied in the artefacts themselves. Recognising this is the first step towards approaching works from the perspective of their particular ontological status. Aesthetic appreciation and the accurate, insightful assessment of quality, condition and attribution is thus opened up to considerations not allowed for under the rubric of strictly Western ontological conditions. A more flexible approach to connoisseurship facilitates the acceptance of a broader range

Connoisseurship in a Globalised Art Market

of definitions and criteria into the scope of authentication practices applied at the global level, and enables individual art works to be discussed and assessed on their own ontological terms rather than being compelled to fit a Western schema restricted by commercial interests and binary oppositions such as 'authentic vs. fake'.

Connoisseurs working in the global secondary art market are engaged to evaluate works against fixed, universal criteria, regardless of cultural or historical origin. Whether appearing at auction or for private sale, objects are measured against three specific benchmarks: authenticity (the art work is shown to have been genuinely created by the individual purported to have created it); originality (the work is the first of its kind and demonstrates innovation and inventiveness); and aesthetic, artistic or art historical value (members of a community accepted as part of an art world identify the object as art).

While their relative application in terms of emphasis or interpretation may shift according to such variables as the medium, age or provenance of a work, the absoluteness of the criteria themselves compresses the range of perspectives that can inform and add nuance to these criteria. This is because the criteria were established within the Western art historical tradition, with its origins in the Enlightenment intersection of a new definition of fine art with a nascent system of commerce and the market. In other words, the art market as it exists today is set up to trade in objects of a very specific ontological structure. As globalisation has accelerated communication and exchange across disparate cultural settings, art works from non-Western contexts have been increasingly transplanted into this structure, distorting their identities and misreading their intrinsic ontological qualities.

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