

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Leicester		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: The Art of Attribution: Leonardo da Vinci, Mantegna and Parmigianino		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): David Ekserdjian	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of History of Art, School of Arts	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2004 – Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor David Ekserdjian's research in Italian Renaissance art equipped Christie's and Sotheby's auction houses, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the UK Parliament with the irrefutable confidence to conduct significant commercial trade in authentic works of art. Ekserdjian's attributions of the <i>Salvator Mundi</i> painting to Leonardo da Vinci (Christie's 2010) and a drawing to Andrea Mantegna (Sotheby's 2019), based on his body of research, directly contributed to two world-record auction sales in 2017 and 2020. Given his reputation as a world leading, trusted authority, the UK Reviewing Committee <u>on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest</u> selected Ekserdjian to assess a painting for Parliament's <i>Export of Objects of Cultural Interest</i> (2016), which he authenticated as a Parmigianino worth GBP245M. The J. Paul Getty Museum purchased the Parmigianino (2017), citing Ekserdjian's research as "standard reference" for the art trade.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Professor David Ekserdjian, a leading and trusted expert scholar in the global art trade valued at USD67B in 2018 (Statistica), exemplifies the UoA's broad expertise in visual culture and Early Modern cultural history. He has researched and published on Italian Renaissance art since the 1970s, with particular expertise on the works of Italian masters such as Leonardo da Vinci, Correggio, and Parmigianino [R1-R5]. Ekserdjian's research expertise is highly sought within the art market because few Italian renaissance paintings, and virtually no Italian renaissance drawings, are incontrovertibly by specific artists. In particular, auction houses such as Christie's and Sotheby's, and cultural centres such as the British Museum and the National Gallery (London), have relied upon his research methodologies to authenticate and attribute sixteenth-century Italian paintings and drawings since the 1980s.</p> <p>Ekserdjian's research methodology involves analysis of known works to identify a reliable trajectory of the artist's career, re-attribution of anonymous works [R5], and attribution of new, hitherto un-attributed work. His new attributions alone relate to more than fifty artists, and he has widely published his findings on da Vinci, Mantegna, Correggio, and Parmigianino [R1- R3].</p> <p>By way of example, it has long been widely accepted amongst art historians that da Vinci executed a painting of the <i>Salvator Mundi</i>. Ekserdjian researched two highly finished, autograph drawings in red chalk on prepared paper in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, which he confirmed as preparatory studies [R1]. One of these works concentrates on Christ's right arm</p>		

raised in benediction, and shows the drapery covering it. Ekserdjian concluded it was an initial sketch, because it represents the arm at a different angle and shows varying drapery patterns. The other sketch includes most of the drapery covering Christ's upper body and a separate study of the right arm and its drapery. Ekserdjian recognised that both correspond extremely closely with the *Salvator Mundi* painting.

The esteem in which major actors in the art market hold Ekserdjian's decisions about new attributions, and his confirmations or rejections of traditional attributions, is clearly evidenced. In 2010, PBS sought his expertise for the 2012 PBS documentary, *Mystery of a Masterpiece* [R4] regarding his rejection of the *Bella Principessa* drawing as a da Vinci. In 2010, as trustee for the National Gallery, Ekserdjian confirmed the attribution of an anonymous painting, *Salvator Mundi*, to da Vinci. In the face of controversy, the National Gallery and Christie's demonstrated their reliance upon Ekserdjian's scholarly expertise. The National Gallery included the work in its *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan* exhibition (2011-2012). In 2017, Christie's invited Ekserdjian to author an essay as a scholarly expert [R1], and subsequently sold the work for USD450.3M as an authentic da Vinci. Furthermore, Ekserdjian's 2019 publication [R2] recognised a newly rediscovered *Reclining Magdalen* as the lost original of a celebrated painting by Correggio [R2], hitherto only known in the form of copies. Ekserdjian authored a scholarly essay in a Sotheby's auction catalogue [R3], attributing a drawing of *The Triumph of Caesar* to Mantegna, this then sold in 2020 for USD11.7M.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1]. David Ekserdjian. "Leonardo's *Salvator Mundi* and the Dramatic Close-Up", in *Leonardo da Vinci: Salvator Mundi*. Christie, Manson and Woods International Inc., New York, 15 November 2017, pp. 123-37. OCLC Control Number: 1010820995.

[R2]. David Ekserdjian. "Correggio's 'Reclining Magdalen' rediscovered". *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 161, no. 1396, July 2019, pp. 556-61. <https://www.burlington.org.uk/archive/back-issues/201907>

[R3]. David Ekserdjian. "Andrea Mantegna and the Triumph of Caesar", in *Andrea Mantegna: The Triumph of Alexandria*. Sotheby's, New York, 2020, pp. 10-17. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2019/old-master-drawings/andrea-mantegna-the-triumph-of-alexandria>

[R4]. *Mystery of a Masterpiece*, Nova (PBS) documentary. "Art experts investigate whether a portrait sold for about \$20,000 in 1998 is actually a lost Leonardo worth millions." Originally aired in the USA, 25 January 2012. Features David Ekserdjian from 43:45 as an expert scholar who denies *Bella Principessa* is an original Leonardo.

[R5]. David Ekserdjian. *Parmigianino*. Yale University Press, 2006. 303 pp, 292 illustrations. ISBN: 9780300108279.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Professor David Ekserdjian's University of Leicester research [R1 – R5] and his global reputation as a scholarly expert in sixteenth-century Italian art equipped Christie's and Sotheby's auction houses, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the UK Parliament with irrefutable confidence in the authenticity of significant works of Italian Renaissance paintings and drawings. As a direct result of Ekserdjian's research expertise, Christie's and Sotheby's set two world-record sales at auction worth USD462M total. The UK Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and

Objects of Cultural Interest selected Ekserdjian to assess and value a rare painting which he identified in 2016 as a Parmigianino and valued at GBP245M. The painting was subsequently purchased in 2017 by the J. Paul Getty Museum based on Ekserdjian's research-led assessment [E1 – E7].

Leonardo da Vinci: Christie's, New York

In 2010, Ekserdjian and a team of scholars examined an unattributed painting, *Salvator Mundi*, which they attributed as an original Leonardo da Vinci. The Christie's Auctioneer and Specialist in Old Master Paintings confirmed that Ekserdjian's 2010 attribution and his 2017 essay [R1] were "fundamental to the painting's world-record-setting sale at auction" [E1 – E3]. He stated that, "even more crucially", Ekserdjian's "important scholarly essay [R1] [for] the sale catalogue was of invaluable assistance in reassuring both Christie's and potential bidders of the work's importance and authenticity, and the painting sold for USD450,312,500" at Christie's, New York, on 15 November 2017 [E1]. The sale exceeded Christie's auction estimate (USD100M) by 350% [E2]. It also "obliterated the previous world record for the most expensive work of art at auction" by 150%: a Picasso sold in 2015 at Christie's for USD179,365,000 [E1, E2d, E3a]. The Christie's Auctioneer and Specialist in Old Master Paintings stated that Ekserdjian's University of Leicester research authority is "virtually without parallel among staff currently teaching at UK universities, which is why he is one of the only British academics in post we call upon for his opinion in connection with such matters" [E1].

Andrea Mantegna: Sotheby's, New York

Following their 2018 research collaboration, where Ekserdjian confirmed the authorship of a Correggio painting [R2], Sotheby's invited him to examine a newly discovered drawing, *The Triumph of Alexandria*. Ekserdjian attributed the work to Italian Renaissance master Andrea Mantegna (2020) in his essay [R3], the only contribution by an external scholar to the Sotheby's sale catalogue [E4]. The Co-Chairman of Old Masters at Sotheby's Worldwide, stated: "There can be no doubt that its inclusion in the catalogue [reassured] Sotheby's and their bidders of the work in question's authenticity, and the drawing sold for USD11,654,000" [E4]. This exceeded Sotheby's auction estimate (USD6-8M) by 45% [E5]. Sotheby's confirmed that this sale established a new record for a Mantegna drawing sold at auction and constitutes "the fifth most expensive Old Master drawing sold at auction [and] the most expensive Old Master drawing sold in the United States" [E5a].

Parmigianino: art assessor for Parliament and J. Paul Getty Museum

Both the UK Parliament and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, USA, have drawn significantly on Ekserdjian's scholarly authority on Italian Old Master paintings and drawings. When the painting, *Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and the Magdalene* was presented to Parliament for the UK Reviewing Committee on The Export of Objects of Cultural Interest (December 2016), the UK Reviewing Committee selected Ekserdjian as one of the External Assessors. Ekserdjian authenticated the piece as a Parmigianino, and valued the work at GBP245M for the export license [E6, E7].

The Chair of Curatorial Affairs for the J. Paul Getty Museum confirmed that Ekserdjian's research and expertise influenced the Museum's decision to purchase the work. He stated that Ekserdjian has "long been widely recognized in the museum world, particularly relating to the major works of Parmigianino", citing Ekserdjian's 2006 *Parmigianino* monograph [R5] as "a standard reference work" in the art trade [E6]. He stated: "In 2017, when the J. Paul Getty Museum acquired Parmigianino's 'Virgin and Child with Saint John the Baptist and the Magdalene', the fact that Professor Ekserdjian supported its attribution to [Parmigianino] was

absolutely crucial". He added: "[I]n the museum world [Ekserdjian is] ... the single individual whose opinion concerning the work of Parmigianino most counts, not least in connection with questions of authorship and attribution" [E6].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Christie's: Leonardo da Vinci

[E1]. Testimonial letter from Christie's Auctioneer and Specialist in Old Master Paintings.

[E2a]. Christie's auction Catalogue.

[E2b]. Christie's Lot List: https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/print_sale.aspx?saleid=27244&lid=1

[E2c]. Christie's auction results, Leonardo da Vinci, 15 November 2017, Sale14995, lot 9 B: <https://www.christies.com/Results/PrintAuctionResults.aspx?saleid=27244&lid=1>

[E2d]. Christie's auction results, Picasso sale, 11 May 2015, Lot 8A. <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5895962>

Media relating to sale, value, and acceptance of attribution

[E3a]. *Leonardo's Salvator Mundi makes auction history*. News feature on Christie's website, 15 November 2017.

<https://www.christies.com/features/Leonardo-and-Post-War-results-New-York-8729-3.aspx>

[E3b]. *Leonardo da Vinci Painting Sells for \$450.3 Million, Shattering Auction Highs*. New York Times, 15 November 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/15/arts/design/leonardo-da-vinci-salvator-mundi-christies-auction.html>

[E3c]. "We want Salvator Mundi' for Leonardo blockbuster, Louvre says". *The Art Newspaper*, 18 February 2019.

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/we-want-salvator-mundi-louvre-says>

Sotheby's: Mantegna

[E4]. Letter from Co-Chairman, Old Master's, Sotheby's Worldwide.

[E5a]. Mantegna Fetches US11.65m at Auction FEB2020

[E5b]. Sotheby's catalogue: *Andrea Mantegna: The Triumph of Alexandria*, 2020.

J. Paul Getty Museum: Parmigianino

[E6]. Letter from Senior Curator of Paintings and Chair of Curatorial Affairs at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

[E7]. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport: *Export of Objects of Cultural Interest 2016 –17*.