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GUIDELINES FOR COMPILING A CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

These guidelines are intended for those who are preparing (or considering compiling) a *catalogue raisonné*. A *catalogue raisonné* (from here abbreviated as **CR**) is understood as a critical catalogue of the complete, known oeuvre by a single artist or a clearly defined part of it (for instance the work produced in a given period or work in a specific medium).

Only general guidelines can be given as each artist asks for a tailor-made approach. We focus here on paintings in the period 1300-1960. These guidelines are not exhaustive, nor iron laws but rather requirements. We hope that **CR** compilers will offer suggestions to expand them.

The key concept for a **CR** is authenticity in the sense of authorship, which for each artist needs to be defined carefully according to a number of criteria, among which the most important is the studio practice of the period and of that of the relevant artist in particular. The term authenticity will be avoided in favour of the more objective term “authorship”.

In almost every case there is a gap between the ideal and the actual production of a **CR**. Usually lack of means severely limits the possibilities of producing a **CR** that meets the desired standards. However, within these limiting parameters there is room for improvement.

These guidelines serve a variety of goals:

- Provide a checklist preparing and aiding the **CR** compiler(s), especially making him/her/ them aware of all the aspects involved (scholarly, scientifically, legally, financially and practically).
- Promote best practices (professionalization and standardization of future **CRs**).
- Offer solutions for pitfalls regularly encountered in **CRs**.

COMPILING A CR

I - Preparation: creating favourable conditions

- Degree in art history or command of basic art historical research skills.
- Review historiography and recent scholarship on the subject.
- Join professional groups, such as the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association.
- Contact specialists on the subject/ check for other **CR** projects on the artist.

- Explore the possibility of collaborating with other specialists as a **CR** calls for a multidisciplinary approach.
- Obtain permission to reproduce the artist’s work and try to have fees waived or reduced.
- Set up a computerized database to file images, data and correspondence, and establish protocols for naming images and files.
- Train your eye by examining firsthand major repositories of works of undisputed authorship. Obtain relevant broader connoisseurship by inspecting firsthand large quantities of works by similar artists of the same period.
- Make known you will be working on a **CR**:
 - 1 Through advertisements on the websites of appropriate institutions, in auction catalogues and art magazines, such as *Weltkunst*, *Apollo*, *Art Newspaper* and *Art & Auction*, among others.
 - 2 Publishing articles on your artist in scholarly periodicals.
 - 3 By contacting museums with holdings of works by the artist and galleries who handle the work of the artist.
 - 4 By organizing a retrospective exhibition in a museum.
- Make yourself and your **CR** project visible and approachable by creating a homepage on which you:
 - 1 Explain the goals and scope of the project.
 - 2 Add contact details and a curriculum vitae.
 - 3 Invite owners of artworks to submit data and images.
 - 4 Also give a post address. Analogous photos will be less likely to have been manipulated than digital material. Material that arrives through conventional mail will also more often reveal from whom and where the images and data come from, possibly enabling the compiler to identify the owner and the whereabouts of the artwork.
- Build a website, which not only serves as a “shop sign” but also contains a secure area as a platform for screened specialist scholars to discuss works, upload and store data as well as images. This is an effective way to prepare for the ultimate publication. However, be careful with what you make public.

II - The actual work: collecting

- Collect high quality photo material:
 - 1 If possible, ask for a pair of formats: raw files (shot with a colour/ grey scale) and TIF (or other non-lossy image files) formats of the same images. Raw files are the most “objective” form of digital photographic image and are invaluable as the standard references. In a “lossy image”, such as a jpeg, data will be compressed in order to make the file size smaller and detail will be lost.

- 2 A minimum resolution should also be established, which should be a fixed constant to a given unit of measure; that is to say, not a file's size, but rather, for example, a set of pixels per unit, such as an inch. A minimum for good quality and reproducibility is 300 dpi (also the standard for reproduction of images in Europe) but high quality images are available at much higher resolutions. If this is not possible, obtain good detail photos for surface study. Inter-comparability between images should be a goal.
 - 3 If you are taking photos yourself, consult a professional photographer in order to establish an effective protocol.
 - 4 Collect archival photos and photos showing the state of a work of art before, during and after a particular conservational treatment.
- Collect data:
 - 1 In the case of Old Masters and nineteenth-century artists: consult photo collections, specialized libraries and research institutes, such as the Frick Art Reference Library (New York), Getty Research Institute (Los Angeles), Witt Library (London), etc., and archives of museums and galleries.
 - 2 In the case of a modern or contemporary artist: consult archives of galleries and of heirs/ family of the artist. Get access to the studio archive and interview people from the artist's circle.
 - Arrange firsthand inspection of the works by:
 - 1 Contacting museums, art dealers and collectors to study genuine and potentially genuine works thoroughly.
 - 2 Visiting auctions and art fairs to examine unknown works that surface.
 - When inspecting works firsthand take photos of:
 - 1 Recto and verso.
 - 2 Stamps, seals, labels, inscriptions and other marks on the verso.
 - 3 Tacking edges in case of canvas support, which can give information on restretching, condition, lining, etc.
 - 4 Edges in the case of panel paintings, which can reveal traces of paint, cutting or shaving
 - When inspecting works firsthand:
 - 1 Take measurements of the height, width (and in case of panel paintings of the thickness of the panel and of the width of the individual boards if the panel construction consists of more than one board).
 - 2 Make detailed notes (with canvas if unlined by setting a small, finely graded, "L" shaped ruler, set aligned with the warp and weft weave of the canvas in a close-up image of the verso will also allow you to record canvas thread counts at a later time if needed; with panel note the orientation of the grain).

These data and images may help to clarify a variety of often interrelated, aspects such as technique and materials used, place and date of creation, subsequent whereabouts and ownership, quality of execution, authorship and state of preservation. Technical details concerning the support may be easily documented and may prove useful to establish patterns of use.

- A general but accurate account of the condition needs to be drawn up with specific focus on the issue of whether the condition is sufficient and the work not too much altered by later treatments, to allow making a statement on authorship. The condition is good enough if:
 - 1 The top paint layer is not obliterated by discoloured, darkened varnishes and dirt
 - 2 There is a substantial portion of the original paint layer preserved in which the artist's handwriting and quality can be recognized.

- Research the provenance.

A provenance ideally provides a documentary record of owners' names; dates of ownership, and means of transference, i.e. inheritance, or sale through a dealer or auction, and locations where the work was kept, from the time of its creation by the artist until the present day.

Problems:

- 1 It is very easy to fake a provenance. Therefore carefully check already published provenances and don't just repeat them from secondary literature.
- 2 It is very difficult and often impossible to find out who really owned a work at a given time.
- 3 In the case of provenances of works by modern and contemporary artists a **CR** compiler is often confronted with the problem that this information will not be disclosed. This also applies to the more recent provenance of works by Old Masters and nineteenth-century artists. If the information is disclosed to the **CR** author, it is often not permitted to put it in the published **CR**. Be sure to have owners fill out documents stating their preferred credit line.

Handbooks, methods and tools:

- 1 Check the provenance guide on the website of the International Foundation for Art Research: http://www.ifar.org/provenance_guide.php
- 2 Consult N.H. Yeide et al., *The AAM Guide to Provenance Research*, Washington 2001.
- 3 Check Google images but beware of fakes.
- 4 Check a work's exhibition history and find out who lent the work (check annotated copies of exhibition catalogues).
- 5 Check auction records by consulting annotated copies of auction catalogues and using printed as well as online repertoires, such as:
 - i. Lugt's Répertoire online: <http://lugt.idcpublishers.info/content/aboutlugt.php>
 - ii. Getty Provenance Index:
 - iii. <http://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html>
 - iv. Online sold lot archives of auctioneers
 - v. Websites such as Artnet, Artvalue, Invaluable and Artprice
- 6 Check gallery records (consult dealer catalogues as well as archives of dealers).
- 7 Check artist's records and correspondence and what the artist wrote on the back of photographs.
- 8 Look for reproductive prints (in the case of Old Masters).
- 9 Look for reproductions in other publications.

- 10 Look for period and later copies of the work (mainly in the case of Old Masters).
- 11 Check relevant, published primary source documents such as diaries and journals in which these works may be mentioned.
- 12 Check seals, marks, inscriptions and labels on the reverse, stretchers and frames of the paintings.
- 13 Check the aforementioned (see under Collect data) photo collections, specialized libraries and research institutes.
- 14 Check the biographies of former owners (check biographic dictionaries and online historic newspaper resources).
- 15 Check the archives of institutions that acted as patrons to the artist in search of contracts.
- 16 Check probate inventories of collectors.

III – Technical information and research: some guidelines

As the technical resources available to each **CR** compiler will vary hugely, no single approach can be offered. However, there are universal recommendations that are essential.

- Collect material relating to the physical condition of the objects under study. Archival references, conservation dossiers, etc.
- Involve a technical specialist early on.

Define your questions, then discuss the possible range of solutions with a technical specialist. If the best route to obtaining specific information is not immediately clear, define your concerns and limitations, then ask for advice on how best to achieve goals within these parameters. Such a discussion may also help you identify features that are open to misinterpretation in the work of an artist (such as characteristic changes that may occur in materials, typical alterations imposed by historic conservation practice, etc.) and thus refine your visual evaluations. The person(s) you speak with should be well informed about the technical aspects of the artist you are researching (or of the art of the period, if that expertise does not exist). They may be experienced in any or all of the following disciplines: technical art history, art science or art conservation. By making sure that the professional/s you consult with are informed about the full range of material issues will bring the most profound insight into the range of issues likely to be encountered.

- Maximise resources. In conversation with technical specialists establish:
 - 1 Physical aspects that might provide maximum interest for research.
 - 2 Physical aspects that can be easily documented and profitably used to establish useful identifying data.
 - 3 The range of technical studies that have already been done, if any. Sometimes works of certain artists have been extensively imaged (X-ray, infrared, etc.) while in others, materials (pigments, binders and supports) may have been examined.
 - 4 Think about what of the available routes of investigation may be most revealing about your artist and how they may be used in a diagnostic fashion. (If your artist did not do under drawings, for example, then works

with neatly rendered, extensive under drawings may be classified as suspect).

- Know the limits

It is essential to understand what the limits of technical research are, although clearly not the fine details of their practice. A qualified colleague should be able to discuss the potential and limitations for technical studies to make this clear. This will avoid over-reliance on certain data, and mis-trust of others that can result from a poor grasp of what can be accomplished. As most art historians are not taught to be educated consumers of technical data, a good working relationship with informed colleagues is of great value. A technical specialist might be involved as a **CR** team member or consultant. They should be able to articulate how a suggested approach to investigation might work, why the methods used are well suited, the pro's and con's of any given approach, and how this information will serve to enhance the **CR**.

Do not over- or underestimate the results of a technical study. A technical study may rule out an attribution or a proposed dating of a specific work. It may articulate how a work conforms to what is known of a specific artist's materials and practice. However, a technical report will not "authenticate" a work of art; it is an accessory to doing so, not a means in and of itself. A good technical study tests a hypothesis. It will articulate a starting question, explain what was done by what means, and the extent of the comparative material that is available for contextualisation of results. Often technical studies are constricted by budgets and limitations of equipment; this context is essential to recognise. Understand what the report has undertaken and what it has concluded (for example: just because nothing has been found to be "wrong" does not mean a work is "good"; not all points may have been checked, the work may be a contemporary production, a forger may have used historically accurate materials, etc.). Again, ask questions of the author of a report if you are unsure of a report's implications; if this is not possible, or if you feel a second opinion is necessary, consult with an independent specialist of equal standing.

Remember the rule of the false positive: in technical study as in connoisseurship, if it is too focused on the work of a single artist, it can be impossible to distinguish actual individual characteristics of an artist from generic features. It is also essential to examine/ discuss the art technological context of a given artist alongside the particular study of their work.

If you are able to commission any technical study, think carefully about the long-term storage and utility of the collected materials. Removing samples from objects is a serious matter not to be undertaken lightly. Removal of material from art objects physically compromises them and should be done as little as possible and for well defined reasons. (Indeed, some of the international organisations for conservation of cultural material include guidance for such issues in their codes of ethics and professional guidelines).

It is essential to plan for:

- 1 Archival storage and reuse/re-examination of sample material taken. Scientific techniques are constantly changing, and interpretation of data is not an absolute. Samples should be available for re-examination in the future, as should data, just as the art historical evidence should be available for consideration by colleagues.
- 2 Again, remember the concept of inter-comparability. Whenever possible, have established protocols for data collection so your information is as useful as possible.

- 3 Accessibility of information. Technical information should be reviewed, discussed and shared. Presentation of work at peer-reviewed conferences can bring technical research to the attention of the wide art community and may also attract useful commentary from other professionals working in the field, and thus new insights.
- 4 Choose objects for study with care. If an object is to be examined for technical study, know its condition and the significance that this implies. One object may be of value to illustrate material weaknesses inherent in the work of a particular artist; thus an object in poor condition may be highly significant to examine and understand. Another work may be of value due to its exemplary state of preservation, another due to its novelty of technique. Identify and exploit technical examination of such works by establishing a defined protocol and specify features of interest.
- 5 Establish networks. Complex problems are best approach with a wide range of insight. No one expert will have exclusive or full knowledge. Identify people who are interested in your issues, and seek their advice. Researchers who work in isolation are rarely effective.
- 6 Ensure that documentation is carefully undertaken and archived.

IV - The intellectual work: further research, processing and interpreting

- Establish the artist's biography in order to know when and where works were executed.
- Establish a chronology of the artist's work:
 - 1 Make a list of dated works as a framework of reference.
 - 2 For nineteenth-century and modern artists; find out when works of art were first exhibited or photographed. Archival images are crucial to dating and understanding the work in order to determine by what date they existed. However, be aware that archival photos may be misleading.

A chronology will often reveal the artist's technical and stylistic development. These processes need to be described and analyzed. This assessment will serve, among many other arguments and evidence, as a criterion to judge the authorship of new works.

- Establish criteria for accepting works:
 - 1 Create a definition of authorship based on the artist's biography, technique, studio practice, chronology and style.
 - 2 Note aspects that you observe that might be helpful in establishing patterns of working or which would be suited to further investigation by a specialist colleague. For example: use of under drawing, particular surface effects, reoccurring problems of condition.
- Gain insight into other relevant aspects typical of the artist's oeuvre (such as working methods and materials, studio practice, sources of inspiration etc.).
- When speaking to specialists in art technology, provide them with as much information as you can regarding specific avenues of investigation that might help you, and specific visual observations you have made. Speak with a specialist in advance of starting your

work. Establish a list of potentially useful technical characteristics to look for/ at in works examined. If there are archival sources relating to the purchase and use of materials, discuss these in advance of planning an examination protocol.

V - Side aspects: scholarly independence, accountability and liability

- Keep careful records of visits to museums, collectors and art dealers of works seen and discussed and file related correspondence.
- Make clear agreements with owners of artworks about how they wish to be mentioned in the **CR**.
- Only issue an opinion on authorship outside the purely scholarly discourse in writing when requested by the owner of the work. Requests may always be turned down.
- If you give an opinion, first consult one of the standard opinion request forms available through the abovementioned Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association, which helps to protect from legal action, financial responsibility for shipping and insurance, and other impositions on the scholar.
- Obtain insurance (for example, authors errors and omissions policy).
- Find out who owns the work and obtain a form of release and indemnity signed by the owner (not a third party) to reduce your exposure to lawsuits.
- Always be careful with what you write and emphasise, especially to owners not familiar with the laws of academic research, that the statement is your personal opinion and reflects the current state of research, and that naturally these opinions may change over time by virtue of new insights
- Do not call a statement on authorship ‘certificate’ or ‘expertise’ but a ‘scholarly opinion’.
- Do not ask for a fee when issuing an opinion on authorship. If a party asks for an extensive report an hourly fee may be asked for.

VI - Structuring the CR: presenting the material

- In the case of Old Masters:

Design a structure that contains sections with works that you consider doubtful, works you reject and with works you know from old sources. Doubtful and rejected works often figure in previous scholarly literature and sources. Therefore, to officially reject a work or cast doubt on its authorship in the **CR**, mentioning the arguments, is a necessary contribution to the critical discourse on the status of these works.

For compilers of a **CR** of an Old Master, this is a differentiated list (not all categories are useful in every case; some are interchangeable or overlap):

- 1 Accepted works
- 2 Collaborative works
- 3 Works from the studio
- 4 Attributed works
- 5 Doubtful works
- 6 Works not seen by the present author
- 7 Rejected works
- 8 Works known from photographs
- 9 Works known from reproductive prints
- 10 Works known from descriptions or other documents

- In the case of **CRs** of modern and contemporary artists these sections are usually omitted and the catalogue solely consists of accepted works.

For compilers of both Old Master **CRs** and those working on more modern masters, a category meriting special attention consists of so-called dead works or archival works. These are works of which the state is so deplorable and of which so little original paint and of the support remains that they cannot be catalogued among the accepted works without at least making a clear note about its severely bad condition.

In each case, indicate the level of certainty regarding the classification, and the type of supporting evidence used to obtain it. If there is technical analysis available, indicate this. When no technical evidence is implied, it may be assumed that none was known to the scholar.

A second layer of structuring is strongly dependent on the artist and the type of work he/she made. A chronological ordering is prevalent in many **CRs** but will not always be of use, for instance in the case of an artist who only worked for a short span of time, did not date any of his works and does not display any clear development in his work.

VII - Publishing: what to include in the catalogue and how to present it

- The published **CR** should meet eight requirements:

- 1 Accuracy (no factual errors, questionable omissions or misrepresentation of previous scholarship).
 - 2 Clarity (unequivocal phrasing).
 - 3 Coherence (the material should be presented in a logical and balanced framework).
 - 4 Consistency (no conflicting statements or visions).
 - 5 Completeness (as far as possible and within the limits the **CR** author has set himself).
 - 6 Correspondence (approach and organization of catalogue follows from nature of artist's work).
 - 7 Practicality (user friendly).
 - 8 Transparency (as regards method, goals set and self-chosen limitations).
 - 9 Confidentiality (with regards of the identity of present owners and, sometimes, locations).
- Apart from the **CR** proper, it should include the following contents:
 - 1 Introduction on goals set, limitations, method and underlying theory, especially definition of authorship and clear criteria for accepting works as autograph.
 - 2 Instructions for practical use.
 - 3 Scholarly apparatus (search aids, concordances, indices, list of abbreviations, list of illustrations, bibliography, list of exhibitions cited in abbreviated form, appendices for example of important documents).
 - 4 Photo credits.

Ad libitum one could add:

- 1 A disclaimer
 - 2 CV author/ team/ committee
- On entry level the following nine rubrics should be considered:
 - 1 Catalogue number (and including artist's own record or artist's studio numbers; also catalogue number from previous **CRs**).
 - 2 Title or short description:
Depending on the artist, the **CR** author needs to indicate basis for establishing titles in general: author's title, title when first exhibited, inscribed title, museum title (often required by photo permission form). Followed by a listing of alternative titles. Also consider what language is used for primary title and who translates titles consistently into another language. If the original title is not that of the language used for the **CR**, the original language title should be included; if this is in the artist's mother tongue this is essential. This may help in conducting research on the artwork.
 - 3 Present whereabouts and ownership:
Inquire with the museum, gallery or collector if there are specific credit lines that have to be followed or wishes regarding confidentiality.
 - 4 Basic technical details:
Medium (be cautious with the phrasing: without technical analysis it is often impossible to identify the medium with the naked eye).
Support.
Dimensions.

Signatures and dates and other inscriptions in the artist's hand as well as later additions.

Note, if applicable, the plain fact that the work has been inspected firsthand. Note exactly what is known, how it is known and what is merely assumed, to avoid oversimplification.

- 5 Image (front and, if instructive, the back; for example the verso of a painting which has been lined and put on a new stretcher will be of far less interest than one that is unlined on its original stretcher)
- 6 Provenance:
Follow a well defined structure.
The provenance should be backed by references to previous literature or other sources.
For Old Masters and nineteenth-century artists include prices fetched at auction as well as prices paid in private deals (if they are known).
Also include the present owner and whereabouts (pay attention to credit lines and confidentiality if required; see above).
- 7 References (; exhibition history, literature as well as unpublished PhD and Master's theses; unpublished reports and other documentation to be discussed in the text of the entry).
- 8 Condition and technical research (keep the assessment concise and straightforward. Note if the observations and research are based on firsthand inspection or on reports provided by the owner of the artwork or coming from some other source, taking into account the occasion and purpose of the report, the date and the conditions under which the research or examinations were carried out. If it is not possible to include consistent information it is useful to highlight "exemplar" works from various periods, which represent the work of the artist as it should be. Other features such as cases where an artist has rejected certain effects – such as for example varnishes – are equally essential to note. This can be hugely helpful for scholars using the **CR** in order to calibrate their perception.)
- 9 Commentary (only if necessary; for instance when the **CR** author disagrees with previously expressed opinions to explain his reasoning and to discuss peculiar aspects of the given work or issues of dating and comparison with other works).