

HOW TO SPOT A FAKE ARTIFACT (The Louis Way)

Intro

Modern science may dazzle us with thermoluminescence testing and radio carbon dating (carbon-14) but at the end of the day, in my opinion, there is nothing on earth that can match the perception of the human eye, and that plain old “gut feeling.”

Over the years I have seen professional dealers and collectors utilize all five senses in the evaluation of an art object. I tend to call it E.S.F. (extra sensory forensics); if you can think of better terminology, let me know, and you will be acknowledged, and receive exalted status..... (only for about a week or so; then I take all the credit!)

Sight

The most important of the senses when it comes to collecting, sight tells us the tooling techniques used, size, visual power, form and presence of an object (aesthetics); the quality, condition, colour, and patination; and whether an object has been restored or modified. (Fakers love to modify a new or authentic piece,; because the hard work has already been done, they are, more or less, working with a blank canvas).

Touch

[This] will let us know the weight of an object, whether it is made of stone, metal, soft or hard wood, cotton or silk. We can also feel the texture of the surface, whether it is rough, smooth, or polished. Touch is a good indicator for silver. Silver is a very good conductor of heat and will quickly warm up in the hands.

Hearing

Beating an African drum, a New Guinea kundu, or playing an aboriginal didgeridoo will let us hear the quality of sound. Tapping the sides of a wooden object can also tell us if it is hollow or there is termite damage. Listening to the opinion and experiences of other dealers and collectors can inform us, and greatly affect our purchasing patterns.

Smell

The nose can inform us if an object has been recently waxed, is suffering from dry rot, or has been kept in a primitive, smokey environment. Some people, including myself, can even smell a fake! ... only joking!...

Taste

Believe it or not, I have seen collectors at auction previews slobber all over and lick artifacts to see if they are genuine! Yeah! yeah!you heard correctly,.....don't laugh!licking an object, then rubbing the wet area with the thumb to see whether the patina is a fake. (A fake, applied patina will usually rub off.) This should not be done for obvious reasons. One has to think of the next person who has to handle the object, but then again, maybe the whole idea of sucking on an artifact at an auction preview is to put other potential buyers off!

Now, all of the above five senses, in fine working order, are completely useless without a good brain to compute all the data, and a memory to make comparisons of similar objects that have been viewed and studied in the past. When all of this bonds together, this is where the euphoric “gut feeling” kicks in. Basically what happens is that you instinctively know, almost immediately, if an item is a dud or the real thing.

(NOTE: Slight editing was done for clarity. KHS)