



COLLECTABLES

with Warren Joel

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Fakes and Forgeries

As long as we have been collecting, people have been prepared to forge the masters. Over the past 20 years we have seen a dramatic increase in the amount of money being invested in collectables.

With these large amounts of money being spent the temptation to forge has increased substantially. Nowhere has this become more prevalent than in the art market.

We have seen many examples of both good and bad copies being pushed on to the Australian market. Some of these copies will fool all but the most expert . . . and some are quite obvious.

What may have started out many years ago as an innocent copy might today be passed off as an original. Part of my job as an auctioneer is to try and distinguish these fakes from originals. The extent some people go to in order to produce these fakes never ceases to amaze me.

It was interesting to note at a recent book sale in London that a large 18th century leather-bound ledger sold for \$7500, even though every page was blank. When I wondered aloud why this had brought so

much money it was drawn to my attention that the purchaser now had available to him several hundred pages of 18th century paper for forging. He was paying for the paper, not the ledger.

One of the most copied articles today is the famous Stradivarius violin. Approximately once a week I get a phone call from an excited violin owner who reads me with great detail the paper label inside the "famous" violin. Unfortunately I am yet to find an original, but I still keep looking!

These violins started out their life as a copy, including the original paper label inside the violin. Are these fakes or copies?

Apart from the art market we have seen an increase in forgeries in almost every area of collecting. It is usually when the price for the original article starts to spiral upwards that the forgeries start to appear.

Upping the ante

Some forgeries have pushed the price of the original article much higher as they have become more sought after in the market. One

example of this is the French glass maker Galle.

Galle produced some of the most exquisite colored glass ever made, which can be worth many thousands of dollars, but with this increased financial interest it was not long until forgeries started to appear on the market. Unfortunately one out of every three pieces of Galle glass I see today is brand new. As more forgeries appear on the market this increases the interest in the glass and subsequently pushes the price of the original Galle higher.

A superior article

Some of the forgeries produced today are in fact much better than the originals. A good example of this is the "Victorian double brass bed". The original Victorian polished brass and iron bed would bring about \$2500 ten years ago. When the copies came on to the market, people decided that the copy was in fact better than the original, as it did not rattle and tarnish, and was more comfortable. These factors have pushed the price of the original Victorian brass bed down by as much as 50 per cent.



Warren Joel Learn to discern

True or false?

Perhaps one of the best examples of forgeries is in sterling silver. Much of the good quality silver plate today bears its inheritance from the better silversmiths of London - even going so far as to copy the hall marks to give the article more importance.

At a recent charity valuation day this similarity between the original and the copy was brought home to me when half-way through the day a young man appeared with his plastic bag revealing what looked like a copy of a Georgian coffee pot.

As he put it on the table and unwrapped it I thought to myself, this is another good copy. I inquired where he had come by it and was told he bought it at a garage sale for \$240, quite proud of the fact that he had haggled the price down from \$300. On closer inspection I was delighted to find that in fact he had

purchased the original 1740 coffee pot. I estimated its value at between \$6000 and \$10,000. He was last seen running from the hall grinning broadly, with his newly identified coffee pot tucked under his arm.

Under the microscope

It is almost impossible to give you a quick and easy answer about how to pick a forgery, but generally speaking you should look for the finest detail. As an example, how old is the canvas? Is there wear and tear on the vase? Does that timber look 300 years old? And what are those funny hall marks?

If you would like your collectable valued please send a note and a description to: Collectables, c/- Leonard Joel, 174 Ingham Street St Kilda 3182 together with a stamped self addressed envelope.