Conducting Research on a Work of Art: A Bibliography of Sources available in the VMFA Library

Welcome to the Robert and Margaret Freeman Library at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts! We are the largest art library in the Southeastern United States, with an ever growing collection of over 143,500 volumes. Our holdings provide significant primary and secondary resources for the study of the history, criticism, and theory of art, including monographs, auction catalogues, bound periodicals, rare books and rare journals, vertical files on artists and subject files on VMFA history, an archive containing institutional and collection records, VMFA museum scrapbooks dating from 1935, and a media collection. The library has recently begun to develop new oral history and exhibition programs. VMFA Library is committed to all forms of information dissemination and is actively pursuing digital initiatives for this purpose.

Our greatest area of collection strength is in the Decorative Arts, especially Art Nouveau, Art Deco and Arts and Crafts. Other areas of specialization include African art, American art, American and English silver, Asian art, British art before 1850, Fabergé and Russian decorative arts, German Expressionist art, Indian art, Western European art, and American and European sporting art.

The Library serves VMFA staff, academics, students, art professionals, and the general public, and is open to the public each day from 12 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The Library stacks are closed to browsing and materials circulate only to VMFA staff on the museum campus.

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PANDORA
The Online Catalog for the Library

The most important research tool in the library is PANDORA, our online catalog. The catalog is available in the Library Reading Room at any of the four Macintosh public-access computers. One may also connect to PANDORA offsite using this web address: www.pandora.vmfa.museum, or from the Library research page of the VMFA website. Using the online catalog it is possible to search the holdings of the Main Library, The Educational Resource Room and the Media Collection simultaneously in the following ways:

- by Author to find books by a given author
- by Title to find specific books that you already know about
- by Subject to find books on particular topics or artists
- by Keyword to simultaneously search on all of the above
- by Browse feature to browse the shelves virtually

PINKNEY
The Collections Database for the Museum

The museums online collection management system, known as PINKNEY contains images and basic information about each art work owned by VMFA and is the natural place to begin research on art owned by the museum. PINKNEY is only available in the library on one of the public computer terminals.

Docent Manuals

Docent manuals were created for the convenience of the volunteer tour guides (docents) to assist them in locating information on works of art in the VMFA collection. Docent manuals are housed in three ring binders and located in the main library reading room. Some manuals are arranged by gallery are marked with orange stickers. Indexes are present in the first notebook for each group. Other manuals are arranged by culture, and then by artist and or genre. The docent manuals contain basic information on a work of art as well as additional articles, explanatory text written by curators and educators, other useful information.

Electronic Resources

Through the general VMFA Library website (located at www.vmfa.museum/library.html) one may also access the Library’s suite of electronic resources: databases and selected websites that may be used to locate books, journal articles, auction sales results, visual resources, and many other types of material. Click “Electronic Resources at the Library” under the “Research Resources” heading. For electronic resources and websites that may be searched offsite, click “Research Resources on the Web” or “Art Resources on the Web” under the “Research Resources” heading.
Print Resources:
Encyclopedias and Dictionaries

Use these print resources as a starting point to find out about an artist, the history of art in a given country or region, artistic techniques and materials, schools and movements and terminology in art, and many other background or contextual facts. Browse the library’s reference collection for additional resources.

General - Art

Reference N31 D5 1996 (34 volumes); also available online (ask Librarian for logon assistance)

Reference N33 M36 1981


Reference NA2520 G94 1982

Reference N33 O93 1997

The Pelican History of Art. New York: Penguin Books, 1953-
Reference N5300 P4 (45 volumes)

Ancient and Early Modern Art

Reference N7265 P5 (3 volumes)

Reference PJ1425 B8 1978 (2 volumes)

Reference DF757 E52 1999 (2 volumes)

Reference DS805 K633 1983 (9 volumes)

Reference N5610 G76 2007 (2 volumes)
Reference DE5 O9 1996

Reference DF521 O93 1991 (3 volumes)

Reference CB361 E52 1999 (6 volumes)

Reference DT58 O94 2001 (3 volumes)

Reference DE56 O9 1997 (5 volumes)

Contemporary Art

Reference N6490 P46

Reference N6490 O94

Reference N33 P74 2000

Photography

Reference TR9 I24 1984

Reference TR9 L46 2005

Decorative Arts

Reference NK1165 E48 1997 (2 volumes)

The books below will assist with research on the materials, terminology, and techniques used in the creation of specific kinds of art, and on collecting works of art. See Section V, “Caring For a Work of Art,” to find information on the conservation and preservation of art objects.

**Paintings**


*Stacks ND31 C7 1992*


*Stacks ND1260 C6*


*Reference N33 G65 1988*


*Stacks ND1790 K613*
Stacks ND2470 T5

**Prints and Printmaking**

Reference NE850 G37 2004

Stacks NE400 H79 1996

Stacks NE863 I9

**Drawings**

Stacks N34 G3 1979

Stacks NC730 M39

**Photographs**

ERR TR9 B35 1991

**Sculpture**

Reference NB50 B37 1997

Reference NK7908.8 B47 (4 volumes and index)

**Decorative Arts**

- Stacks NK928 C62 (6 volumes)


- Stacks NK30 H56 1997


- Reference NK30 M38 2000

**Silver and Gold**


- Reference NK7143 C55 1985


- Stacks NK7104 H618 1983


- Stacks NK7234 V46 1995

**Silver Hallmarks**

The Library’s collection includes many books on the silver hallmarks of specific countries, cities, or regions. To find books on the hallmarks of a given country or region, searching PANDORA, or browse the resources adjacent to the call number NK7210. Following are several examples of books on the hallmarks of French, English, and American silversmiths.


- Stacks NK7210 B4 (2 volumes)


- Reference NK7143 C924 1996 (2 volumes)


- Reference NK7210 D5813 1992


- Stacks NK7112 G73


- Stacks NK7144 L66 G74
Stacks NK7143 J15 1964

Reference NK7112 R3 2004

**Porcelain and Pottery**

Reference NK3770 B64

Stacks NK4083 C64 1993

Stacks NK4215 C8 1980

Stacks NK4483 F3713 1983

Reference NK4083 H6 1952


Reference NK4215 K68  
Reference NK4215 K68 1986

Stacks NK4165 W36 2002

**Glass**

Reference NK5104 S66 1991
Furniture and Frames

   Stacks NK2205 A7 1965

   Reference NK2205 D5 1985

   Stacks N8550 G713 1992

   Stacks N8551 E85 M58 1996

   Reference NK2205 S68 1989

III. Finding Biographical Information

Biographical information about an artist is useful in order to understand the context of the art that the artist created. Resources are often specific to time period and/or geographic location of the artist. The best place to begin is with a simple Google or Google Image search. Google [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Online Sources

The websites suggested below may be searched offsite with the exception of Oxford Art Online, Newsbank and JSTOR which require subscriptions.

**ArtCyclopedia**
   www.artcyclopedia.com

**AskART**
   www.askart.com; mainly regional American artists; access to enhanced content available in the Library (ask librarian for logon assistance)

**JSTOR (access on electronic resource page using library terminals)**

**Newsbank (ask librarian to conduct a search of U.S. newspapers)**

**Oxford Art Online (access on electronic resource page using library terminals)**
Print Sources

For a well-known artist, one might find entries in encyclopedias or dictionaries on art; for a less well-known artist, more specialized biographical/regional dictionaries are required. Some of these are listed below, but try browsing for others. The Library has several dictionaries based by country, but they are almost exclusively for English-speaking countries. Check PANDORA to determine if the VMFA Library contains an artist file for your artist or has a catalogue raisonné for the artist.

Worldwide Indexes

Reference N40 A634 (10 volumes)

Reference N40 B471 2006 (14 volumes) (English version available)

Reference ND1337 B7 D5 1958

Reference ND1374 B8 1982

Reference N43 G3 1997 (2 volumes)

Reference N43 H54 1999

Reference N7574 D48 2001

Reference NA680 C625

Reference TR139 C663 1988

Reference N6490 C6567 2002 (2 volumes)
Reference N43 P47 1985

Reference NA40 M25 1982 (4 volumes)

Reference N40 T4 (37 volumes)

Reference N31 D5 1996 (34 volumes); also available online as Oxford Art Onlinethrough VMFA electronic resources onsite.

Reference N40 V6 (6 volumes)

Reference N6796 W56 1992

**Artists’ Signatures, Monograms, and Seals**

Reference NK4167 B75 1976

Reference N45 C36 1982A

Reference N45 C36 1987

Reference N45 W3 1966

Reference N45 J32 1981

**North America**

Reference N6536 C4 W6 1990
  Reference N6536 C523 1980

  Reference N6536 F26 1999 (3 volumes)

  Reference N8354 W656 1999

  Reference N6548 M28 (7 volumes)

  Reference NB236 O6 1984

  Reference N6536 F5 1986

  Reference N6538 S78 1997

  Reference N40 W5

**Latin America**

  Reference N6502.4 S45 2003

  Reference N6502 E53 2000

**United Kingdom**

  Reference N6768 B83 1998

  Reference N6767 J63
IV. Estimating the Value of a Work of Art

The VMFA is prohibited from providing either monetary appraisals or authentication of art works, however we can assist patrons to obtain a comparable, that is an estimated value based on previous auction sales. One way to obtain a general idea of the value of a work of art is to locate the results of recent auction sales or upcoming auction sales of other works by the artist executed in the same medium, and of similar style, size, and date. The VMFA library subscribes to several auction result databases for this purpose.

Auction Sales Databases (typically only cover sales dating from the 1980’s forward)

ArtFact
  www.artfact.com (ask librarian for logon assistance)

ArtNet
  www.artnet.com (ask Librarian for logon assistance)

AskART
  www.askart.com ask Librarian for logon assistance

Sotheby’s website (upcoming and past sale results)
  www.sothebys.com

Christie’s website (upcoming and past sale results)
  www.christies.com

If you are seeking a value conclusion for insurance purposes a formal appraisal must be prepared by a professional appraiser. Appraisals are legal documents that provide a valuation for insurance, damage or loss, estate taxation, and distribution of property or for charitable contributions and donations.

The following organizations provide appraisal services:

Appraisers’ Association of America www.appraisersassoc.org

Appraiser’s Society of America http://www.appraisers.org/ASAHome.aspx

Art Dealers Association of America http://www.artdealers.org/

International Fine Art Appraisers http://www.ifaacertified.com/

National Institute of Appraisers http://appraiseroffineart.com/

Private Art Dealers Association http://www.pada.net/

Print Resources


Stacks AM231 L36 1999

Christie’s, Sotheby’s and miscellaneous auction catalogs from various auction houses worldwide provide historical sales data and are useful for provenance research and documentation of condition. The VMFA Library has thousands of auction catalogs dating from the early 1900’s that are available for research.

V. Caring for a Work of Art: Preservation and Conservation

**General Guidelines**


Stacks N8560 F32


Stacks NK1127.5 G8 1985


Stacks ND1650 K4


Stacks AM303 C37 1992


Stacks NK1127.5 S52 1987

**Paintings**


Stacks ND1650 D758 1967

**Works on Paper: Drawings, Prints, and Photographs**


Stacks N8560 C55 1978


Stacks NE380 E45 1987
VI. Researching an Unidentified Work of Art: Methodology
Adapted from guide by Karen Bucky, Librarian at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute

I. Gathering Evidence: Physical Observation

Begin with the evidence provided by the object itself. Gather as much information as you can by thoroughly examining the front, back, and all sides (including the inside, if applicable) of the piece. Look first for a signature and a date. If the signature is illegible, copy it and see what possible letters the artist’s name starts with—if you can identify the first three letters you have a good start. Write down all possible variations if any letters are ambiguous.

Look for any marks that might have been part of the creating or manufacturing process: signatures; monograms; hallmarks; stamps; inscriptions on the back, stretchers, frame, or base; foundry markings. If it is a painting, look at the stretchers; were they manufactured commercially? If so, this will give an indication of the age of the work. If a sculpture is cast bronze, look for foundry marks,
copyright date, edition number, and where the foundry is located. Look also for markings that would give clues about the history of the object: gallery labels, exhibition labels, auction labels, or owners’ stamps.

With paintings and works on paper, always examine the back of the object. There is often a great deal of information—inscriptions, labels, dealer numbers, collector’s marks—on the stretcher or the back of a canvas or sheet of paper. With sculpture, look underneath and (if it is hollow cast) inside the object for inscriptions or signs of its age.

Take photos or make drawings of these marks exactly as they look—no detail is too small to dismiss. Make notes on exactly where the marks appear.

Determine what the object is made of and what materials/techniques the artist used, as specifically as possible. If the object is a painting, is it oil, acrylic, watercolor, tempera, or other material? Is a work on paper an original or is it a multiple? (look for an edition number, e.g. 3/50). If the work is a print, is it an engraving, etching, wood cut, aquatint, serigraph, silkscreen, lithograph, something else? If it is a sculpture, is it bronze, plaster, wood, marble, stone, mixed media, other? Many of the books listed in this bibliography include descriptions and illustrations that will help you to identify the materials and techniques used to create a work of art.

Look at a print or drawing under strong magnification, or a 10x loop. If there is color, do you see uneven pooling of color? This might indicate an engraving, hand-colored with watercolors. Can you see how the artist achieved halftones (gray areas)? Is there cross-hatching or do you see an overall stipple effect? Study the differences between etchings, engravings, and other kinds of prints to become familiar with what characterizes the different techniques.

Additionally, try to determine what type of surface the art is created on. If it is a painting, is it on stretched canvas or linen, a panel, a board, a piece of paper, or a piece of paper mounted on a canvas? Is it a collage? There are many possibilities.

Make notes on whatever information you have on the object’s history: when and where you got it, what you know about its prior ownership, any information provided by previous owners or dealers. Make note of the source of each piece of information. Don’t assume that anecdotes passed along by former collectors and family history about the object is necessarily factual, but collect them nevertheless.

Make additional notes about the condition of the work. Condition affects value. For sale or legal purposes the condition of a work of art must be determined by a professional. However, you can look for discoloration along the mat edge, which is caused by non-archival matting materials and creates a dark yellow-orange to brown acid burn where the mat meets the paper. Additionally, older pieces are often framed with corrugated cardboard, which also burns the paper and creates staining that can cause striated dark burn marks. Varnish on oil paintings is often yellowed and discolored. Many paintings have an overall pattern of small hairline cracks called craquelure. If any of the paint is lifting or cupping, the paint is unstable and should be examined by a professional conservator. Document tears, missing paint, discoloration, and staining.

Last but not least, when conducting research on an unidentified work or artist, it is essential that you provide photographic documentation to reference personnel so that they may better assist you. Send jpeg images of your work by email to library@vmfa.museum or bring photographs of the object with details of marks, signatures, and views of the back or interior of the piece with you. Do not bring...
original artwork into the museum, as it causes security concerns. Finally, be patient, and be realistic. It often takes a good deal of research to identify a piece and some works will never be identified.