

Artwork Evaluation Guide

A practical, step-by-step framework to identify, assess, and estimate the value of art and prints using your smartphone, AI, and online research.

Overview

Use this guide to learn how to confidently evaluate artworks at home. You will capture high-quality photos, leverage AI to help identify key details, and research comparable sales to understand value ranges. The process applies to paintings, works on paper (etchings, lithographs, screenprints, giclée), photographs, and limited-edition prints.

Quick Start: Photograph the artwork well, ask AI to help identify the artist/style/period, determine whether it is original or a print, and verify value using recent sales of similar pieces.

Photographing the Artwork

- Place the artwork in bright, even lighting (daylight near a window works well). Avoid glare; tilt slightly if glass is reflective.
- Take a full, straight-on photo of the entire front (include frame if present).
- Capture close-ups of the signature, edition numbers (e.g., 12/50), printer/publisher chops, and any inscriptions.
- Photograph labels, stickers, stamps, and writing on the reverse (back of frame/canvas).
- Take angled shots to reveal surface texture (brushwork, plate marks, dot patterns).
- Note measurements (height × width) of the image and the sheet (or canvas) in inches or centimeters.
- Record materials and condition observations (foxing, tears, stains, craquelure, yellowing, warping).

Using AI for Identification

AI can accelerate attribution and dating when given clear images and context. Provide the best photos and any known details (where acquired, any provenance notes, signatures).

Ask AI to Determine

- Artist attribution (exact match or “in the manner of”).
- Medium and technique (oil, watercolor, etching, lithograph, screenprint, giclée, photograph).
- Style and movement (Impressionism, Abstract, Pop Art, Contemporary, etc.).
- Approximate period/date range based on materials and style cues.
- Whether the work appears original, a limited-edition print, an open-edition print, or a reproduction/poster.

Provide AI With

- Full-front image and multiple close-ups (signature, edition, texture).
- Measurements and any visible plate mark or dot pattern description.
- Back labels, stamps, gallery/museum stickers, or handwritten notes.
- Any known purchase date/location or family provenance.

Key Question to Ask AI: “Is this an original, print, or reproduction? What indicators lead you to that conclusion?”

Distinguishing Originals vs. Prints

Type	How to Recognize	Notes on Value
Original painting/drawing	Visible, varied texture; brush or pencil marks; no uniform dot pattern. Canvas or heavyweight paper support. Often unique.	Typically highest value; depends on artist, subject, size, condition, and provenance.
Etching/Engraving/Drypoint	Embossed plate mark; slightly indented image area; fine ink lines with occasional burr.	Limited editions or early states can be valuable; look for pencil signature and edition number.
Lithograph	No plate mark; even surface; tonal fields; sometimes printer's chop mark on margin.	Artist-signed, numbered lithographs from reputable publishers can hold strong value.
Screenprint (Serigraph)	Areas of flat, solid color; slight ink layering at edges; often bold graphic look.	Popular for mid-century and Pop Art; edition size and publisher influence price.
Giclée/Inkjet	Microscopic dot pattern; no plate mark; often on smooth paper or canvas; sometimes labeled as “giclée”.	Usually lower value unless limited, signed, and by a highly collected living artist.
Reproduction/Poster	Offset printing dots; credit lines or museum text in margins; mass-produced.	Generally decorative value only.

Researching Market Value

1. Identify the artist and medium using AI and reference sites.

2. Search recent sales of comparable works (same artist, medium, subject, size, edition, and condition).
3. Check multiple sources: auction databases, gallery listings, and online marketplaces (e.g., eBay "Sold" filter).
4. Prioritize realized prices (what pieces actually sold for), not just asking prices.
5. Adjust for condition issues, framing, and authenticity indicators.

Tip: Edition size, signature, publisher, and printing date matter. A pencil-signed, low-edition lithograph from a renowned publisher typically outperforms an open-edition giclée of the same image.

AI Prompts You Can Copy

- “Identify the artist and medium of this piece. Here are photos: [attach images].”
- “Estimate the period and print method (etching, lithograph, screenprint, giclée, etc.). What visual cues lead you there?”
- “Provide five comparable auction or eBay sales with price range, including links and dates.”
- “Explain what makes certain prints more valuable than others for this artist and medium.”
- “Is this an original, print, or reproduction? What evidence supports your conclusion?”
- “Given these comps, suggest a fair insurance value vs. a quick-sale value.”

Where to Look for Comps

- Auction platforms with historical results (e.g., Sotheby’s, Christie’s, Heritage, Bonhams; and aggregator databases).
- Online marketplaces (eBay “Sold” listings, LiveAuctioneers results, Etsy for decorative prints).
- Gallery sites and artist catalogues raisonnés (when available).
- Specialist print publishers and workshops (e.g., Tamarind, ULAE) for edition info.

Recording Your Findings

Use a simple worksheet to keep your research organized. Consider tracking the following:

Field	Your Notes
Artist	
Title/Subject	
Medium/Process	
Dimensions (image/sheet)	
Edition/Signature	
Condition	
Publisher/Printer/Chop	
Provenance/Labels	
Comparable Sales (links + sold prices)	
Value Range (low/likely/high)	

Red Flags and When to Seek Help

- Signatures that don’t match known examples or appear mechanically printed.
- Missing or suspicious edition numbers; unusually high editions for older prints.

- Labels referencing famous museums when the work seems mass-produced.
- Severe condition issues that could drastically impact value.
- High-value attributions without supporting documentation—consider a professional appraisal.

Care, Storage, and Framing

- Keep works on paper out of direct sunlight; use UV-protective glazing when possible.
- Use acid-free mats and backing; avoid pressure-sensitive tapes.
- Maintain stable temperature and humidity; avoid basements and attics.
- Handle with clean, dry hands or cotton gloves; support from beneath.

Remember: Market values fluctuate. Use multiple sources and favor recent, realized sale prices. When in doubt, consult a qualified appraiser or conservator.

This guide is for educational purposes and does not substitute for a formal appraisal. Always verify attributions and prices using reputable sources.