CATALOGUE RAISONNE

A catalogue raisonne is one of the first steps in authentication. Remember that although appraisers are not authenticators, you must still due your due diligence and examining the catalogue raisonne is the first step.

A catalogue raisonne (translated as “reasoned catalogue”) is a list of works believed to be by a specific artist and often of a specific medium within that artist’s genre. Catalogue raisonne’s are usually arranged chronically and often indexed alphabetically by title, subject, and/or period. They usually include images (particularly those which have been published recently). Some include extensive biographical material; others are mere lists. It is not uncommon for a catalogue raisonne to be multiple volumes.

Typically a catalogue raisonne will include the following information:
- title
- date
- medium
- dimensions
- signage/marks
- provenance
- exhibition history
- bibliographical references

Additionally, a catalogue raisonne of a print may also include:
- publisher
- printmaker workshop
- specific printers
- date of execution and release dates
- number of colors
- specific colors
- type of paper
- watermark
- chop mark
- edition size (including artist’s proofs (a.p.), publisher/printer proofs (p.p.), not for sale (h.c.)
- explanations of various editions and states
- whereabouts of original plate

Included in a catalogue raisonne of a sculpture may be:
- foundry
- date of execution and castings
- patina
- signage/marks
- edition number
- whereabouts of various editions

Inclusion of a work in a catalogue raisonne is not a statement of guaranteed authenticity
Scholarship changes
New works are discovered
New experts update old opinions
Mistakes in old catalogue raisonne may be corrected

There can be multiple catalogue raisonne for an artist. Be sure to examine the definitive version(s).

Most major art libraries have catalogue raisonne for prominent artists. They can usually be looked up under the artist’s name, however they do not always have the words catalogue raisonne in their title.

A helpful, but somewhat dated book is:

A helpful source to find catalogue raisonne’s on prints is:

To find catalogue raisonne’s in progress, contact:
- Dealers who represent the artist
- Museums who have recently had an exhibit of the artist’s work
- Scholars on the artist
- Auction houses
- Art foundations set up in the artist’s name
- Family members of the artists

What happens if a painting is not accepted by the catalogue raisonne?
You will have to disclose in your report that the artwork was rejected by the catalogue raisonne. Ideally, you should find out their reasoning\(^1\). If it is an issue of lacking proper documentation, perhaps the owner of the artwork could find additional supporting materials\(^2\).

In most cases, without the “stamp of approval”\(^3\) from the catalogue raisonne, artwork cannot be valued as by a specific artist. The terms, in the manner of, attribute to, after, etc. will have to be used. As such, its value will be greatly reduced in most cases.

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\(^1\)I had a client who had a painting by a well-known French artist. The painting was not included on the catalogue raisonne although it had been included in several museum exhibitions, including an exhibition at the Louvre. The current expert on the artist resides in Paris. His policy is that for €450 he will state that it is a fake; for €750 he will declare it authentic. He felt it was a fake and would not issue a certificate. My client, fluent in French, discussed the matter with the expert. The expert agreed that for $25,000 he would come to New York to declare the authenticity of the painting.

\(^2\)Avoid sending the painting to France. French law permits leading experts to confiscate a fraudulent artwork. You may never see the work again. In more than one occurrence, French dealers who have confiscated artwork have held it for a number of years and put it on the market pocketing the proceeds.