



THE ART NEWSPAPER

[Russia-Ukraine war](#) [Art market](#) [Museums & heritage](#) [Exhibitions](#) [Books](#) [Podcasts](#) [Columns](#) [Adve](#)

ADAA
Archive

The ADAA thirty years on: “We’ve cleaned up tax fraud, the selling of fakes, helped recover thefts, and supported freedom of expression”

As the Art Dealers Association of America’s annual Armory show drew to an end we talked to Gilbert Edelson, a founder member

Jason Edward Kaufman

31 October 1992

Thirty years ago a handful of New York City gallery owners banded together to form the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA). A not-for-profit corporation in the state of New York, the ADAA today numbers 133 members in nineteen cities, and has a roster of activities ranging from appraisal services and lobbying efforts, to lecture series and the annual Art Show at the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue.

Membership is by invitation (dues are less than \$1,000 per year) extended only to U.S. dealers in works of European and American fine art—painting, sculpture, drawings, and prints—from the Renaissance to the present. Dealers in primitive, tribal, Oriental art, classical antiquities, and objets d’art are excluded. Members must be reputable experts, in business for at least five years,

whose exhibitions substantially contribute to the cultural life of the community. Though mainly public gallery owners, the ADAA numbers a handful of private dealers as well, admitted because of their stature in the field or because they took their public concerns private. Former presidents include Alexandre Rosenberg, Pierre Matisse, Klaus Perls, Eugene Thaw, Andre Emmerich, Leo Castelli, Stephen Hahn, Norman Hirschl, and William Acquavella. For the organisation's thirtieth anniversary, The Art Newspaper spoke with Gilbert S. Edelson, Administrative Vice President and Counsel, about the founding of the ADAA and its role in today's artworld.

Who started the ADAA?

Gilbert Edelson In 1962 I was an associate working with the law firm where the late Ralph Colin was a managing partner. Ralph believed that the dealers' role was unrecognized, that dealers as a group had a poor reputation. Having worked closely with many dealers to form his own collection, he knew that good dealers had incredible knowledge and connoisseurship. But the public didn't understand that. He decided to start an art dealers organisation, and he asked me to help.

So it was a public relations effort?

It was partly a public relations effort, and partly an effort to get the voice of the dealers heard. He persuaded the dealers—at the time a fiercely independent group of businessmen who didn't like the idea of belonging to any organisations—that they needed to be heard by the government, museums, and collectors. The original members included Alexandre Rosenberg, Klaus Perls, Pierre Matisse, Sidney Janis, Leo Castelli, Stephen Hahn, Norman Hirschl, Andre Emmerich (who is now the president), and a number of dealers who are now gone—Martha Jackson, Edith Halpert. I could go on and on.

What was the specific impetus for the organization?

What really spurred it was abuses in appraisals of works of art. Since most museums (the Getty excepted) have small acquisitions budgets, most objects come by gift. The tax law provides for a deduction of the fair market value of the work of art. There were two problems back then: first, collectors tend to have an inflated idea of the value of their work, and second, since they feared the IRS (Inland Revenue Service) would question any evaluation they gave, they overvalued everything. The IRS got to the point where, because of the abuses, it was prepared to recommend to Congress the abolition of the deduction for donations of works of art. Someone

had to do something.

We went to Washington to talk to the IRS and said, “Look, honest donors want a reputable place to get appraisals and we think dealers are best qualified to provide it”. We devised a system whereby three dealers would be asked to give an independent appraisal, and we would average them for an official evaluation. That’s still the way we do it. The fee is on a sliding scale according to value, and nobody who appraises for us is paid for it. The dealers don’t get a penny; they do it as a public service.

So this was the primary function of the ADAA at its founding?

There was a second problem, which was fakes. Today there’s not much of a problem, but at that time it was a little more troublesome and there was nobody doing anything about it. There were fakes of Old Masters, Cézannes, Soutines, and even contemporary work like Jackson Pollocks.

Now Walter Chrysler was an important collector with a marvellous eye who bought some wonderful things. He was an eccentric individual, and in 1962-63 he opened his own museum in Provincetown, Cape Cod, in which he hung the Chrysler Collection. It had Courbet, Degas, Corot, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Delacroix, and it got a very good review in the New York Times. Ralph [Colin] went to see it, and he said “My God, a third of the pictures are beautiful, but I think two-thirds of the pictures are fakes. They’re absolutely dead wrong”. And this show was going to travel to the National Gallery of Canada, among other places, and then maybe Mr Chrysler might try to sell some of them. So Ralph got together a group of dealers—people like Sidney Janis, Alexandre Rosenberg, Klaus Perls, Pierre Matisse. They went to see it and came back and had a meeting one night in New York, and they made a list of the fakes. They called the New York Times and said, “We want to tell you quietly that the show you gave a rave review to is filled with fakes”. When the Times published that story it became a scandale. The important thing we were concerned with was to keep those fakes off the market, and we were successful in that.

That was followed a few years later by the Meadows situation in Dallas, Texas, where Alger Meadows had bought from two travelling Frenchmen a whole collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works which were all fakes. They were done by that forger Elmyr de Hory who lived on Ibiza. Word got out on that, and they were prevented from getting onto the market.

Then there was a big show of Miró in New York in the late Sixties that got a good review in what

was then called The Herald Tribune. Every picture in that gallery show was a fake. We got together a group of important dealers and they all came over and testified, and the gallery owner said the artist was lying, but in the end the show was closed and the gallery closed.

These were fakes on a massive scale. Then you could walk up Madison Avenue and see a fake in the window. What could you do? Now, with the Art Dealers Association you have a professional group that could call and say to the dealer, "Listen, that picture is wrong. We assume you don't know it, and will do something about it". I think the risk of a fake making the rounds today is much much less than it used to be.

Was the ADAA also active in policing the art market for thefts?

Many years ago, if a work was stolen you might report it to the police or the FBI, but there was no way to get out the word to the market. In the 1960s we started an art theft/loss notification system by which we sent to dealers, auction houses, museums, and police authorities notices of missing works of art. Later, IFAR [International Foundation for Art Research] was formed and we turned over our files to them. We continue to work with the police, the FBI, and Interpol on stolen works of art.

Today, how does the ADAA exert its influence and on whom?

We publish a handbook for our members, provide appraisal services, and we're active in legislative matters. Several years ago, we worked through the New York State Sculpture Bill that makes it necessary for dealers and foundries selling multiples of sculptures to provide complete information on these objects, and warranties that the information is correct. The same thing was created for prints about ten years ago. These laws have been adopted by other states, as well. Now there's the Artists' Rights Bill. We're in favour of the part that would protect the work of art after it leaves the studio, but we've fought against the resale royalties section that would provide a share of resale profits to go to the artists. We support whenever we can the interests of museums, both with respect to the tax laws and otherwise.

We periodically make grants to institutions. We feel very strongly about freedom of expression, so when [in 1989] the NEA withdrew its grant to Artist's Space, within forty-eight hours we gave them \$10,000 to replace it. When [in 1990] the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center and its director were indicted in the Mapplethorpe case and needed money for their defence, we raised about \$50,000 for them in about two days. And earlier this year we gave \$10,000 to Franklin Furnace to show our support for their programme.

Does this money come from membership and appraisal fees?

Some does, and some comes from contributions and grants to the ADAA Foundation, a separate corporation. We've also made contributions to the Frick Art Reference Library, the Archives of American Art, the Drawing Center, and IFAR, though frankly, we have very little money available for such purposes.

Has the recession taken a toll on the ADAA?

So far we have not lost any member because of the recession, largely because our membership is very stable financially. But times are not what they were three or five years ago. The one good thing that's come out of this is that the speculators have been shaken out.

Is the ADAA at odds with the auction houses?

Not really. The auction houses were very successful in getting a lot of pictures in recent years, but there were a series of auctions with a very high buy-in rate, and pictures were getting publicly burned. Now it seems a lot more are going to the dealers.

The important thing for us is to promote the good name of dealers, and even more, to promote an interest in art and collecting. This supports not only the dealers, themselves, but also the artists, and the museums down the road.

[ADAA](#)

[Art market](#)

[Fakes & copies](#)

[Tax fraud](#)

[Interview](#)

[COOKIE SETTINGS](#)