

Helen Conybeare Williams in *Spear's*: 'Fake or Fortune, and the Case of Buyer Beware' for Art Collectors, Investors, Connoisseurs and Enthusiasts

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PRACTICES Litigation

Followers of the BBC's immensely popular "Fake or Fortune" art-sleuthing series, which sees journalist Fiona Bruce and Art dealer and historian Philip Mould investigating the provenance and history of ownership of notable artworks, will be acutely aware of the challenges of convincing respected expert panels of authenticity, even after painstaking investigations and compelling scientific research, and the devastating rejection of a painting as genuine.

The "Fake or Fortune" series airs in the UK. In perhaps one of the most memorable moments of this year's series, both experts and viewers were left stunned when a still-life painting bought by an amateur antiques enthusiast for £165,000, thought to be the work of Modern British artist William Nicholson, was revealed likely to be a forgery, with art experts saying there was not enough evidence to confirm the hand of the artist, and as a consequence almost worthless.

Indeed, for anyone looking to acquire valuable works of art, collectibles or ancient artefacts, there's a good reason why the simple adage 'let the buyer beware' has stood the test of time.

Courts in leading art centres around the world are often called upon to determine disputes over title, provenance, authenticity and attribution of valuable art and artefacts. These disputes catch the headlines not only because the artworks often carry vertiginous values, but also because their past can be shrouded in mystery.

Recently, an exquisitely ornamented carved rock crystal jar from the Medieval Islamic period, valued at up to £12 million, was the subject of an ownership dispute in the London Commercial Court, together with a claim for delivery of the jar against the London auction house, Sotheby's. Iranian trader Ali Saatsaz Jeddi said the jar belonged to him after he bought it from a friend in Dubai in 2010, while collector Ali Pishvaie said he held part ownership. Sotheby's found itself in the middle of the court case when Pishvaie deposited the piece for auction in 2012.

Mr Pishvaie maintained that he had sold the jar to Mr Jeddi in 2011 by way of a part exchange for an antique bronze object but, as they both considered the jar was worth more than the bronze object, he had kept a 25% ownership interest in the jar. The competing accounts were totally irreconcilable as to provenance and ownership of the jar with a striking absence of reliable documentary evidence and inconsistencies on both sides. Ultimately, a simple agreement written out after a meeting on hotel notepaper that the jar was consigned by Mr Jeddi to Mr Pishvaie for sale in London was deemed the only reliable document, with the Judge ruling in Mr Jeddi's favour.

To read the full *Spear's* article, click [here](#).