

# E DITORIAL

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## *Historical-technical and economic-financial evaluation of art works*

The methodological path related to the knowledge of cultural heritage starts from the study of fundamental literary sources in historical anamnesis.

This necessarily includes a sequence of operative steps in relation to appropriate diagnostic-analytical methodologies and correct conservative intervention, based on a complete programme.

The art historian Giulio Carlo Argan underlined that: “All art works are artefacts, but not all artefacts are works of art”.

What artistic value recognises is judgement. However, it is neither based on given parameters nor on the expression of aesthetic pleasure or the condition the work arouses in the spectator.

The legitimacy of the judgement depends on the mental process with which it is reached, that is, on the method. Taking the French essayist George Bataille as inspiration: “At the origins of industrial society, which is founded on the primacy of the autonomy of goods, of houses...”, it is clear that it is with industrial society that things have acquired this primacy and autonomy and at the same time have lost a spiritual quality which belonged to them, too.

If we consider cultural heritage as goods, even if they are very particular ones – because they cannot be considered economic goods in the strict sense of the word, but as goods possessing qualities of merit, because they are unique and cannot be reproduced – as such, they have a market value. But it is the aspect concerning income, that those of a humanistic and historical-artistic nature must however, manifest and emanate from the artefact. This represents a possible intimist dialogue with the outside, displaying a mix of sensations, pulsations and participation: from this stems an interconnection of aspects, technical and economic, cultural and hedonistic, social and mercantile, spiritual and commercial.

In auction houses, the economic-financial evaluation of the work of art – even if dependent on different factors which are not always ponderable, being endogenous and exogenous to the art market – is fundamentally based on criteria of a subjective nature, because of aesthetic, stylistic, iconographic aspects, but without diminishing the importance of historical-artistic competences, it is correct and advisable to support it with an objective evaluation, obtained by using the diagnostic analytical techniques applied in this sector.

This relates to aspects considered fundamental in establishing the quotation for the work of art: the characterization of materials, its attribution, dating, period of realization and assessment of the state of conservation.

However it is also true that auction houses represent an excellent channel for producers of fake art works, because the presentation of a work of art in a catalogue, supplies a justification for the authenticity of that work, which in turn is considered an entirely personal opinion.

It can evidently be seen then, how the dual aspect connected to the problem of defending the cultural patrimony at present must not only be considered in terms of thefts and lootings, but also in terms of producers of fake and counterfeit works of art.

This phenomenon is found in several areas and activities (printing works, foundries, galleries, etc.) and for the most part involves Contemporary Art. To contrast this situation, a handbook is necessary for those who are purchasing, where the first point states: “the verification that the work of art is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity and an evaluation of the state of conservation”.

A desire to change the present situation which has crystallized in auction houses is to be hoped for, so that a correct evaluation of the artefact will give buyers more reliability and confidence in a market which is as unstable as it is important.

Thus, we find in the art market too, as in the field of business, a “brand”, in other words, that which gives a product its appearance, meaning and character, but in this case refers to an artistic product. This “brand” can go beyond the “characteristics” of the product itself, because it expresses a strong vision, which captures the enthusiasm and faithfulness of clients and employees, determining in time an important economic return.