



Why do people have their artwork appraised?

There's been an increase of calls lately from people who are considering selling. Another primary reason is that people need their insurance policies updated. And another might be estate—someone has passed away. There's a whole methodology that we use, depending on the purpose of the appraisal. If it's bankruptcy, we give you a liquidation value; if you're going to sell it, it's fair-market value; if you're going to insure it, it's replacement value.

How do you determine those values?

Using similar methodology as someone doing a house appraisal. We look for comparables—we don't pull a number out of the air; we go by the facts. We research what things have sold for, both at auction and in galleries. We have public-auction databases at our disposal, plus the relationships we've established in the art world. Those are critical because we have to call galleries and find out about past sales without jeopardizing someone's privacy.

What does an appraisal cost?

We type up a letter of engagement, which outlines our understanding of

Miriam Smith, Art Appraiser and Adviser

The Trade

A Laguna resident for 36 years, Smith has helped individuals and corporations buy, sell, appraise, and display artwork since 1987 through her Newport Beach-based Art Resource Group.

AN ABSTRACT PAINTER, SMITH took a job assisting an art adviser in Irvine. When she discovered she loved guiding clients through the art world, she turned consulting into a career. It requires a palette of varied skills. She's a detective who examines clues to a painting's provenance; a businesswoman who evaluates the art market; a curator who helps clients build a collection; an interior designer who finds the perfect place to hang a piece; and a counselor for those times when a Miró is faux. —*Anastacia Grenda*

the assignment and estimates the cost. The first piece is generally \$475, and each piece thereafter is about \$125, but that depends on the artwork.

Then the hands-on work begins?

We have an inspection table and a tool kit: We have a loupe we inspect a painting with, we have flashlights and blacklights. It's kind of forensic. We're looking for a signature, we're looking for notations—anything that will give us an indication of age, the artist, where it's been exhibited, any repairs, all of that. People are excited about coming in and getting that attention on the painting.

So clients can watch you work here?

Yes, or if it's a larger appraisal, we go to their home. On larger appraisals we're doing 50 to 60 pieces.

Made any surprising finds?

I did an estate appraisal that included a painting by Russian artist Alexej von Jawlensky. I knew if it was authentic, it was very important. So I went to the library and pulled out

Exhibit

“Perspectives on Reality,” an exhibit showcasing 10 nationally recognized American artists including Richard Diebenkorn, Viola Frey, and Kim Dingle, continues through Jan. 15 at Art Resource Group, 20351 Irvine Ave. #C-1, Newport Beach. 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and by appointment. 949-640-1972, artresourcegroup.com.

what's called a *catalogue raisonné* [a collection of known works produced by an artist]. I discovered that this piece was included, but the caption underneath said: whereabouts unknown. So it was thrilling to be able to write the experts who created this *catalogue raisonné* and inform them that the painting was in this particular collection. And it increased the value of that work and established that it's authentic.

What does the final appraisal include?

There's an affidavit telling the purpose of the appraisal. It includes the date. Our qualifications are listed and there's a summary of the property; we have pictures of everything. And then we have source bibliographies—whom we spoke with. If a painting is damaged in a fire, the insurance company knows whom we talked to. It talks about our methods and includes value discussion. Unfortunately, we sometimes do have to give bad news.

That must be difficult.

There's a lot of psychology involved. Sometimes families have built up very high expectations—they might have bought a painting and been told it was going to be very valuable, and that's not the case at all. We try as carefully as we can to be sensitive.

ANASTACIA GRENDA has been writing about the arts for Orange Coast since 2003. Read her story on the local dance scene on Page 92.