

This summer I accepted an internship at Gurr Johns in their New York City office. Gurr Johns is a leading independent art advisory firm specializing in the acquisition, sale and valuation of fine and decorative art and jewelry. They assist both private and institutional clientele in receiving the best valuation for the artwork, and with that broad network, Gurr Johns is able to conduct negotiations with individual collectors and major museums and art galleries around the world. As an intern, I assisted appraisers on site, learned research techniques for art valuation, assisted with the sales department, learned about working with auction houses and other sales venues, along with general office assistance.

My internship definitely went beyond receptional duties and organizational tasks, and the majority of my time spent at Gurr Johns was learning about the appraisal process. Initially, I started out researching specific artists or pieces of artwork. Sometimes, a client would have a piece of work and they did not know either the artist or the name of the work. An appraiser would then ask me to try and discover any information on the piece and provide literature to support by research. Other times, the artist or artwork title is known and the appraiser would like to research further information about the piece. In that case, I would either go to the Watson Library inside of The Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Frick reference library where I was able to pull out catalogue raisonnés and reference books. Any information I was able to uncover I would report back to the appraiser. This information was helpful to the appraiser because it would be used to highlight the importance of the piece and then in conclusion, the value of the artwork.

One of my other primary tasks was finding comparables to specific pieces of artwork. Because an appraiser's job is to decipher an appropriate value for the artwork, they would need other similar works of art to come to the conclusion of the value of the client's artwork in the current market. Even if the client has records and invoices of the artwork and the price they paid for it, the value of the artwork could have increased or decreased depending on the market at the time of the appraisal. In that case, I would research pieces of artwork that are by the same artist, or if that is not available, pieces of the same genre by similar artists, same time period and nearly identical size and medium. I learned how to use the databases including Invaluable, ArtNet, Liveauctioneers, Askart, and 1stDibs. Sometimes these databases would provide the asking price of the piece, but if not, I would contact the gallery where the piece was being sold and request a price. Most galleries were willing to give out the information, but I ran into a couple instances where the gallery knew I was asking for research purposes only and had no intention of purchasing the artwork. When that happened, I assured them that their expertise was very helpful and I was appreciative of their time, even if they displayed a slightly annoyed attitude. Through this process and by acquiring the information and the artwork prices of today's market, the appraiser was able to appropriately decide on a value.

One extensive project that I undertook was researching a collection of artwork throughout four estates of a man who recently died, and previous to his death, he was a large oil business owner in Texas. His wife wanted an insurance

appraisal of both the fair market value and retail replacement value of the collection. Before the beginning of my internship, two appraisers traveled to their four estates in Texas to collect records and take pictures of every piece of artwork throughout the estates. Within the collection were hundreds of pieces including Western paintings and prints, European paintings and prints, Native American artifacts, Native American pottery, furniture, and books. First, I organized each of the categories into charts that listed where each piece was purchased, the date it was purchased, and for how much. I then was assigned to focus on the Native American pottery, which had sixty-four pieces in the collection, and find fair market value and retail replacement value comparables for each of the pieces. I did so by using the databases and finding galleries online that sold similar pieces of pottery. I had to be very thorough with each individual piece rather than bundling up the entire collection because each piece of pottery came from a specific tribe or town, and depending on its origin, the values dramatically varied. I learned how much attention to detail must be paid in the part of the appraisal process, because if the research for the values is off and the appraiser prices the pieces at a ridiculously low or high cost, the client will be unsatisfied. Although I was not making the decision of the price tag on the artwork, my primary research was of great importance to the appraiser's judgment.

One of the most memorable experiences that I have from my internship was my on site visit to a recently deceased Japanese artist, who has had exhibitions at the MoMA and most recently, at the Guggenheim in New York, (due to

confidentiality purposes, I cannot say who the artist is). It particularly struck my interest because last semester in my Advanced Drawing class taught by Jessica Wohl, he was one of the artists we studied out of a very selective group of contemporary artists. Because the artist died and left his extensive collection of artwork to his wife, she needed an insurance appraisal from Gurr Johns. While I was there I helped the appraiser take pictures and notes of the pieces. It was incredible having first-hand access to these world-renowned pieces of artwork, and not only being able to observe the art, but interact and work with it.

When I come back to Sewanee, I would like to continue exploring and researching new artists. As an art major, I found myself being very inspired by all of the diverse art that I was surrounded by daily. I hope to hold on and build on that inspiration while preparing for my art show that I will have to complete as my comp this spring. Although I was not creating art at my internship, I found out that the researching process initiated my creativity, and that technique is something I will continue to do. I am very grateful to Sewanee for allowing me to have this incredible experience that I believe will shape my future career.