



Researching Your Art

Want to learn more about the painting you found while clearing out the attic? What about the drawing that has been hanging in grandma's hallway since you were a kid? Maybe the sculpture you found at the flea market last summer really *is* a Remington? How can you find out?

For answers, be prepared for a little detective work. We hope these tips and resources will help you begin, but remember these lists are not exhaustive. Whether you research a family heirloom or a yard-sale find, the process can be rewarding!

Okay, let's investigate!

- [First Steps](#)
- Know the artist's name? Go to [Biographical Resources](#)
- See a mark or signature you cannot identify? Check out [Signatures, Monograms, and Markings](#)
- To learn about the history of particular artwork, go to [Exhibition Guides and Provenance](#)
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First Steps

Like any good detective, begin with what you know. Gather the information. What is the title or subject of the work? Where and when was it made? If you do not know the exact year, perhaps you can guess an approximate date. How long has the work belonged to you or your family? Check family records and interview relatives who might know something about the artwork. If you recently acquired your treasure, try to obtain as many details as possible from the seller, dealer, or previous owner. If you are researching a painting, can you determine its style? Is it realistic or impressionistic? Is it abstract or representational? After reviewing the information you have, determine what else you want to learn. Such questions will guide your research.

Many printed and online resources can help you investigate your artwork. The best place to start is your public library. There a librarian should be able to direct you to helpful books, clipping files, and online databases or indexes. If you live near a university or art

museum, check to see if their libraries are open to the public. They will likely have many of the specialized art resources listed in this guide. Do not overlook state or local historical societies, as they may also have a wealth of information. Archives and art museum libraries are usually open by appointment only, and you will need to contact them in advance for access to their materials.

Biographical Resources

If you know the artist's name, consult biographical dictionaries to learn some basic, but important facts about the artist. Often, these publications are organized by regions (e.g., *Dictionary of New Orleans Artists*), by subject (e.g., *Dictionary of Marine Artists*), by media (e.g., *Dictionary of Western Sculptors in Bronze*) or by time periods (e.g., *Handbook of 17th, 18th and 19th Century American Painters*). Please see our appendix for a comprehensive bibliography.

Biographical dictionaries provide vital statistics including life dates; locations of birth, death and activity; school affiliations including where the artist studied or taught; and memberships in artistic clubs or societies such as the National Academy of Design. Some dictionaries may also provide variant spellings of the artist's name, information on when and where the artist exhibited, or list the whereabouts of the artist's major works. Because an artist might be listed in more than one dictionary, checking several might help you develop a greater understanding of the artist.

Dictionaries of American Artists

- Falk, Peter Hastings, ed. *Who Was Who in American Art*. Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1999.
- Groce, George C. & David H. Wallace, eds. *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America, 1564-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Havlice, Patrice Pate, ed. *Index to Artistic Biography*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981-.
- Igoe, Lynn Moddy, and James Igoe. *250 Years of Afro-American Art: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1991.
- Optiz, Glenn B., ed. *Dictionary of American Sculptors: 18th Century to the Present*. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Apollo Book, 1984.
- Opitz, Glenn B., ed. *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers*. Poughkeepsie, NY: Apollo Book, 1983.

Dictionaries for International Artists

If the artist you're researching isn't listed in the above sources, check more comprehensive international dictionaries. Plus, see our bibliography of specialized dictionaries grouping artists by region or media.

- *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*. Munich: K.G. Saur, 1992-.
- Benezit, E., ed. *Dictionnaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs, et Graveurs*, Paris: Gründ, 1999.
- *Mallet's Index of Artists, International-Biographical, Including Painters, Sculptors, Illustrators, Engravers and Etchers of the Past and Present*. New York: Peter Smith, 1948.
- Petteys, Chris, ed. *Dictionary of Women Artists: An International Dictionary of Women Artists Born Before 1900*. Boston, G.K. Hall, 1985.
- Thieme-Becker, ed. *Allgemeines Lexicon der Bildenden Künstler*. Leipzig: Verlag Von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1907-1913.

Sources for Contemporary Artists

Contemporary artists are often more difficult to research. Do not give up too quickly though. Many contemporary artists have personal Web sites. Try entering the artist's name in an Internet search engine such as Google, Altavista, or Yahoo. If the artist does not have a Web site you may still discover a press release from an exhibition or a newspaper or magazine article. When you've exhausted online resources, consider the following printed materials:

- *Dictionary of Contemporary American Artists*. Ed. Paul Cummings, New York: St. Martins Press, 1994.
- *New York Public Library: The Artists File (microfiche)* Alexandria, Va: Chadwyck-Healy, Inc., 1987-1989.
- *Who's Who in American Art*. New Providence, N.J.: R. R. Bowker, annual.

Online Artist Biographies

There are surprisingly few comprehensive online sources for artist biographical information. Try these art specific sources:

- www.AskArt.com has information on about 28,000 American artists, which may include biographical data, images of the artist's works, auction sale information, etc.
- www.artnet.com

Some larger biography sites reference major artists:

- www.infoplease.com/people.html
- www.biography.com

The Getty Research Institute maintains the Union List of Artist Names at www.getty.edu/research/conducting_research/vocabularies/ulan/. While this online database doesn't include full biographies, the index does supply the artist's name, variant spellings, life dates, nationality, and related bibliographic citations.

Signatures, Monograms and Markings

If you have only a signature or initials and cannot identify the artist, consult an artist signature or monogram dictionary.

- Castagno, John, ed. *American Artists: Signatures and Monograms, 1800-1989*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990.
- Castagno, John, ed. *Artists as Illustrators: An International Directory with Signatures and Monograms 1800 to the Present*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990.
- Falk, Peter Hastings, ed. *Dictionary of Signatures and Monograms of American Artists*. Madison, Conn.: Sound View Press, 1988.
- Jackson, Radway, ed. *The Visual Index of Artists' Signatures and Monograms*. London: Cromwell Editions, 1991.

Foundry and Material Supplier Dictionaries

Be aware that not all names found on an object belong to the artist. For example, previous owners may have written their name on the back of an object. Often, for cast or fabricated sculptures, the foundry or fabricator's name or monogram symbol appears on the base of the sculpture or another inconspicuous place. Sometimes, material supplier

name can appear on a work or an attached label. Foundry and material supplier dictionaries can help you identify these marks and establish where your artist may have been active.

- Berman, Harold. *Bronzes: Sculptors & Founders: 1800-1930*. Chicago: Abage Publications, 1974-ca. 1981.
- Edge, Michael S. *Directory of Art Bronze Foundries*. Springfield, Ore: Artesia Press, 1990.
- Forrest, Michael. *Art Bronzes*. West Chester, Pa: Schiffer, 1988.
- Katlan, Alexander W. *American Artists' Materials Suppliers Directory Nineteenth Century: New York 1810-1899; Boston 1823-1877*. Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Press, 1987.
- Katlan, Alexander W., *American Artist's Materials: A Guide to Stretchers, Panels, Millboards and Stencil Marks*. Madison, Conn.: Soundview Press, 1992.
- Shapiro, Michael Edward. *Bronze Casting & American Sculpture: 1852-1900*. Newark, Del.: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1985.

Exhibition Guides and Provenance

Facts about an artwork's history can prove elusive. Titles of works may change over the years. Plus, dimensions often vary slightly, depending on how measurements were taken. For tracking provenance (the location of an artwork prior to its current ownership), start with exhibition guides in print. Consult auction indexes, collection catalogs or inventories, catalogues raisonné, and archival files and records.

For nineteenth century and earlier works, search the Smithsonian American Art Museum's online [Pre-1877 Art Exhibition Catalogue Index](#)--a list of 950 exhibitions held in this country through the 1876. You can also consult the following exhibition guides:

- *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*. Madison, Conn: Soundview Press, 1988-1989.
- Cowdrey, Mary Bartlett, ed. *American Academy of Fine Arts & American Art-Union, 1816-1852*. New York: New-York Historical Society, 1953.
- Manor, Clark S., comp. *A History of the Brooklyn Art Association with an Index of Exhibitions*. New York: James F. Carr, 1970.
- Naylor, Maria, comp. *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record: 1826-1860, 1861-1900*. New York: Kennedy Galleries, 1973.

- Perkins Jr., Robert F., and William J. Gavin, III, comps. *Boston Athenaeum Art Exhibition Index 1827-1874*. Boston: Library of Boston Athenaeum, 1980.
- Rutledge, Anna Wells, ed. *Cumulative Record of Exhibition Catalogues: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1955.

Encyclopedias and Surveys

For more in-depth information, ask your librarian to help you search the library's online catalog. There you might find books or exhibition catalogs featuring your artist.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum's library catalog (like many other museum or university catalogs) can be searched via the Internet at www.siris.si.edu. If you find a book that interests you, check with your local library to see if they have it or can borrow it through interlibrary loan.

To find relevant articles in magazines or journals, look for the artist's name in periodical indexes such as *Art Index* or *Art Bibliographies Modern*. Makers of decorative arts, designers, or craft artists may be indexed in *Design and Applied Arts Index*.

After locating a relevant book or article, check out the accompanying bibliographies for sources you might not have already discovered.

To find out which museums own work by a particular artist, search the Smithsonian American Art Museum's national [Inventories of American Painting and Sculpture](http://www.siris.si.edu/saam.htm) available on the web through SIRIS (the Smithsonian Institution Research Information System) at www.siris.si.edu/saam.htm.

Do not be discouraged if you cannot find an artist listed in standard biographical resources. Even though the artist might not have a national following, he or she might be well known regionally. If the artist is native to your area or if you know of an associated geographical location, try contacting state or local historical societies for unpublished information in their files. Some larger public libraries and museum art libraries maintain ephemera files on artists active in their areas.

With or without the artist's name, there is still plenty to discover about your object. If you have clues regarding the title, style, or date of the work, but no artist information, you can still track down the origins of your object with careful research. Look for well-illustrated exhibition catalogs or general art survey books to see if you can find any similar works that would help match your artwork to a particular "school of artists."

Encyclopedias

- *Grove's Dictionary of Art*

- *McGraw Hill Dictionary of Art*
- *Praeger Encyclopedia of Art*
- *Encyclopedia of World Art*
- *Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists*

General Survey Books

- Brown, Milton W. *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.
- Craven, Wayne. *Sculpture in America*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1984.
- Prown, Jules David. *American Painting from its Beginnings to the Armory Show*. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

Have you uncovered the mysteries of your work of art? Sometimes it is very difficult--or impossible--to determine an artwork's maker or history. If that is your conclusion, do not feel discouraged. If you enjoy your treasure and want to preserve it for years to come, there is plenty to learn about its value and how to properly care for it.

How Much is Your Object Worth?

It is hard to establish fixed values for antiques, artworks and other collectible items. The amount asked or offered is determined by many factors, including the condition of the object, personal interests of both the seller and the purchaser, and trends in the market. According to Smithsonian Institution policy, no staff member may offer monetary evaluations. However, the following guidelines should help you find an approximate value for your artwork.

First, consult price guides to determine current sale and auction prices. Some price guides are available on the Internet, but most come in published book or CD-Rom format. Specialized university or art museum libraries and larger public libraries often carry these guides. Price indexes are usually published annually and cover international auctions and galleries.

Price Guides

- *ADEC: International Art Prices*
- *Art Sales Index*
- *Davenport's Art Reference & Price Guide*
- *International Auction Records*
- *Leonard's Annual Price Index of Art Auctions*

For prints, check the following resources:

- *Gordon's Print Price Annual*
- *Contemporary Print Portfolio*
- *Lawrence's Dealer Print Prices International*

Online Pricing Resources

- <http://icollector.com>
A free database of 1.1 million sales of fine arts at auction. It gives you access to online auctions, auction catalogs, dealers and gallery directories.
- www.auctions-on-line.com
- www.artfact.com
- www.artprice.com
- www.artcult.com
- www.artnet.com
Unregistered users can access a demo database.

Appraisals & Appraisers

Consider finding an appraiser to determine the value of your artwork. Appraisers are trained specialists who work for a fee. They evaluate your piece and give you a written statement of its value. Although the following organizations do not provide appraisals themselves, they each publish a directory of their members. Always seek an appraiser with an expertise in the type of artwork what you own.

American Society of Appraisers
11107 Sunset Hills Road, Suite 310
Reston, VA 20190
(703)-478-2228 or 1-800-ASA-VALU
www.appraisers.org

Appraisers Association of America
386 Park Avenue South, Suite 2000
New York, New York 10016
(212) 889-5404
www.appraiserassoc.org

International Society of Appraisers
303 West Madison Street, Suite 2650
Chicago, IL 60606
(312) 981-6778
www.isa-appraisers.org

Auction Houses

Some auction houses also host free “open house” days where visitors can bring in their artworks and have auction-house staff members share their expertise. Other houses will allow owners to mail their information with a photograph, and their experts will respond. To find an auction house in your area, search the web for “fine art auction houses.”

Prints, Posters, and Slides

Do you have a print or a poster? If it is a print, is it an original? It can be difficult to answer these questions without taking the item to an appraiser or auction house. Yet you can begin your research by finding a catalogue raisonné (a complete listing of an artist's works), if one has been published for that artist.

Make sure you know the difference between a print and a poster. A print is an original artwork created using relief techniques—such as woodcuts or linocuts—or intaglio processes such as etching, engraving, lithography, or serigraphy. Each technique maintains the character of the marks made by the artist during the creative process. An original print marries the printing ink to the paper or, in the case of photography, to the light-sensitive photographic paper.

A print is the result of a unique artistic process that experts consider to be on a par with drawing, painting, and other fine-art techniques. Unfortunately, reproductions are often incorrectly referred to as prints. Often, items advertised as "fine-art prints" or "limited edition prints" are really photomechanical reproductions of original works of art. Such reproductions use the same commercial printing processes used in producing magazine illustrations. The artist's involvement is not required. Reproductions have the virtue of being less expensive than originals, but they are not considered original artworks.

Print Information Resources

- Cahn, Joshua Binion, ed. *What is an Original Print? Principles Recommended by the Print Council of America*. New York: Print Council of America, 1964.
- *Currier & Ives: A Catalogue Raisonné: A Comprehensive Catalogue of the Lithographs of Nathaniel Currier, James Merrit Ives, and Charles Currier, including ephemera associated with the firm, 1834–1907*. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1984.
- Gascogine, Bamber. *How to Identify Prints. A Complete Guide to Manual and Mechanical Processes from Woodcut to Ink Jet*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986.

- Griffiths, Antony. *Prints & Printmaking. An Introduction to the History and Techniques*. London: British Museum, 1980.
- Johnson, Una A. *American Prints & Printmakers*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980.
- Nadeau, Luis. *Encyclopedia of Printing, Photographic and Photomechanical Processes*. Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada: 1994.
- Riggs, Timothy. *The Print Council Index to Oeuvre-Catalogues of Prints by European and American Artist*. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus International Publication, 1983.
- Stauffer, David McNeely, and Mantle Fielding. *American Engravers upon Copper and Steel*. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Books, 1994.
- Watrous, James. *American Printmaking: A Century of American Printmaking, 1880–1980*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1984.

Selected Print Dealers

The Old Print Gallery, Inc.
1212 31st Street, NW
Washington DC 20007

The Old Print Shop
150 Lexington Avenue
New York NY 10016
www.oldprintshop.com

The Philadelphia Print Shop
8441 Germantown Print Shop
Chestnut Hills PA 19118
www.philaprintshop.com

Poster and Reproduction Sources

Is your love of fine art deeper than your pocketbook? Would you be happy with a reproduction, poster, or slide of a famous work? Most local print and frame shops have catalogs of commercially available posters. Or try searching the Web. Just use your favorite search engine and type in "art posters" or "art reproductions." Remember that some artworks are not reproduced in poster or slide format.

- www.allaboutart.com

- www.allposters.com
- www.art.com
- www.Barewalls.com
- www.globalgallery.net
- www.postershop.com
- www.postergallery.com

Superstock Fine Art Catalog
 7660 Centurion Parkway
 Jacksonville FL 32256
 (800) 246-3378

Museum Gift Shops

If you're longing for a specific image, and you know which museum owns the artwork, contact that museum's gift shop to see if a poster or reproduction is available.

Art Institute of Chicago (800) 621-9337 www.artic.org

Boston Museum of Fine Arts (800) 227-5597 store.yahoo.com/mfapublications

Metropolitan Museum of Art (800) 662-3397 www.metmuseum.org/store/index.asp

Museum of Modern Art (800) 447-6662 momastore.org

If you're still unable to locate a particular image, some companies may help you locate a hard-to-find poster or reproduction for a fee.

Haddad's Fine Arts Reproductions
 3855 E. Mira-Loma Avenue
 Anaheim CA 92830
 (714) 996-2100

New York Graphic Society
 33 River Road
 Cos Cob CT 06807
 (203) 661-2400
 **not available for sale to individuals

Art Print Resources
209 Riverside Avenue
Yonkers NY 10705
(800) 466-6799

Print Finders
955 Massachusetts Avenue, #271
Cambridge MA 02139
(888) 997-6783
www.printfinders.com

Shorewood Collection/Shorewood Fine Arts Reproductions
475 Tenth Avenue
New York, NY 10018

Selected Slide Suppliers

Davis Art Images
50 Portland Street
Worcester, MA 01608
(800) 533-2847
www.davisartimages.com

For a more complete list of slide suppliers, see the Visual Resources Association Web site at www.vraweb.org

How to Care for Your Collections

Regardless of the value of your artwork, if it is personally meaningful, you should consider having the object conserved. It is very important to have trained professionals do the job. Your local art museum, gallery or historical society can recommend reputable conservators in your area. For guidelines on selecting a conservator and a list of professional conservators in your area, contact the following organizations:

American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works (AIC)
1717 K Street, N.W., Suite 301
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 452-9545
aic.stanford.edu

Staff at the Smithsonian Center for Materials Research & Education are often asked questions about caring for and preserving artifacts and heirlooms. While they cannot give advice on specific items, they have broad guidelines and strategies for artifact and collection care. For access to these resources, many of which are online, go to www.si.edu/scmre/takingcare/guidelines.htm.

Library of Congress
Preservation Directorate
101 Independence Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20540-4500
(202) 707-5213

The Library of Congress also provides useful advice on preserving works on paper (drawings, prints, posters) and on caring for books, photographs, videos, and so forth. The Library of Congress has online publications that answer questions related to the care, handling, and storage of valuable collections, which can be found at www.locweb.loc.gov/preserv/careothr.html.

Conservation Organizations

The following organizations are primarily geared toward the professional, but they do serve the general public.

The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA)
264 South 23rd Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 545-0613
www.ccaha.org

CCAHA sponsors informative lectures and workshops in collections care.

Northeast Documentation Center (NEDCC)
100 Brickstone Square
Andover, MA 01810-1494
(978) 470-1010
www.nedcc.org

NEDCC is especially strong on the conservation of paper-based materials. Their Web site provides a useful list of Internet Resources and their Preservation Manual.

The Regional Alliance for Preservation (RAP) is a consortium of 15 regional conservation centers. Their Web site provides an extensive bibliography of publications and online leaflets. See, especially: Starter Kit for Collections Managers at www.rap-arcc.org.

Additional Conservation Reading

- Bachmann, Konstanze, ed. *Conservation Concerns: A Guide for Collectors and Curators*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

- Clapp, Anne F. *Curatorial Care of Works on Paper*. Oberlin: Intermuseum Conservation Association, 1978.
- Dollof, Francis W. & Roy L. Perkinson. *How to Care for Works of Art on Paper*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1979.
- Ellis, Margaret Holben. *The Care of Prints and Drawings*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1987.
- Keck, Caroline. *A handbook on the care of paintings*. Nashville: The American Association for State and Local Histories, 1965.
- Long, James S. *Caring for your family treasures*. New York: Heritage Preservation and H.N. Abrams, 2000.
- National Committee to Save America's Cultural Collections. *Caring for Your Collections*. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1992.
- Simpson, Mette Tang, and Michael Huntley, eds. *Sotheby's Caring for Antiques: a guide to handling, cleaning, display and restoration*. London: Conran Octopus, 1992.
- Zigrosser, Carl, and Christa M. Gaehde. *A Guide to the Collecting and Care of Original Prints*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1969.

Collection Documentation

Caring for your collection extends beyond maintaining the physical condition of the objects. It is important to keep good object records and a collection history. This data will be invaluable for insurance purposes in case of theft or disaster. Be sure to create a folder for each object in your collection.

In your file, include the following items:

- color photographs of the object, including full-view and details—front, back, framed and unframed. Document multiple views of three-dimensional works.
- purchase date and price
- vendor data
- artist/maker information including life dates
- title of work
- detailed description of object's subject matter or type of work
- date of work
- dimensions—framed and unframed for two-dimensional works. Overall, object and base measurements for three-dimensional works
- media and support data

- detailed description of object--include location of scratches, losses, dents, abrasions, and so on.
- copies of all conversation and appraisal reports
- text of inscriptions, markings and labels
- ownership history (“provenance”)
- bibliographic information if your work is cited in any exhibition catalogues, auction catalogues or catalogues raisonné
- exhibition and loan history

See the Getty website for information on protecting cultural objects through international documentation standards at www.getty.edu/conservation/index.html

In the unfortunate event your artwork gets stolen, here are important resources.

International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR)
 500 Fifth Avenue, Suite 1234
 New York, NY 10110
 (212) 391-6234
www.ifar.org

Art Loss Register
 20 East 46th Street
 New York, NY 10017
 (212) 297-0941
www.artloss.com

[National Stolen Art File](http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/artheft/aboutus.htm)
www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/artheft/aboutus.htm

A source for information about stolen art in general; includes a link to Interpol.

Want to Learn More?

For further information on materials, terms or techniques, please check the source listed below.

- Carr, Dawson, W., & Mark Leonard. *Looking at Paintings: a guide to technical terms*. Malibu, Calif.: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992.
- Mayer, Ralph. *The Artist's Handbook of Materials & Techniques*. New York: Viking, 1991.

- Taylor, Joshua C. *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*. 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Online Dictionaries of Art Terms

- [ArtLex www.artlex.com](http://www.artlex.com)
A dictionary of visual art, more than 2,600 terms illustrated
- Words of Art www.arts.ouc.bc.ca/fiar/glossary/gloshome.html
An online glossary of terms found in art theory and criticism

Bibliographies

If you want to research a bit more, check out the following bibliographies.

Artists by Region (pdf, 92k)

Learn more about artists who were active in your state.

Artists by Occupation (pdf, 88k)

Resources on architects, craft and design artists, folk arts, foundries, graphic artists, illustrators, photographs, sculptors, and artist who specialized in miniatures or silhouettes.

Minority Artists Biographical Sources (pdf, 92k)

Sources on African American, Asian American, Latino artist, Native American, women, and hearing impaired artists.

Basic Dictionaries and Other Sources (pdf, 84k)