

# BLOUIN ARTINFO

## From Renoir to Warhol: The Craziest and Most Lucrative Thrift Store Art Finds

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Thrift stores are no longer hunting grounds for indie vintage fiends and elderly knickknack hunters — more and more, unsuspecting kitsch fans are picking up bargain-basement paintings at flea markets and garage sales only to later discover that they've purchased master works by art legends, with value to match. While these finds often face exhaustive verification procedures, many lucky shoppers still end up the owners of paintings worth a fortune — not a bad deal, when they were just looking for pretty pictures. If the trend continues, we won't be surprised if we run into Jeffrey Deitch picking through discount bins at our local thrift store, or find Jeff Koons rooting around a suburban yard sale looking for one of his own balloon statues. For now, here is a list of our favorite stories of unexpected art finds.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir's "Paysage Bords de Seine" was recently discovered for just a few dollars at a Virginia flea market sale.

### Mystery Box, Missing Link

He was simply looking for a barber chair at a garage sale in the spring of 2000, but Rick Norsigian, a painter from Fresno, California, ended up spotting some glass plate negatives of Yosemite that reminded him of his days working at the monument during his youth. He talked the seller down from a whopping \$70 to just \$45 for the two boxes containing the negatives, only to discover later that those boxes may be worth a little more — about \$199,999,955 more. This cache turned out to be 65 glass plates by celebrated American photographer Ansel Adams, estimated to have been shot in the 1920s and 1930s. The images, which art dealer David W. Streets has referred to as a "missing link" in Adams's career, had previously been thought destroyed in a 1937 darkroom fire that destroyed 5,000 similar plates.

### Bolot-meow-sky

Beth Feedback, a painter from North Carolina, has spent much of her artistic career creating whimsical paintings of brightly-colored cats with cartoon eyes. But her most significant art purchase was of a somewhat more classic work...even if that purchase wasn't exactly intentional. While selling her paintings at the Leanne Pizio Art Festival in Oak Ridge, North Carolina, Feedback caught a chill and decided to visit a nearby thrift store to pick up a sweater, where she ran across two large, painted canvases on sale for \$9.99 each. Delighted to find such a bargain on materials, she snatched both up and returned to her post. But when she showed her find to the festival creator, Pizio noticed a tag on the back of one that suggested it might be valuable, and advised Feedback to do a bit a research before painting over it. Feedback finally got around to this last July, and discovered that the painting, a red diamond-shaped work with blue and white rectangles cutting through it off-center, was actually a notable piece by early 20th-century painter Ilya Bolotowsky. Through some social media outreach, she found a gallery that had once owned the painting, who provided Feedback with original documents proving its legitimacy. She then contacted Sotheby's, which accepted "Vertical Diamond" for auction



and expects to receive \$15,000 to \$20,000 for it in March 2013. If her own neon-kitty sales at the Pizio art fair weren't what Feedback would have liked, it looks like she made out okay.

### **This Might be Worth Something...**

Whatever attracted a Virginia woman to a box containing a Paul Bunyan doll and a plastic cow at a Shenandoah Valley flea market this past September must have been the right instinct. In that box was a lovely landscape painting, which the owner first stored in a plastic bag in a shed, then in the trunk of her car, before deciding she liked the frame and hanging it in her kitchen. When she started to tear the brown paper off in the back, her mother stopped her, speculating it might be worth something when she noticed that the frame had a Renoir plaque on it. She then brought it to the Potomack Co. auction house, who determined it to be the French Impressionist's "Paysage Bords De Seine", and speculated that it could fetch as much as \$100,000. Unfortunately, before its new owner had a chance to celebrate, The Washington Post did some digging and found that the painting was stolen from The Baltimore Museum of Art in 1951. The flea market shopper was "disappointed," to say the least.

### **"Who the f\*\*\*\* is Jackson Pollock" or Horton Hears a Pollock**

When your friend is depressed, what could cheer them up more than a large and "ugly" piece of artwork? Apparently that was retired truck driver Teri Horton's idea when she stumbled upon a rather large (66x47-inch) painting of red, white, black and yellow paint splatters at a California thrift store in 1992. After Horton used her haggling skills to knock the price tag down from \$8 to \$5, she brought it to her friend, who declined the gift: in addition to also thinking it was ugly, it wouldn't fit through the door of her trailer. This left Horton with no choice but to try and resell it at a garage sale. When a local art teacher passed by and suggested the painting may be a Jackson Pollock, Horton's response was, "Who the f\*\*\* is Jackson Pollock?" Since these fateful words were spoken, Horton has spent several years attempting to verify the painting, despite going through a forensic specialist who allegedly found a fingerprint in the painting matching one in Pollock's studio. If proven real, the painting would reportedly be worth over \$100 million. While its resolution is unclear, Horton's story has now been captured in the 2006 documentary, "Who the \*\$&% is Jackson Pollock?"

### **Andy At "A Very Good Bargain"**

Even art collectors can be on the lookout for "a very good bargain." This past April, collector and businessman Andy Fields was hunting for deals at a garage sale in Las Vegas, Nevada, when he hit on what he thought was a great sale: five paintings for \$5. When he went to frame one of those paintings, he found a sketch behind it of 1930s singer Rudy Vallee. On the back of that sketch was Andy Warhol's signature. Fields did some more digging to find that the sketch was most likely created in 1939 or 1940, when Warhol was bedridden with cholera. The sketch, said to be worth over \$2 million, is one of the earliest pieces from the legendary artist, showing his first signs of style and obsession with celebrity-as-art. According to The Daily Mail, a forensic handwriting examiner confirmed that the signature was, in fact, Warhol's.

### **"Education of the Virgin" Finally Graduates Yale**

A painting's lovely earth tones are sliced in half by a horizontal crease; a now-headless angel hovers over a woman and child; chunks of paint are lobbed off a disfigured canvas, exposed to years of dampness. This is how John Marciari, curator of European Art at the San Diego Museum of Art, first spotted a work titled "Anonymous, Spanish School, seventeenth century," in the basement at Yale University. At the time, the university was renovating the building and relocating its basement inventory; a former curator of Early European Art at the university's art gallery, Marcia recalls noticing its striking attributes beneath the damage, later stating, "Not only was it a work of great quality, but the painting was so confidently executed that it seemed to bear the signature style of a particular artist." He expected to do years of research, anticipating numerous academic debates to determine whether this painting may in fact be the work of 17-century Spanish artist Diego Velázquez, and furthermore,



the painting Education of the Virgin. But when the story broke to the media in July of 2010, the rest of the world was immediately convinced that a missing masterpiece had been found. The painting's authenticity is still being researched by experts, and it has since been subjected to X-ray analysis, which has revealed that it is mounted similarly to other early works by the Spanish artist. The Daily Mail reports that the painting is believed to have been given to the museum as a gift by the Townshends, a family of shipowners whose vessels often traveled to Spain, in 1925.