

The Hallmark of Authenticity: Origin or Artist, Secure Your Own Provenance!



By Anayat Durrani

California truck driver Teri Horton bought a painting for \$5 in a San Bernardino thrift shop in the early 1990s. She showed her painting to an art teacher who thought it could be by American abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock, one of the most famous artists of the last century. Thus began Horton's 15-year crusade, with the enlistment of a self-proclaimed "forensic art expert," to prove to a skeptical art world that her \$5 painting is a genuine Pollock worth up to \$50 million.

Pollock died in 1956 in a drunk-driving accident. Horton has not been able to prove where the \$5 painting came from, despite her "forensic art expert's" finding of fingerprints allegedly belonging to Pollock on the back of the disputed painting. The painting has no

provenance, and no connoisseurs of Pollock have accepted it as an original Pollock.

Two years ago, Alex Matter, the son of close friends of Pollock, announced he had found 32 paper wrapped paintings purported to be by Pollock in a storage area owned by Matter's father in Long Island. The works have been examined by Pollock connoisseurs, undergone tests and even chemical analysis at Harvard, but have left Pollock experts polarized on their authenticity.

Next to art theft, issues revolving around authenticity and attribution are arguably the biggest problems in the art market today. The Pollock-Horton saga and the Matter paintings highlight the importance of the existence of an organization like Fine Art Registry™ (FAR®)

for contemporary artists. By registering and tagging their artwork in the Fine Art Registry secure database today, artists can prevent future disputes over attribution and authenticity long after they are gone.

"Here we are 50 years after he's gone. I wonder what Pollock would say if he could see the media circus surrounding Teri Horton's piece," says Theresa Franks, CEO of Fine Art Registry. "If only FAR had existed when Pollock was alive. If he had registered his body of work, we would know for certain what was his and what wasn't."

Connoisseurship and the latest technology are sources used to determine authenticity. However, neither produces irrefutable results. Through FAR, contemporary artists will not have to worry about who will authenticate their work



when they are gone, as they can provide permanent, irrefutable provenance for their own work. A FAR tag is affixed to the work of art or art object and each tag is issued only to an authorized user who is registered with the system. Identification information for the work of art and its owner is stored in the database. By registering and

piece with a unique permanent identifier that corresponds to the record of all the information about the work and the artist who created it.”

In visual art, primary source refers to a record containing original information created at or about the time of the event, as opposed to compiled or secondary

Registering with FAR eliminates attributions

To be considered a credible attribution, the size, style, materials, composition, names of suppliers or manufacturers of materials used in the art, signature location, and so on must all be discussed. Through FAR, artists can personally record all the information about their artwork and about themselves directly into the database. Furthermore, the FAR database is searchable by artist, subject, year, medium, as well as works sold by the artist or owned by a particular collector. The online database is also a work in progress so that the artist can post updates at any time or as soon as new information is available.

“To value an art object, one has to first know where it originated and who best to tell us this than the artist himself?” says Franks.

There will be no questions on attributions or authenticity because it is the artist who has directly made a permanent historical record of their own work. For the collector and art historian, any issues of attribution or authenticity will be answered immediately through the FAR website, because it is the artist who supplied the information.

“Provenance established by the artist can mean the difference between absolute authentication and mere attribution,” says Franks.

“In making a permanent registration of your work on FAR®, you are creating primary source information about YOU, the artist, that no one now or ever can refute.”

tagging their own artwork when they create it, artists will establish provenance by cataloging all of the information about themselves and each piece they create in a secure database to be studied and researched by collectors and art historians for years and years to come.

“FAR® is the best solution because it is the only place a living artist can store primary source information about themselves for the future,” says Franks. “Added to this is the ability to mark each

information, explains Franks. Examples of primary sources include interviews, diaries, letters, speeches, results of experiments (forensic) or original research, literary works, autobiographies, original theories, artwork and other materials, she says.

“In making a permanent registration of your work on FAR, you are creating primary source information about YOU, the artist, that no one now or ever can refute. If the primary source says it’s so, it must be so,” says Franks.



Catalogue raisonné and the FAR database

Catalogues raisonnés provide a comprehensive source of information for all of an artist's body of work, up to the year the book or catalogue was printed. It is usually written by a connoisseur of the artist's work (or team of connoisseurs, art historians and scholars), and contains provenance of the work. The catalogue includes everything about the artist and their work, including examples of the artist's signature, and photographs and scans of the work throughout the catalogue.

Catalogues raisonnés are very expensive to produce and for collectors or historians researching an artist they are often expensive to purchase. They are rarely reprinted. A growing number of catalogues are now online, including those of Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall. As an online database, FAR similarly provides an accessible catalog of all registered artists to be accessed by scholars, dealers, auction houses, museums, and collectors to verify attribution or provenance of a work by an artist.

"We have only seen the start of where the Internet will take us, and those artists with a vision who are serious about making their mark in history and who choose to make their permanent catalogue now will benefit most," says Franks.

A catalogue raisonné is indeed pricey. Francis O'Connor and Eugene Thaw's four-volume catalogue raisonné on Jackson Pollock in 1978, which remains the scholar resource for study of the artist, is priced at \$5,000 (Ursus Books). The Pollock-Krasner Foundation published a supplement to the 1978 Pollock

authenticity is another matter. After the Pollock-Krasner Foundation published a supplement to the catalogue, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation authentication board was dissolved. The Foundation has not authenticated works since. It now directs owners of a suspected Pollock to contact

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catalogue raisonné in 1995, written under O'Connor's direction (\$150, Ursus Books).

"Why wait until you're dead and gone to have someone else subjectively manufacture your catalogue raisonné? That is if you're lucky enough that anyone cares to publish one on your work at all and if they do, will they get it right?" says Franks. "The best catalogue raisonné would come from the artist creating the work."

And, like the Pollock debacle, getting experts to agree on

the International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR), which consults a panel of anonymous experts who can issue opinions on authenticity. Scholars often do not publicly render opinions about art attributions or on authenticity for fear of liability.

"None of the experts want to commit to an opinion for an attribution or authenticity. No scholar, scientific or otherwise will risk a lawsuit," says Franks. "No longer is it enough for one expert to say that it is or isn't authentic.



It must be a consensus of experts. And none of the experts will sign any document certifying authenticity any more.”

FAR® is the natural solution

To avoid all the attribution and authenticity issues that have surrounded artists such as

comprehensive archived information on the artist and his or her body of work to include the permanent storage of a library of information on the artist, including digital photographs, digital documents and other digital media, like video and voice recordings, and stores it permanently,” says Franks.

unnoticed, unappreciated and lost to cultural society forever?” asks Franks.

Had Fine Art Registry™ existed during Pollock’s time, and had he registered and tagged his body of work, the Pollock-Horton case and other cases of recovered potential Pollock art would have already had a definitive answer on authenticity. With FAR, contemporary artists now have the opportunity to ensure that their artwork does not undergo the same fate.

“You, the artist, by creating your catalogue now, have the ultimate control in death too, an opportunity that Jackson Pollock, Chagall, Miró, Picasso, and all the rest that have gone before never had. The technology simply wasn’t there yet,” says Franks. “But today’s living artist is at the dawn of a new age in art history where they can take charge and tell their story in their own words, make decisions on what to include or not include in their catalogues raisonnés and possess authority over their own body of work long after they have passed on. The permanent historical record is all about you, the artist and the preservation and recordation of your mark in art history. And FAR is the answer.”

“Experts will then no longer be needed to authenticate an artists’s artwork, except perhaps in matters of a fake or forgery.”

Pollock, contemporary artists can and should register and tag their artwork with FAR. Experts will then no longer be needed to authenticate an artist’s artwork, except perhaps in matters of a fake or forgery. Any questions on provenance, authenticity and attributions can be remedied by way of a search through the FAR database. Inquiries on a piece of artwork can be found directly from the source that created it, the artist.

“The FAR database offers the permanent storage of

If an artist should pass on before making a catalog of their own using FAR, then they are leaving their body of work to be dissected, much like in the Pollock case, with no real concrete answers on provenance or authenticity. That is, of course, if the artist and their work is remembered.

“Fifty or one hundred years from now, when students, historians, collectors, other artists and educators research artists on FAR, what will they find about you? Will they find you at all? Or will you, like so many others, go unknown,

Keep up to date on the issues of authenticity and provenance – Join Fine Art Registry today!