

AN EYE FOR A PAINTING

*Love that work of art?
Before you whip out your checkbook,
Get the advice of an expert.*

In the past

three decades, there's been a boom in the market for fine art depicting dogs, especially among fanciers seeking to invest in elegant images of their breed. Unfortunately, it's hard to know whether a painting or sculpture is worth the asking price, or is a good investment. Most people will need the help of an educated eye, a professional art appraiser.

For some guidelines on choosing and hiring a top professional, the GAZETTE talked with Martine White, of Bernards Appraisal Associates (bernardsappraisal.com), in Gladstone, New Jersey. White is a senior accredited appraiser with the American Society of Appraisers and has been appraising fine art and antiques for over 20 years. As a collector of sporting and dog-portrait paintings, White has taken a special interest in appraising dog art on behalf of the AKC and individual collectors for insurance-scheduling purposes. She is also the proud owner of Little Bear, a Sussex Spaniel.

GZ: How did you develop your interest in appraising art?

MW: I grew up painting, and surrounded by art. My mother was a regional New Jersey artist, and I have relatives who are established artists. Art is like music; it feeds the soul. Setting aside the valuation standpoint, I enjoy the intrinsic value of art. It's amazing how the character of a painting can transport you to another consciousness.

GZ: What skills are essential for your work?

MW: To appraise art you must understand the medium of the work and the artist who created it. There are specific characteristics that define an artist's work that transcend the signature. A

good appraiser should be evaluating brushstrokes, style, and even how the canvas was placed on the stretcher or the type of board the artist chose as a substrate. A good art appraiser has a critical eye—this is not something you can acquire through book knowledge. Also, an art appraiser should be an art collector as well. It is not until you live with a work that you truly understand it. I could not live without my collection of sporting and dog art!

GZ: Say I'm interested in buying a painting. What's the first step in finding out how much it is worth?

MW: The value of fine art is dependent upon the artist who created the work. So the first step to valuation is to determine if the work is authentic. If the painting is unsigned and the artist is unknown, then the value is based on decorative considerations. Important questions to ask the seller or retailer are:

- What is the history of the painting, i.e., who owned the painting and was it ever exhibited? (Exhibition labels are often found on the back of the painting.)
- Is the painting signed or is it an attribution to the artist? If it is an attribution, is the painterly style correct?
- If the painting is signed, does the artist have an established track record of sales in the primary retail or secondary auction market?
- What time period of the artist's life was the painting created?
- What is the medium of the painting? Oil on canvas, watercolor on paper, et cetera? Is this the medium the artist typically worked in? At the time of purchase, I would always request written documentation that not only confirms the authenticity of the painting but the provenance as well. In addition, a formal receipt



White poses with a Maud Earl painting of the spaniel Smut.

(rather than an appraisal from the gallery) documenting the artist of the painting, creation date, and medium is a very important aspect of the sale and should accompany any purchase. In the event of questionable authenticity down the road, this is the consumer's only legal recourse.

GZ: How should I go about hiring an appraiser when buying art either retail or at auction?

MW: It is very important to hire a certified appraiser of personal property with a designation or experience in the appraisal of fine art. However, unlike real-estate appraisers, personal-property appraisers are not required to be certified in any state. Anyone can hang out a shingle and claim to be an appraiser. Fortunately, there are certifying organizations such as the American Society of Appraisers (appraisers.org) and the Appraisers Association of America (appraisersassoc.org) where professional appraisers can complete intensive coursework and qualifying examinations in appraisal methodology, valuation science, and connoisseurship. A professional appraiser is a researcher and report writer and is certified with an appraisal organization under the umbrella of the Appraisal Foundation, in Washington, D.C. Professional appraisers write appraisal reports in conformance to USPAP (Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice). Certifying appraisal organizations have websites with member listings in regional chapters and designations.

COURTESY SUBJECT

GZ: Do appraisers specialize? And, if so, how narrow is the focus? If you are interested in a Maud Earl, should you look for an appraiser who is an expert in this artist or British dog art?

MW: It would prove difficult to find an appraiser with such a narrow expertise. This type of expert would be more valuable in the process of authentication. However, for valuation purposes, a certified appraiser who is experienced in appraising 19th- and early 20th-century English and American paintings, specifically dog portraits and sporting art, would be a good choice.

GZ: I found a painting in my attic. If I hire an appraiser to tell me what it's worth, how do I know if that person is giving me an honest, accurate assessment?

MW: The appraiser should be certified and in good standing with a certifying organization. In addition, I would recommend an appraiser who is not a dealer, auctioneer, or broker. Therefore, there will be no conflicts of interest with the valuation. Wearing too many hats can prove problematic!

GZ: Should I get a second opinion?

MW: A certified appraisal written in conformance with USPAP should have complete documentation substantiating the value opinion. Therefore, if the value conclusion is backed up with supporting documentation, there should be no need for a second opinion. **GZ**