

The Value, Impact, and Ethics of Art Expertise (München, 17–18 Mar 27)

Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, München, Mar 17–18, 2027

Deadline: May 6, 2026

Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte

Between Canon and Commodity: The Value, Impact, and Ethics of Art Expertise.

Conference at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich (March 17–18, 2027), organized by Matilde Cartolari (ZI/LMU Munich), Lynn Catterson (Columbia University, New York), Christian Fuhrmeister (ZI/LMU Munich), and Joanna Smalcerz (University of Warsaw).

In 2022, the tondo *Madonna and Child with Three Angels* attributed to Sandro Botticelli, with a composition identical to that in the Uffizi, was sold by Christie's for \$48,480,000. In the catalog entry, the attribution is constituted by numerous authoritative voices who have discussed the painting since its appearance in the mid-19th century. This painting is just one example of an expansion of an artist's oeuvre performed and sanctioned through the art market until today.

The practice of authentication of works of art for the art market by experts is inextricably linked with canon and commodity, that is the enhancement of their position in a cultural and commercial hierarchy. Assessing and appraising artefacts can be deployed qualitatively, as in, for example, connoisseurship, to position the object within art historiographical narratives, or quantitatively, as a transactional agent in the marketplace. While the art historian's authentication regulates and defines these hierarchies and relevance, verdicts also impact monetary estimates, generating a powerful tension between art history and the art trade. This shapes the trajectory of artworks, the historical narratives associated with them, and their commercial worth. Due to this intimate interdependence, the unavoidably close relationships between art institutions and scholars on the one hand, and the art market, its advisors, mediators and dealers on the other hand, promote opacity and secrecy in the practice and use of expertise, most especially in matters of potential, and often surreptitious, financial gain.

This conference explicitly aims to focus on the relationship of art canon and commodity, i.e. on the cultural, scholarly and commercial consequences of the practice of providing expert opinions. Addressing practitioners in the field – from dealers, scholars, and collectors to authors (of e.g. catalogues raisonnés), curators and administrators –, the conference team would like to solicit contributions that interrogate how art expertise has been used and performed from the mid-19th century to today. More specifically, we are interested in:

- investigations of the financial impact of (changing) attributions
- studies that reveal the strategies to compensate experts
- research that unfolds how inclusion in and exclusion from the art historical canon has impacted

the mercantile fortuna critica of artists, groups, movements

- inquiries into the often fraught relationship between the art trade and academic or museum-based art history
- critical reflections on the nature of the relationship of canon and commodity, e.g. addressing epistemic biases, asymmetrical power relations, political instrumentalizations, or ethical dilemmas

We invite proposals for formal presentations of max. 20 minutes, but we also welcome self-nominations for more discursive formats like panel discussions or roundtables. Please send your ideas, suggestions, proposals and abstracts in a pdf format of one page accompanied by a short biography (again max. one page) no later than Wednesday, May 6, 2026, noon, to expertise@zikg.eu.

Applicants will be notified by May 29, 2026, whether their submissions are accepted. The conference program will be announced in September or October 2026.

Subject to approval of funding, we aim to reimburse travel costs (railway tickets 2nd class, or economy class flights when needed) and to provide accommodation in Munich during the conference.

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Newsletter-Abo: <http://www.zikg.eu/institut/newsletter>

Reference:

CFP: The Value, Impact, and Ethics of Art Expertise (München, 17-18 Mar 27). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 26, 2026 (accessed Apr 29, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52088>>.