

**Forbes**

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## Paul Cézanne: Redux And Renewal Of His Catalogue Raisonné



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Arts

Fakes! Forgeries! Frauds! The art media loves a good scandal, especially one amplified by miscreants and skullduggery. Take Wolfgang Beltracchi, a German art forger, who faked between 1,000 and 1,300 works, by artists such as Ernst, Gauguin, Monet and Picasso. His paintings were not just copies, he successfully produced hundreds of “original” works in the fashion of art luminaries. Over three-plus decades, he and his wife—Helene—created provenance for his forgeries, resulting in millions of Euros in sales. This Bonnie and Clyde art duo were even celebrated, so to speak, in a 2014 documentary, *Beltracchi: The Art of Forgery*. How can this happen?



Wolfgang Beltracchi.

Artists are not uniformly accomplished record keepers, nor are collectors and gallerists. Why is this important? Once an artist’s work leaves the studio, its lineage may be lost. In fact, if a work is given away or sold from the studio—without a signature or formal documentation,

like a receipt or certificate of authenticity—the work may enter a zombie-land of “statelessness,” where its authenticity is questioned or denied. If a collector does not maintain documentation of sales and ownership, its authenticity may also be challenged, impeding future sales or gifts. As for gallerists, their record keeping is also variable, governed primarily by tax law and only secondarily by an interest in maintaining historical records (See, for example, [Archives of American Art](#).)

How are questions of authenticity and provenance resolved? A CR, shorthand for catalogue raisonné, a scholarly compilation of an artist's production, helps considerably. If this sounds mind-numbingly esoteric, think of it as a robust research tool, like detailed catalogs for collectibles and consumables (automobiles, coins, toys or wines.) A CR, as it is referred to in both commercial and institutional circles, is an essential tool for researching the attribution of an art work, as well as its provenance, or record of ownership. The CR is as close to a definitive reference work as you can get in the art community, especially as authentication boards are disbanded in response to lawsuits.

Look at the website of the international Foundation for Art Research ([www.ifar.org](http://www.ifar.org)), and click on the Catalogues Raisonnés tab where you can search by artist's name for catalogs that have been published and others that are in preparation. The number of artists in this database—living and dead—is extraordinary. These CR's go a long way to demonstrate definitively both authenticity and provenance. Moreover, in the on-line age, CR's have gradually morphed into real-time resources, which are periodically updated, owing to newly authenticated (or dismissed) works, ownership and location.

Take the CR of Paul Cézanne, who lived between 1839 and 1906. The original CR was organized by Lionello Venturi and published in two volumes in 1936. It contained lists of over 1,000 works by the artist, along with 1,634 black and white illustrations, presented by medium (painting, watercolors, lithographs, etchings, and drawings) and organized more or less chronologically using Cézanne's four major periods: Academic & Romantic, Impressionist, Constructive, and Synthetic. Most notably, the 1936 compendium also listed works that were missing, by whatever means.

While aspects of Cézanne's output—or, to be more precise, his oeuvre—were updated periodically, it was a team of John Rewald and Jayne Warman, later joined by Walter Feilchenfeldt, who updated Cézanne's

watercolors in 1983 and his paintings in 1996. This latter effort, called a “masterpiece of scholarship” by David Nash (a Cézanne scholar in his own right), revised and annotated Venturi's work, listing 854 known paintings and indicating which of them had been itemized in the stock books of Ambroise Vollard, who was not only Cézanne's dealer, but also—in reality—his benefactor. (The location and disposition of Vollard’s archives are listed in the directory of The Frick’s Center for the History of Collecting.)



The Paintings, Watercolors and Drawings of Paul Cezanne. © COPYRIGHT 2019 CEZANNE ONLINE CATALOGUE, LLC.

The most recent update to Cézanne’s CR is a completely revised, web-based edition, initiated in 2014 and fully launched on the 180th anniversary of the birth of Cézanne, January 19, 2019. The authors Walter Feilchenfeldt, Jayne Warman and David Nash rethought the very idea of a CR. The CR’s on-line presence remains an art research innovation. Unlike the print-bound versions, the on-line CR deploys color images scaled to Cézanne originals, bringing the work to life. The supplementary materials include photographs, postcards, works by other artists, and other images related to Cézanne's paintings. (Access to the catalogue is free, but registration is required.)

Is this it? Hardly. In rebuilding the CR, the authors discovered four new works. In the on-line Cézanne CR, caution is deliberate. There is always room for doubt in a catalogue. For example, David Nash said, if the authors “haven’t seen the work [or if they are uncertain], it has a

designation of TA (traditionally attributed.)” This is a collaboration by highly respected art historians whose focus is Cézanne, sharing opinions based on historical facts to lead to decisions about authenticity. There is still work to be done and revisions will be made as needed.

In the art marketplace, particularly, collectors and gallerists like “certainty,” they want to pin the authenticity of an artwork on someone. Scholars are not only more cautious, they are more comfortable with uncertainty. The Cézanne CR is a reminder about the need for expert record-keeping in the art market. It is neither easy nor inexpensive. There is a need to build interactive databases, format digital images, and collect elaborate data, all the while technology is changing.