

# Signatures on Artwork

The Phenomena of Signatures are so vast that it took quite some time to highlight it here in relevance to Katrain.

So.....

Our basic existence is survival. In our society, surviving means Money, like it or not. That counts for everyone, including artists. If an artist cannot sell his work, another source of income is a necessity. Think: Vincent van Gogh.

To sell Art, it must have a function; being furniture or household items like vases, tableware or kitchen items. The value can also be solely decorative as sculptures, paintings and drawings.

As our population was growing over the centuries, the production of these items increased as well. Craftsmen formed Guilds to secure their markets and stabilize their income. Being part of a collective, there was no need to individualize an object with a clear visible signature.

But fraud, dishonesty and greed are as old as mankind and to secure the authenticity of one's work, using hidden hallmarks were quite useful. It was said that Leonardo painted a minuscule L and V as secret initials in the Mona Lisa's left eye but that myth is debunked.

Up until the sixteenth century, the sheer lack of regular signatures, kept the artists unknown.

In respect to paintings, Holland's Golden Age was from the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century till the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century. During this period the popularity of paintings for house decoration became so great that an estimated 5 to 10 million paintings were produced. See: ( De Noord-Nederlandse kunsthandel in de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw, By Marion Boers, ISBN 978-90-8704-288-2, Page 11)

Obviously the bulk was inferior and cheap. Everybody with a keen eye for color and proportion and with the help of some money for a painter's chest could be painting away as an artist. But to distinguish from this heap, it became a necessity for well known and well paid painters to authenticate their work with clear visible signatures.

Stained Glass, on one hand, is similar to paintings as a decorative item, on the other hand it is completely different in respect to production. The production of the glass itself, up to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, was prohibitive. Hence, it is easy to see that the Stained Glass artists did not worry about copying of her/his work. In their time, the few were well known.

However, exceptions exist. In Fritz Geiges book: Der alte Fensterschmuck des Freiburger Münsters. It shows on page 84 two images of Hans Holbein the Elder's name/signature. Not to forget that Tiffany also signed his stained glass masterpieces but that is end 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In my research, as a member of the Caretaker team, I did not find any study about hidden hallmarks in Stained Glass.

With a few exceptions, the large stained glass windows in churches and cathedrals do not require the artists to sign their work because no one can walk away with these colossal windows under their arm.

For the conclusion of this chapter, I want to highlight that we are living in a fantastic time! About everything you want to know is at your keyboard. Every image, video and sound is there. For us Caretakers, traveling through the wide and majestic world of Stained Glass is a never ending adventure.

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Caretakers.

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