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How A TV Show Helped Authenticate a Lost Painting by
French Master Édouard Vuillard

Eileen Kinsella, Tuesday, January 19, 2016



Edouard Vuillard, *Femmes dans un restaurant* (1918).
Image: Courtesy of Sotheby's.

It's the dream of every hopeful *Antiques Roadshow* and *Fake or Fortune* participant come true: a leap of faith on an unconfirmed artwork ends up passing that authenticity test with flying colors.

Following a 2007 auction in Norfolk, England, author Keith Tutt—a longtime fan of French painter [Édouard Vuillard](#)—snapped up an unconfirmed circular painting from the owner of the unsold work. (The reserve price was originally £11,000.)

Nine years later, the painting is being offered at Sotheby's Impressionist and modern day sale as a bona fide Vuillard work titled *Femmes dans un restaurant* (1918), which now holds an estimate of \$356,000 to \$500,000 (£250,000 to £350,000). The sale will take place February 4 in London.

After acquiring the work, Tutt carried out his own research before eventually contacting the directors of the BBC show *Fake or Fortune*. Bendor Grosvenor, part of the *Fake or Fortune* team, flagged the upcoming sale in a [blog post](#).



From left: Bendor Grosvenor, Philip Mould, Fiona Bruce.

Image: Courtesy of BBC.com.

According to [Sotheby's catalogue entry](#), the TV team, led by Fiona Bruce and Philip Mould "invoked the power of scientific analysis alongside the help of respected Vuillard experts" to create a solid case for the attribution.

Further research allowed the team to trace the provenance of the painting back to its origins. The painting was created in 1918 as a partner to the artist's famous canvas *Le Grand Teddy*, which was commissioned for the eponymous Parisian cafe that same

year. Now, the work will be included in the supplement to the Vuillard critical catalogue by the Wildenstein Institute.

While the large version of *Le Grand Teddy* shows the interior of the cafe in its heyday, complete with glamorous patrons, *Femmes dans un restaurantis* "an altogether more intimate and carefully composed scene," according to Sotheby's catalogue.



A viewer looks at the Vuillard painting on display.

Image: Courtesy of Sotheby's.

After the restaurant closed, in 1922, the painting passed to Jos Hessel, Vuillard's longtime friend and dealer. It was later owned by theater manager Charles B. Cochran,

and then by artist Doris Sinkeisen, before being acquired by art dealer Robert Warren and offered at the Norfolk auction house, where Tutt acquired it.

Another [recent example of a hunch](#) that turned out to be quite profitable was the savvy buyer who spotted a bucolic landscape painting at Christie's that he snapped up for about \$5,000. After careful cleaning and research, it was confirmed to be the work of British painter John Constable, and was then [resold at Sotheby's](#) for a hefty \$5 million.