



DEGREES OF AUTHENTICITY

We tend to think of artworks as being authentic or reproductions, or as authentic or forgeries.

As usual, the reality is more complex.

It was common of artists of the past to have workshops where they employed an entire team of assistants. These assistants usually had specialties. Some were particularly competent at painting fabric and clothing. Others had a great talent with landscapes. Some were good at painting faces and others had a gift for horses.

Together the entire workshop produced one great painting after another and they were all sold as the work of the master. In a good workshop that comprised talented painters the master himself could go for months without touching a brush. This was the case with Rubens for example.

The result of this situation is that next to works "by" the artist, meaning that he presumably painted them entirely by himself, we find works in which assistants participated from a little bit to a lot, then works painted entirely by assistants.

Then there is the question of works "attributed to" as opposed to works "by" the artist.

The difference is one of proof, of certainty. By definition, a work "attributed to" is "probably" by the artist but it is not guaranteed. Why is it not guaranteed? Generally, because there is not enough evidence or because some detail, some aspect of the work, or of its history, creates a doubt, a question, a hesitation. In such cases, the work is labelled "Attributed to" instead of "by" the artist.

Right here we see that we have four degrees of authenticity:

- By the artist
- Attributed to the artist
- Studio of the artist (which means he had help from assistants)
- Workshop of the artist (which means the assistants did it all on their own}

Following this we have further derivatives:

- Circle of the artist means painted by a contemporary of his. It means the work is exactly as old and painted on and with the same materials and art supplies as if the master had painted it.
- After the artist. This means that it is supposed to be a copy of a known work of the artist. Naturally, the thorny question is whether it is a copy or another version by the artist himself?
- Follower of the artist. This means painted by someone who liked to paint like the master and the same type of compositions and who was either his contemporary or nearly contemporary.

Works painted much later are referred to as:

- In the manner of the artist if the subject, technique and style are like his
and
- Style of the artist if it is just the general style that is similar

Finally, of course, there are photo mechanical reproductions.

This is to say that a painting or drawing can be much more than simply authentic or not authentic. It is often not a simple either or question.

We are specialists in determining exactly what artworks are. Take advantage of our decades of experience, the high education of our art historians and our worldwide research resources.