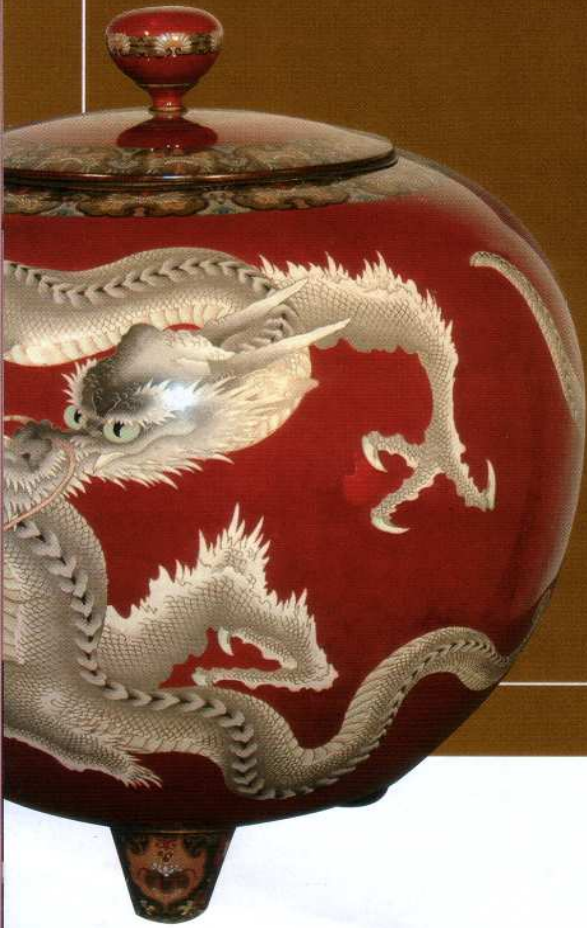


Antiques Roadshow

Photography: Robert B. Faltemeier

It's a well known, but often forgotten fact, that you should buy antiques because you like them and not for a quick profit. Yet, for a novice, buying in the antique market can be a risky business, and all investment can be lost. Antique specialist *Robert B Faltemeier* offers a few tips on shopping for antiques.



Cloisonné Tripod from late 19th - early 20th century



Travellers visiting holiday destinations have always sought souvenirs to remember their trip by. Today, such mementos can range from an inexpensive T-shirt to highly priced antiques. Yet, a genuine piece of art or furniture can't be so easily bargained for as a T-shirt. Replicas and forgeries are widespread and enticingly low prices are often an indicator that there is something dubious about the piece. It's almost impossible to find a genuine antique that's much cheaper than the list prices provided by auction houses and antique dealers; some lists are readily available on the Internet or in larger museum libraries.

When being offered an inexpensive antique, always ask yourself: "if it is genuine, where does it come from and why is it so much cheaper than a comparable piece in reputable galleries?" The provenance or origin of an antique is of great importance. Be aware, as certificates and historical background are often readily produced – but few are worth the paper they are written on.

Hundreds of years of war and political unrest throughout the world – and especially in Southeast Asia – has led to antiques being removed from private and public collections

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and sold on the open market. Some items have even been removed from museum stores, galleries, churches and temples in peacetime. An example would be the proliferation of decapitated Khmer heads on offer. To ensure that the piece has not been stolen, it's wise to consult the Art Loss Register (www.artloss.com) – though bear in mind that even this website is not completely foolproof.

More countries are reclaiming their cultural heritage and the introduction and changes of treaties and laws, means that certain types of antiques are now harder to acquire. Greek, Roman and Egyptian antiques are difficult to sell if not accompanied with a clean bill of health, such as a genuine export licence from the specific country or a well-documented provenance. National collections all over the globe have stopped buying antiques that are not from a reputable gallery and come with a proven history since 1970.

Another key consideration before you part with a large sum of money is the condition of the antique. Pieces are often damaged due to environmental factors, handling or trafficking. All too frequently the owner has the damage fixed by an unqualified person to save money,



which often causes further damage and will result in the decline of its value. When buying an antique for thousands of dollars, it is essential to have an independent consultant analyse the state of the item. They will conduct a scientific test of age such as thermoluminescence dating or radio carbon dating.

Having bought your antique, it is important to know how it should be stored or displayed. Organic materials are easily destroyed and a regular check for insect damage needs to be undertaken. The high humidity levels in the region are also problematic, and can lead to mould or fungus damage. It is best to keep textiles, wood and paper at a recommended relative humidity of 55-65 per cent to prevent damage by moisture. Metals like bronze are easily corroded; especially dangerous is chloride corrosion when salts erode the metal. It's therefore best to keep bronzes at a relative humidity of 40-45 per cent.

Light is another damaging factor, and organic materials such as textiles and paper are easily faded. As a rule of thumb, anything with pigments should be kept out of direct sunlight. If in doubt, a trained conservator can help you obtain the right conditions for your burgeoning collection. ||

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When buying precious antiques, it is imperative to look out for the following :

- ▶ Known provenance
- ▶ Knowledge of a country's import and export laws
- ▶ A certificate of authenticity, and guarantee of return
- ▶ A condition report, listing previous restorations and damage
- ▶ Scientific analysis such as the thermoluminescence test or radio carbon dating
- ▶ Consultation of The Art Loss Register

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