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APPRAISING ART

JANET BRINER KNOWS HOW TO QUANTIFY
THE VALUE OF ART

Photos: FRANK KLEINER



when she appraises Far Eastern art. Due to his activity in the tea trade, Alfred Baur spent much time in Colombo at the beginning of the 20th century. He discovered his love of art while travelling throughout Asia. His collection, which ranks among the most valuable of its kind in the world today, comprises some 9,000 objects from China and Japan, including some artworks from the Tang Dynasty.

As the daughter of the Lucerne merchant and art patron Viktor Lüthy, Janet Briner developed a savvy eye from an early age on. Her particularly close and friendly relationship with Angela Rosengart also dates from this phase in Janet Briner's life. With its masterpieces of Classical Modernist art, the Rosengart Collection Lucerne has ranked among Switzerland's most important museums since 2002. Janet Briner continues to add to her expertise today by annually visiting local and international fairs, auctions, exhibitions and galleries, always in quest of examples which can be compared with clients' artworks. Attending these art events enables her to view and touch as many original pieces as possible, as well as to feel the pulse of the times and develop a sense for the market.

Many of her private clients are experts on their collections and very well informed. Janet Briner considers herself more as a generalist rather than as an expert, and this opens many doors for her. "Everyone wants to become an expert in a certain field. But I wanted to become a generalist appraiser early on and to work with renowned specialists whenever necessary," she adds. In the course of her exemplary career, which has earned her an international reputation, she has been privileged to appraise objects in diverse genres including, but not limited to, paintings, sculptures, silver, porcelain and furniture from the 16th century to the present day.

How can one imagine the process of an appraisal? And what are the essential factors that must be considered? Determining the commercial value of a cultural asset is a complex and delicate task that must be based on numerous components and criteria. It is indispensable to view the original work of art firsthand in order to recognize its artistic quality. The first question to ask is whether the appraisal refers to the piece's replacement value for insurance purposes or to its liquidation value in the event of a sale or a division of an estate. The motives for an appraisal can be very different and each motive can exert a direct impact on the object's estimated value, which must regularly be reviewed and adjusted to conform to the current market value.

After the artwork has been identified (artist, title, description, technique, signature, date of production, dimensions), Janet Briner asks further questions about authenticity (existing expert opinions), provenance and state of preservation (status reports and restorations). The object's rarity, fashion trends and the artwork's location also influence the appraisal: e.g. a Bernese chest of drawers from the 18th century by Mathäus Funk would be appraised at a lower price if it were presently in Australia rather than in Switzerland. It is also important to know in which museums the object has already been exhibited and in which publications it is listed.

Many private and institutional collections nowadays are assembled by professional curators. The estimated value of the individual works of art in these collections can be readily determined because the necessary information is already documented. An appraiser's work has become much easier and the art market has become more transparent thanks to the internet and digitization. Although a collector's personal connection and his emotional relationship with his or her art objects cannot be quantified, it is sometimes possible to take this subjective added value into account for the purposes of insurance estimates.

The monetary value ultimately determined when an appraiser's work is complete represents a justifiable value for a particular purpose and at the time of the appraisal, but does not in the slightest reflect the joy and emotions that Janet Briner has experienced during her conscientious work and research.

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Previous page: Janet Briner in front of "The Tuileries garden" by Edouard Vuillard. Left: Janet Briner with Angela Rosengart, the founder of the Rosengart Collection Lucerne. Below: Alfred Baur established a fertilizer factory in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1897.



Photos: Priska Ketterer (1), Yves Gerard (1)