

The Art of Museum Donation Appraisals



“Give me a museum and I’ll fill it,”
said Pablo Picasso.

But he wasn’t talking about obtaining a tax deduction. As tax season heats up, museums are being asked how to donate a work of art. It’s often frustrating for donors to discover that museums cannot accept everything that is offered and that curators cannot comment about the value of a gift. Even if a museum has agreed to accept a work, donors often find themselves on their own when it comes to getting an appraisal.

How can museums advise prospective donors? According to Sandra J. Tropper, ASA, “The appraiser who values a donor’s personal property needs to be worthy of trust. The best appraisers are knowledgeable both about the property and about valuation techniques.” When museums refer prospective donors to ASA, they can do so with confidence, Tropper adds, because “ASA accreditation is a challenging process. ASA appraisers are highly qualified and have been vetted for competence and experience.”

“..ASA appraisers are
highly qualified and have
been vetted for competence
and experience.”

said Sandra J. Tropper, ASA

While curators want to be helpful to their donors, museums cannot select, hire or pay an appraiser: this is the job of the donor. Making it even more complicated, the IRS has recently tightened up the rules so that fewer appraisers now are “qualified” to write charitable donation appraisals. Even if they wish to give an important work by Picasso, donors are finding that it is not a simple task. Most of the rules are explained in IRS *Publication 561* and in a new book titled *To Give and To Receive: A Handbook on Gifts and Donations for Museums and Donors*, which was edited by two American Society of Appraisers members, Sharon S. Theobald, ASA and Laurette E. McCarthy, Ph.D., AM.

Researching for an accredited, independent personal property appraiser is simple: go to ASA’s website, www.appraisers.org and do a “Find An Appraiser” search in the Personal Property Discipline using your zip code. ■



www.appraisers.org | (800) 272-8258