

Institution: University of Leicester
Unit of Assessment: UoA34 Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
Title of case study: Attribution, Auctions and Exhibitions
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The impact comes from Ekserdjian's authentication and attribution of Renaissance paintings and the curatorship of international exhibitions, both of which have had substantial financial impact on institutions and individuals involved in the art market, in particular the auction house sector, galleries and museums. This also includes cultural impacts on the art-loving public by introducing them to newly-discovered and attributed artworks which might previously have never been exhibited publicly and by offering innovative ways of exhibiting and understanding masterpieces gathered from around the globe.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This case study is built around the research and activities of Professor David Ekserdjian, in particular his work on the authentication and attribution of 16th-century Italian paintings and drawings by the world-famous masters Correggio and Parmigianino, and also through his curatorship of important international exhibitions, most notably the recent blockbuster show 'Bronze' at the Royal Academy in London.</p> <p>Ekserdjian has been engaged in research and has published widely in the fields of Italian Renaissance painting and sculpture since the late 1970s, with a particular focus on Correggio and Parmigianino, the subjects of his two major Yale monographs (1998 and 2006). He joined the University of Leicester in 2004 as professor and has continued to publish in these and related areas throughout the current census period. Ekserdjian's research methodology is what nowadays might be called a traditional connoisseurial one, involving painstaking analysis of the paintings at hand to identify thematic motifs and formal styles in order to locate the artwork within the flow of the artist's career, or indeed to determine who did the painting when this might be unknown. This approach can only be sustained when a scholar has built up an encyclopaedic bank of formal, stylistic knowledge of artworks from across the period, and it is an approach that is not often practised in art historical scholarship these days, which has shifted increasingly towards the analysis of the social and theoretical content of artworks. The relative rarity of Ekserdjian's traditional approach to research and the unique skills it requires means his opinion is much valued by the art trade, auction houses, collectors and museums.</p> <p>In many cases, Ekserdjian has been the first person to identify and publish specific works as being by Correggio or Parmigianino. In others, his confirmation – or rejection – of traditional attributions has decisively affected their fate in the art market and the exhibition circuit. The <i>Portrait of Niccolò Vespucci</i> in Hanover, for example, was identified by Ekserdjian by comparing it with a little known preparatory drawing and also by identifying the sitter, which has led to the work being widely exhibited as a Parmigianino. Similarly, the <i>Portrait of a Man</i> by Parmigianino was first made known in Ekserdjian's monograph on the artist (1), and led to this private piece being publicly exhibited at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts in 2011 (4). Other examples include the loans by private collectors of Parmigianino's <i>Portrait of Lorenzo Pucci</i> and his <i>Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine</i> to the National Gallery in London, which would not be on loan and public display if not for Ekserdjian's endorsement of their attribution to the artist. It was, equally, Ekserdjian's expertise on Correggio (2,3) that led to the acceptance of a newly discovered <i>Virgin and Child</i> as part of the artist's oeuvre and to its purchase by the Art Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne.</p> <p>The extent to which Ekserdjian's research has been valued in terms of its academic and public merit is demonstrable through numerous citations and reviews, but also by the central role he has</p>

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played in organizing four major exhibitions devoted to Correggio and Parmigianino in recent years, two of which fall in the current census period (*Parmigianino e il manierismo europeo*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 2003; *The Art of Parmigianino*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Frick Collection, New York, 2004; *Correggio e l'antico*, Galleria Borghese, Rome, 2008; *Correggio*, Galleria Nazionale, Parma, 2008). It is on the basis of this knowledge and experience that Ekserdjian was invited to devise and curate the 'Bronze' exhibition at the Royal Academy in late 2012.

3. References to the research

Five publications and one research award:

1. 2006: *Parmigianino*, Yale University Press. 303 pp, 292 illustrations. Published with the assistance of the Getty Foundation.
2. 2008: 'Correggio disegnatore' and catalogue entries on drawings, in A. Coliva (ed.), *Correggio e l'antico*, exhibition catalogue, Galleria Borghese, Rome, pp.76-83 and 140-71.
3. 2008: 'Antonio da Correggio "pittore singularissimo" e "la maniera moderna" ' and catalogue entries, in L. Fornari Schianchi (ed.), *Correggio*, exhibition catalogue, Galleria Nazionale, Parma, pp.140-45, 184, 188, 321, 322.
4. 2011: 'Eye to Eye: European Portraits 1450-1850', introduction to *Eye to Eye: European Portraits 1450-1850*, exhibition catalogue, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, pp.17-33.
5. 2012: *Bronze* (with Cecilia Treves), Royal Academy of Art. Winner of the 2013 Association for Cultural Enterprises award for 'Best New Publication'.
6. Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship of £133,000 covering 2009-2012 to research 'The Italian Renaissance Altarpiece: Between Icon and Narrative'.

4. Details of the impact

The impacts are cultural and financial, and derive from Ekserdjian's work in the authentication of paintings and the curating of exhibitions, as follows:

'Bronze' Exhibition

Ekserdjian devised the original idea for and curated the recent Royal Academy exhibition 'Bronze', which ran from September to December 2012 and, along with the Leonardo show at the National Gallery, was one of the most admired and revelatory 'Old Master' exhibitions in the world within the current census period. Ekserdjian persuaded collectors, governments and museums from around the world to loan over 150 priceless sculptures, reliefs and other artefacts, many of which had never left their home countries before. Indeed, in the example of a loan from Austria, a change to the country's export laws was required, which offers impact of a rather different but nonetheless substantial kind. The Managing Director of Royal Academy Enterprises, testifies: "Many people commented on the fact that the show was a unique experience in the history of art appreciation; it's highly unlikely that such a quantity and a wide range of artefacts will ever be brought together again. The exhibition certainly could not have happened without David's breadth of insight...His passion, determination and persuasive skills were instrumental in securing many of the loans that made this an exceptional exhibition" (A).

The exhibition and its innovative thematic approach garnered international attention and comprehensive acclaim from all the main news and media outlets, with hundreds of published reviews (B). [text removed for publication]. Sales of merchandise, the award-winning catalogue (5) and catering revenues were likewise substantial, calculated [text removed for publication], and the Royal Academy estimates substantial domestic and international tourism as well, with an estimated

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9,000 foreign visitors. The cultural and educational impact of the exhibition was likewise extensive and positive, in particular in relation to the RA's innovative events programmes, including hands-on bronze-making workshops, which reached out to a wide demographic and can be evidenced in visitor feedback and emails (C).

Attribution Cases

Ekserdjian was invited to devise the concept and curate the Royal Academy exhibition on the basis of a reputation built up over many years, which took in several other exhibitions as detailed above, as well as for his extensive connections at all levels of the art world. But this work in the public eye of the international art world is built upon and feeds back into Ekserdjian's more private work, particularly in the areas of attribution and auctions.

A prominent example is when Sotheby's consulted Ekserdjian in 2010-2011 to assess a piece now entitled *Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist*, which Ekserdjian confirmed was by Correggio. His endorsement of the attribution was published in their subsequent auction catalogue, and he was then contacted by a number of interested parties seeking advice on the piece. They included its eventual purchaser, the Art Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, who relied entirely upon Ekserdjian's assessment of the authenticity of the piece against the "rumour mongers" who then sought to discredit it: "Furthermore his expertise was imperative in that it aided us to assure our very generous donor who was funding the acquisition that the work was indeed genuine...An extensive technical examination and conservation treatment carried out here in the ensuing months absolutely confirmed Professor Ekserdjian's assessment of the painting" (D). Sold at Sotheby's for [text removed for publication], this was "the highest priced acquisition in the NGV's 150 year history" (E). After conservation is complete, the painting will go on public display there.

Another example is the Parmigianino *Portrait of a Man*, for which Ekserdjian initially confirmed its attribution to the dealers who were selling it (Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox) in 2006, whilst also informing them that it would be published as a Parmigianino in his then-forthcoming monograph (1). This made it possible for the dealers to market it as an extremely important new discovery, which swiftly led to its acquisition by its current owner, the business leader and philanthropist [text removed for publication]. [text removed for publication] confidence in the authority of Ekserdjian's judgement led him to spend a very considerable sum of money on the work, [text removed for publication] (F). "Without the endorsement by Professor Ekserdjian," the dealers confirmed, "who is universally regarded as the supreme authority on the works of Parmigianino, we would not have been able to offer it at anything like the same level of price" (G). Ekserdjian subsequently provided [text removed for publication] with advice on other acquisitions, and ultimately it is [text removed for publication] intention that the best of the collection should end up in public museums. It is worth adding that neither the Correggio *Virgin and Child* nor the Parmigianino *Portrait of a Man* came from a British collection, so their removal to Australia and the United States respectively have had no negative implications in terms of this country's national heritage.

As a final example: in the summer of 2010 Ekserdjian was put into contact by Sotheby's with another collector, [text removed for publication], and subsequently advised him on the purchase of the *Portrait of Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci* by Parmigianino for [text removed for publication] (H). He also advised on other purchases subsequently from various auction houses and galleries. All of the purchaser's most significant acquisitions, many of them advised by Ekserdjian, including Domenichino's *Saint John the Evangelist* and Goltzius's *Jupiter and Antiope*, have been on loan to the National Gallery, and it is the owner's expressed aim to bequeath them all to the museum. The Director of the National Gallery testifies to the crucial importance of Ekserdjian's authentication of these and other loaned works for the museum's display programme, which "obviously enhance the permanent collection, and are therefore of great public benefit to the millions of visitors we receive every year." As well as the likely commercial impact on the value of the loaned pieces that they will derive from being displayed in such an eminent museum, he continues, "what matters most to me is that the National Gallery's reputation as an international centre for scholarship is supported not only by its curators but by one of its Trustees [Ekserdjian]" (I).

These are the highlights of Ekserdjian's recent attribution work, and all parties have expressed

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confidence in relying on his expertise in the future (F, H). Moreover, in the words of Hazlitt, Gooden and Fox: “It is a source of particular reassurance to us – and indeed to our clients – that Professor Ekserdjian invariably insists on refusing any personal remuneration for performing such services” (G).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Managing Director of Royal Academy Enterprises Ltd.
- B. Royal Academy ‘Bronze’ reviews dossier.
- C. Royal Academy events programme, including educational and outreach activities: <http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/bronze/events-and-resources/>; visitor feedback videos: <http://www.royalacademy.org.uk/exhibitions/bronze/about-the-exhibition/what-our-visitors-are-saying-about-bronze,945,MA.html>.
- D. Acting Senior Curator in International Art, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.
- E. Joint International Department Head and Co-Chairman of Old Master Paintings, Sotheby’s.
- F. [text removed for publication]
- G. Hazlitt Gooden and Fox.
- H. [text removed for publication]
- I. Director of the National Gallery, London.