

AUTHENTICATION IN ART

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Dealers & the 'art' of faking it: Akbar Padamsee on how to avoid buying a counterfeit

The furore over Leonardo da Vinci's 'Salvator Mundi' refuses to die down. The international art world is still debating the authenticity of the world's most expensive painting – it sold for \$450 million in New York last week.

Now an Instagram spat has broken out, based on former Metropolitan Museum of Art director Thomas Campbell's post about the painting's conservation.

But the debate about encountering fakes at high-end auctions isn't new. For Indian contemporary artist Akbar Padamsee, the subject is close to the heart. Seated on a wheelchair at Priyasri Art Gallery in Mumbai, clad in a black t-shirt and shorts, and surrounded by his new collection of works, the 89-year-old artist says that he routinely comes across counterfeits of his paintings. "At least once a month, I come across a fake. It's a pain in the neck," he says, shaking his head. According to Padamsee, the solution to the menace is simple – buy directly from the artist.

The art of persuasion

Coming across fake paintings is one thing, says Padamsee. What's worse are the attempts to influence him so that he can verify the paintings as genuine. "I met an art dealer recently, who put up a fake painting of mine. She took me there and photographed me. I was furious because it was not my painting. If she respects herself as a dealer, she need not have resorted to such tactics," he recalls. Padamsee, though, looks at it pragmatically. "I haven't lost anything. She loses her money. I told her clearly it wasn't my painting. Despite that, if she wants to throw her money away, then do it. It's your money. How difficult is it to check with me? I stay around the corner from her. She could have come by and asked. She didn't want to. She said she bought it, but I don't think she did," he says.

Irritating requests

Another time, an art collector met Padamsee with two of his paintings that were rolled up. Padamsee immediately told the collector that they couldn't be his works because he never rolled his paintings as he used thick colours.

Once, Padamsee even received a reproduction of his painting along with a letter from a police commissioner (not from Mumbai), requesting him to sign it. "He tried to intimidate me just because he was a police commissioner. I said, 'Sorry, I can't (sign the painting),' "he says.