AXA

XL Insurance

Insights from our experts

Protecting what matters

For mid-sized to multinational clients, XL Insurance offers more than 30 lines of business including: Property, Casualty, Cyber, Construction, Professional Liability, Financial Lines, Accident & Health and Environmental.

We are also a leading player in Specialty insurance including: Aerospace, Fine Art & Specie, Marine, Motor, Political Risk, Credit & Bond, and Crisis Management & Special Risks.

Cover image:
Derick McKinney on Unsplash

Foreword

Diversity is the word that always jumps out at me whenever I survey AXA XL's Fine Art & Specie portfolio and talk with colleagues, clients and broker partners.

AXA XL is a leading global insurer of fine art and specie. The objects we protect range from thousands of years to weeks old and include fine art, antiquities, antiques, jewelry, watches, classic cars, raw and polished gemstones, and bullion. Our clients include museums, private and corporate collectors, galleries, auction houses and individual artists. We sponsor such prominent international art fairs as TEFAF Maastricht, The Art Show in New York, Art Toronto and ART SG — a new international art fair in Singapore. AXAL XL's commitment to the arts also includes funding academic research on art conservation and restoration and hosting a juried competition, the AXA Art Prize, now in its sixth year, for art students in the U.S.

Similarly, AXA XL's Fine Art & Specie team includes people with diverse nationalities, backgrounds, and prior experiences, along with wide-ranging expertise.

We first produced a similar brochure in 2018, and after a few years of hiatus, I'm delighted to once again showcase the team's broad knowledge and expertise. As with previous editions, the articles explore topics that don't usually get much coverage. For example, how design museums provide exemplary references for designers of everyday objects. It also addresses some of the issues that are being hotly debated today within the arts community, e.g., how the recent wave of restitution policies is causing some museums to re-assess the universal museum concept that has held sway for decades; or whether NFTs could be, as the article puts it, a "short-lived" movement or the beginning of a "new chapter of art" — I'll let you decide.

On behalf of AXA XL's entire Fine Art & Specie team, I hope you find this diverse material interesting, informative and thought-provoking.

Jennifer Schipf
Global Chief Underwriting Officer, Fine Art & Specie
AXA XL

Photo: Ryan Stefan on Unsplash

Contents

Behind the scenes

The dramatic life Frida Kahlo

Name: Alexia Visone Bustillo

Role: Technical Expert, Fine Art

Qualifications: M.A. in art business, B.A. in history

Interests: Contemporary art, Latin American art, NFTs, FC Liverpool

Frida Kahlo is one of the most popular and influential Latin American artists of all time. Her paintings transcend cultural barriers, making her an international art star. Kahlo's life, however, was not always delightful or defined by fame and success. For most of it, she battled enduring health issues, physical and mental disabilities, infidelities and losses.

These traumas took center stage in her autobiographical paintings and are the key subjects expressed throughout her work. Her triumph is that today, everyone knows Frida Kahlo: the woman, the artist, the symbol and the feminist. She was the perfect storyteller and the prima donna in her own factual and fictional world. In the theatre of her life story, she was the director, the leading actress and the audience, too.

Scene one: La Casa Azul

In 1907, the artist was born Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón in Coyoacán, Mexico City, to a famous German photographer, Guillermo Kahlo, who had immigrated to Mexico, and Matilde Calderon y Gonzalez, a housewife of indigenous and Spanish descent. Surrounded by Mexican culture, nature, literature and photography, their daughter Frida grew up in a hothouse of creativity that nurtured her affinity for art.

Kahlo spent most of her life in La Casa Azul, her family home in Coyoacán, a small town on the outskirts of Mexico City. Now housing the Frida Kahlo Museum, La Casa Azul was the stage for Frida's early life and became synonymous with her private universe. As the place where she fell in love with art as a child, La Casa Azul inspired many recurring subjects in her future work.

Despite the picture-perfect atmosphere her family sought to portray, Kahlo's early life was not joyful, as she recalled in her private journals. At age six, she contracted polio, a terrible affliction that shortened one of her legs; this disability left her prey to bullying by other children. Her parents'

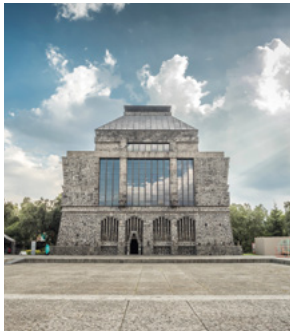
Top: Vintage Frida-inspired decoration
Above: Frida Kahlo on the Mexican Peso bill. Both images © Shutterstock

constant marital problems and poor health also made life at home miserable. She later described her childhood as "very, very sad." Safety concerns related to the Mexican Revolution and political uprisings led Frida's mother to prohibit her children from attending school, so Frida and her sisters stayed home for long periods. To push her sorrows away, Frida immersed herself in surrealistic art, finding beauty in her pain and using painting to represent and reflect on her daily life and struggles. As she observed, "I never painted dreams; I painted my own reality."

Scene two: the accident

A little while ago, not much more than a few days ago, I was a child who went about in a world of colors, of hard and tangible forms. Everything was mysterious and something was hidden; guessing what it was a game for me. If you knew how terrible it is to know suddenly, as if a bolt of lightning elucidated the earth. Now I live on a painful planet, transparent as ice; but it is as if I had learned everything at once in seconds.

In 1925, Kahlo was riding home from school in Mexico City when her bus collided with an electric tram, causing life-threatening injuries from which she never fully recovered. She was only 18 years old. The accident broke her spine, leg and pelvis, and an iron handrail impaled her uterus and abdomen. The injuries confined her to bed for eight



Left: La Casa Azul, located in Coyoacán, where Frida lived. Above: The Diego Rivera Anahuacalli museum in Coyoacán in Mexico City, designed by Diego Rivera. All images © Shutterstock

months and caused her excruciating pain. While recovering at home, she had a special easel built and attached to the bed, along with a mirror hung from the ceiling, allowing her to paint while lying down. This was when she discovered that, as her work illustrates, "pain is not part of life; it can become life itself."

This accident was transformational for Frida. Restricted to her bed, then using a plaster corset and a wheelchair, she began to paint her famous self-portraits.

As my own muse, I am the subject I know best. The subject I want to know better.

These mesmerizing paintings allow us to connect deeply to the realms of her physical and emotional distresses. Through her lifetime of self-portraits, we witness the synergy and dualities of her new identity as a female artist, experiencing the joy and agony of family and friends, life and death, solitude and heartache. And her tormented love life.

In *The Broken Column* (1944), Frida portrays herself in martyrdom after spinal surgery. Tears are shown running down her cheeks, symbolizing the pain she endured. In the painting, Frida faces us with an open torso, split down the middle, held together with a corset to support her injured spine. Looking inside her bare open chest, we see a broken stone column representing her spine, while her legs are covered with a white, blood-stained sheet, and her whole body is pierced with nails.

This self-portrait reflects Kahlo's agonizing physical pain; nonetheless, her gaze and posture depict a strong, calm, beautiful woman. The duality of pain and beauty is the central theme, highlighted against an empty background of torn landscape. Rather than using the bright Mexican color palette familiar in her other paintings, Kahlo chose somber colors for this work to represent her complete isolation, solitude, vulnerability and chronic pain.

Scene three: an elephant and a dove

Frida Kahlo first met fellow Mexican artist (and future husband) Diego Rivera in 1922; they were reintroduced and fell in love in 1928. Theirs is one of the most dramatic and passionate love stories ever told.

Frida first approached Diego while he was at work on his ground-breaking mural, *La Creacion*, in Mexico City. At the time, she was a young artist seeking advice on her future endeavors. Though Frida was love-struck, their inevitable connection was not consummated. Diego was twenty years older than Frida, twice divorced, and known to be a womanizer and a communist.

Six years later, Diego visited Frida's father at La Casa Azul, seeking permission to date and marry his daughter. Her parents disagreed on their relationship, and Frida's mother famously said, "this is like the wedding between an elephant and a dove." Against all odds, the artistic bond between the two prevailed and strengthened their love even more.

That love, however, was tough and painful. Their marital life was full of problems. Frida suffered three miscarriages in four years — all linked to her teenage accident, which had damaged her uterus. Eventually, the marriage started to fall apart, and infidelity became a constant part of their relationship. When Diego had an affair with Frida's sister, Christina, it was the final straw. The result was a very public and grief-driven divorce.

Despite this, they continued to love and complement each other artistically and personally. Diego admired Frida as a free, independent, strong woman with a powerful resilient spirit. Frida was

Frida Kahlo Museum, Casa Azul, Coyoacán Mexico. © Shutterstock

Handmade dolls inspired by Frida Kahlo © Shutterstock

Diego's ultimate muse. Unsurprisingly, they remarried a year after their divorce.

Kahlo's relationship with Diego Rivera is a recurring theme in her artwork. She created one of her most celebrated paintings, *The Two Fridas* (1939), after their divorce in 1939. The portrait contrasts Frida's two representations of herself. The Frida on the left, dressed in traditional Mexican garments, portrays her broken heart, a figure symbolizing a wounded woman torn from the inside out. Underscoring her injury, her main artery is shown dripping blood onto Frida's white folkloric dress, as if she were bleeding to death.

The other Frida — a more composed, serene, independent version of the artist — is dressed in contemporary Mexican garments and radiates endurance. Nevertheless, the two Fridas are connected; they hold hands and share the same artery. The Frida on the right holds a miniature portrait of Rivera in her hand, while her heart remains intact and unbroken.

Scene four: life after Frida

I tried drowning my pains, but they learned to swim.

After years of constant health struggles, including the amputation of her right leg due to complications from the accident, Kahlo died in 1954 at the age of 47. Like many other artists who left the world too soon, Frida's popularity spiked. Her posthumous fame has been called "Fridamania," — placing her at the center of a popular global discourse about her work.

Although her life was a continuous turmoil of tragedy — marked by illness, solitude and agony — Frida Kahlo left an undeniable mark on the international fabric of culture and art. She continues to be one of today's most desirable and acclaimed artists. In November 2021, her self-portrait *Diego y yo* (Diego and I) sold for USD 34.9 million at Sotheby's New York, crushing the artist's previous high price of USD 8 million in 2016 for *Two Lovers in a Forest* (1939).

Estimates are that she created 150 to 200 artworks during her lifetime. However, her legacy and influence transcend the numbers associated with her success. Her value as an artist is deeply rooted in the intimate and personal connection she established with a global audience spanning vast generational and cultural differences.

The museum sector

A wave of restitution

Name: Alix Powis de Tenbossche

Role: Underwriter, Fine Art & Specie

Qualifications: M.A. Law and art market degrees; formerly a fine art insurance broker

Interests: Emerging art scenes, artists' biographies

How is this a wave?

In recent years, museums in the Western world have begun applying various restitution policies concerning the return of artworks to their countries of origin, causing a global shake-up about what constitutes a legitimate art collection. For instance, museums in France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Belgium have repatriated numerous artworks from around the world that have long been part of their permanent collections.

To cite just a few cases: In France, the Quai Branly Museum returned 26 royal objects, plundered in 1892 by French forces from the palace of Abomey, back to the Republic of Benin. In the United Kingdom, the Victoria and Albert Museum repatriated an ancient Anatolian gold ewer, dating back more than four thousand years, to Turkey. The Humboldt Forum Museum in Germany returned some 20 ancient objects to the Republic of Namibia. Belgium has sent an inventory of art objects with Congolese provenance from the Africa Museum in Tervuren to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

What is a restitution policy? Museums worldwide are grappling with this since many of their artworks originated outside their countries. According to the Museum Association, the oldest international organization of museums, "All museums should have a repatriation policy or procedure in place that sets out how any proposal for repatriation will be managed." The act of (re)transferring art objects also represents an important marker of cultural cooperation between the countries that hold them and those requesting their return to their country of origin.

For many reasons, restoring heritage objects to the communities that created them is vitally important. For example, it allows those countries to promote their valuable cultural achievements within their own borders and to develop pride in these artifacts that can be bequeathed to future generations. Restitution and repatriation of artwork are also processes that aim to account for history and thus

offer the groundwork for a particular form of repair in the wake of colonialism.

Navigating the challenges

The current fervor of restitution policies being implemented worldwide has led to unprecedented decisions on the part of many museums to return artwork, an experience many seem to have taken in stride. Restitution is now a matter of course. The need for countries to access their own memories and reconnect with their own archives of identity is universally accepted.

Interestingly, the values associated with this sea change are analogous to the fundamental principles of the insurance industry: repairing the damages, restoring the property to its original state, and avoiding unjust enrichment. We naturally integrate these ideals within the scope of our coverages.

The desire to repair harm is simple, but the way forward and the scale of restitution are more complex. In Europe, the debate on how to proceed is situated at the crossroads of several topics, in a whirlwind of questioning.

Museum professionals lack agency

The people working within the museum ecosystem include professionals who document the artworks, other specialists who assess their condition, and those who protect and transport these valuable objects. Their overall feeling is that they have been minimally included in the decisions and choices about art objects to be returned.

Discussions about the restitution of art have focused primarily on political issues. In contrast, the people in charge of the relevant collections, those who daily oversee the artworks and know them well, have often been excluded. In response, some have gone so far as to express a thesis of instrumentalization of museums by governmental authorities. Others wonder why some property is now systematically returned to states, passing from the hands of one government to another, whereas looted artwork is more likely to be returned to the families who formerly owned it.

Objects: cultural, commercial, artistic or ceremonial?

Focusing on material goods gives rise to more debate and questions. For example, the epithet

Museums must lead the conversation on repatriation

attached to an object depends on the perspective of those looking at it.

Many of the art objects being returned were first collected for ethnographic studies intended to enhance understanding of various cultures; the objects were not initially valued for their artistic dimension.

Could they become characterized as artworks as a result of being viewed through a European lens? Were their formal qualities as art only defined by their valuation in certain art markets? Or conversely, was it the discovery of these objects that revolutionized Western aesthetics?

Then again, some collectors valued them as commercial objects from the start, which raises nuanced questions about the difference between legitimately versus wrongly acquired art, e.g., good-faith purchases versus illegitimate or domineering acquisitions.

Another point of view notes that these objects often have cultic pasts that were interrupted. Will such ritual objects be reinstated in their original roles when returned home? The world and its mores are rapidly changing. Do the ceremonies and rituals associated with returned objects align with the ethics of the museums returning them?

In any case, each artifact has its own story, and each artwork involves a multi-episode narrative. When items are moved from one culture to another, the meanings attached to them are often left behind.

Both images courtesy: DALL-E

Re-reading their collections for the public

First, museums need to strike a balance between their founding principles and how best to serve their audiences — both local and international — by listening to the wishes of all the people involved. Second, museums must give priority to the circumstances of how art objects were and are acquired and practice restitution where warranted. Finally, over time, perhaps through more acknowledgment of historical events and the resulting displacement of objects, museums can endeavor to provide a re-reading of their collections for the public.

Various overlapping resources are being consulted to document these artworks precisely to valorize them in response to each restitution request. For example, Germany has set aside a budget of EUR 1.9 million dedicated to researching the provenance of objects. Being the object of a serious study would legitimize the subsequent action of restitution. Developing a framework of procedures in which various stakeholders — for example, historians, jurists, and art experts — contribute perspectives on returning artwork on a case-by-case basis would be a sound potential approach, as opposed to museums or governments taking general positions on restitution.

A dialogue between museums is also probably key to developing mutual practices and understanding, as well as between museums and the communities involved. History is best told by choirs of voices, not soloists.

What are the next challenges?

Considering the web of issues and interests at play here, it is clear that numerous challenges await. Novel actions of restitution are inventing the path forward even as the procedure is being conceived.

Bringing back community heritage by putting art objects back into the cultures from which they were removed is a process of integration. What form should this take? Some suggest teaching about the process as a way forward, making the countries that recover the goods responsible for this local educational effort. Others point out that this posture again borders on imperialism.

In the same vein, those who advocate for a partnership based solely on the expertise of European museums are getting into troubled waters. Genuine restitution is still a question of placing the cursor correctly between the influence of museum know-how and the local capacity to create structural advancements through the training of curators and museographers.

Moreover, in the future, we will inevitably question the universalist conception of our museums. Presenting objects in the manner of a universal museum tends to imbue them with a certain solemnity with which they weren't necessarily created and that they probably wouldn't have back home. We are moving away from the fixed or sanctuary idea of museums into an age that appreciates various perspectives about art and history within shared knowledge spaces.

As insurers, the most critical challenge regarding restitution may be getting out of our tutelage and weaving diverse professional relationships, creating real exchanges between competent people in each country concerned. Our goal is to develop standard practices enhancing artworks' durability, protection, and circulation by employing best practices within the insurance industry.

How furniture became a collectible

Exploring mid-century modern design with Christian Brändle, Director of the Museum für Gestaltung (Design Museum) Zürich

Name: Rabea Tönnissen:

Role: Senior Underwriter, Fine Art & Specie

Qualifications: Senior Art Expert and Underwriter for AXA XL since 2012

M.A. in art history, history and archaeology

Interests: Archeology, Old Masters, miniature paintings and scientific instruments

A conversation with Christian Brändle

Christian Brändle has served as the Director of the Museum für Gestaltung (Design Museum) Zürich since 2003. He studied architecture at the Swiss Federal Technical Institute (ETH) in Zürich and has authored and co-authored eleven books, including *100 Years of Swiss Graphic Design* and *Every Thing Design*. Since 2019, he and his team have also been responsible for managing the Le Corbusier Pavilion on behalf of the city of Zürich.

Many experts agree that objects created in the middle of the 20th century — often referred to as mid-century modern design — have played an iconic role in furniture design. The general fascination with pieces designed by Florence Knoll, Marcel Breuer, Arne Jacobsen, Frank Lloyd Wright, Charles and Ray Eames and Mies van der Rohe, to name only a few influential designers of the period, remains undiminished and uninterrupted. In many households today in countries around the world, cult objects such as Arne Jacobsen's 1952 plywood *Ant Chair*, the fiberglass *LAR Armchair* designed by Charles and Ray Eames in 1950 and the *Model B 301 Armchair* designed by Charlotte Perriand for Le Corbusier in 1929, continue to occupy pride of place.

Forged in the wake of World War II

Early 19th-century Central European decorative arts and architecture were characterized by idiosyncratic combinations of styles and ornaments from various epochs and regions. However, towards the end of the 19th century, the essence of what constituted good design evolved and centered on the notion that, as the Chicago architect Louis Sullivan famously put it in 1896, "form follows function." That ideal took hold, and from 1910 onward, the need to reduce form according to objects' intended functions and purposes prevailed as good design practice, a principle championed by the legendary Bauhaus design school in the 1920s.

As the term implies, mid-century modern design was forged in the wake of World War II and was broadly influenced by overlapping geopolitical, economic and cultural movements then dominating the post-war West. Traditional materials such as metal and wood were scarce. That prompted designers and manufacturers to explore new materials and production techniques, ultimately leading to significant changes in furniture designs and manufacturing processes.

The iconic *Lounge Chair* by Charles and Ray Eames, first produced by Hermann Miller in 1956, is an excellent example of these innovations. While the seat and base were made of leather and aluminum, the body was created using a newly developed manufacturing technique for molding bonded plywood.

Molding bonded plywood — and other innovations — soon became popular with mid-century furniture designers for several reasons. For starters, they afforded the era's decorative art designers greater creative freedom. They also enabled the development of faster, less costly manufacturing processes and, in turn, opportunities for mass production. Moreover, steadily increasing sales prompted designers to continue experimenting with new materials and techniques and led to closer collaboration between designers and fabricators. This resulted in a profusion of affordable furniture and consumer goods that matched the needs and desires of young families longing for modern, elegant designs in the post-war period.

What makes a design masterpiece?

The era of mid-century modern design undeniably produced iconic furniture whose uninterrupted production and timeless appeal continue to inspire and influence designers worldwide today. But what exactly distinguishes their exceptional design?

According to Christian Brändle, "Similar to what distinguishes a work of art as exceptional, pieces of design that stand out as groundbreaking are driven by style and functionality. If, in addition to these two factors, a design piece is also innovative and refined to perfection, it is safe to assume we are looking at a masterpiece."

As with fine art, issues of provenance and historical significance—along with the originality of style and functionality — also play prominent roles in the collectibles market and the value of designed objects. Verner Panton's *Panton Chair* illustrates this nicely. The world's first plastic cantilever seat, molded in a single piece, was introduced in 1967. Initially produced from cold-molded fiberglass painted in various colors, the chair has since been reproduced in different versions and types of plastic via various production technologies. Although all versions of the chair were developed in close collaboration between the manufacturer and Verner Panton, later production changes affected both the feel and the look of the furniture, as well as their market value; when re-sold today, *Panton Chairs* produced with the original technique typically fetch higher prices than subsequent models.

As another example, Christian Brändle points to the *Wassily Model B3 Chair* designed at the legendary Bauhaus design school by Marcel Breuer in 1925. While several early pieces still circulate today, only one unrestored chair, owned by Alexander von Vegesack, the founder and president of CIRECA (Centre international de recherche et d'éducation culturel et agricole), still exists today. His chair shows the natural process of wear and aging and, despite its signs of use, has a significantly higher market value due to its unique patina than its restored equivalents or even new productions of the design. Such valuable objects usually become part of collections rather than remaining in use as furniture.

The rise of design collections and design museums

How did design collections, such as those at MoMA in New York or the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, come about?

Christian Brändle explains that most design museums, including the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, have their origins in collections of applied and decorative arts dating back to around 1870 that focused on how objects' functions influenced their designs. Unlike art museums, which aim to expose the public to different artists and movements, these collections served as references for designers of examples of good and bad designs.

Switzerland launched its "show collection" in 1875, which laid the foundation for today's Museum für Gestaltung Zürich. It currently holds

© Umberto Romito und Ivan Šuta, Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / zhdk

© Umberto Romito und Ivan Šuta, Museum für Gestaltung Zürich / zhdk

around 580,000 objects in four collection areas: design, graphics, crafts and posters. Continuously growing, the museum presents influential design pieces within the context of Swiss design history, displaying its uninterrupted flow, artistic design culture and beautiful objects of everyday use. It also boasts one of the world's most important poster collections.

Along with other influential design musems, which include the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK) in Vienna and London's Design Museum, the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich's approach has evolved to showcase the social and cultural contexts surrounding different objects as well as the collaborative processes between designers and manufacturers. Many design musems are also adding interactive displays to engage audiences and provoke a broader understanding of design's possibilities, processes and impacts.

Gambling on design classics

A common dilemma for historically grown design collections is that some objects won't retain the relevance they had when first acquired. Looking at museum costs and the shortage of space, acquiring artifacts of design significance poses an ongoing challenge for all contemporary collections. But is it even possible to predict whether an object will become a design masterpiece worthy of collection when it first appears?

While the design importance of some objects is clear from the beginning, others must stand the test of time to develop their relevance in terms of the materials used or their relationships to other objects.

According to Christian Brändle, the question of how and why certain objects find their way into collections while others are overlooked is ongoing. Nonetheless, sometimes it is quite apparent. For instance, due to its unique fabrication, the *Chair ONE* by Magis, designed by Konstantin Grcic, instantly became a design classic when it was introduced in 2004. According to Grcic, the chair is "constructed just like a football: a number of flat planes assembled at angles to each other, creating the three-dimensional form." Predicting this chair's relevance for the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich's collection was easy, so acquiring it quickly became essential. Waiting until an object's relevance is widely confirmed can make acquiring it difficult or even impossible if it is no longer in stock or has become prohibitively expensive.

The downside of quick acquisitions is that not all will later fit into the collection or gain importance as collectibles. So a good rule of thumb for collectors is to contemplate the external drivers of innovation — whether material, legal or cultural — as these are reflected in an object's design. That is why early drafts, sketches and prototypes of designs also occupy important places within design collections.

Conserving masterpieces

With extensive design collections, the conservation requirements are considerable. Christian Brändle points out that different objects and materials have different needs when it comes to storage, exhibition and upkeep. When collectibles are in private use, he believes they should be allowed to live and age with dignity, enjoyed by their owners. Who knows whether a piece will or won't gain value over time due to the history later read from it?

When insuring design objects such as Verner Panton's *Panton Chair*, one should always consider whether the object should be insured as a furniture piece or as a collectible, as its market value may differ from its replacement value. The mix of materials or the existing traces of wear and tear may also pose challenges on-site or during transport. For that reason, specialized experts with knowledge of the materials and methods used to create the object should be consulted on how to best preserve a collectible for future generations.

When trash becomes art

From the streets to in-between sheets

Name: Franziska Lena Adams

Role: Underwriter, Fine Art & Specie

Qualifications: M.A.in art history, certified insurance expert (IHK Examination)

Interests: Modern and contemporary art, painting, ceramics

In property insurance, the value of the covered interest is the basis for risk assessments and resolving claims. However, in art insurance, the insured and material value of artwork often diverge widely. Initially worthless materials can dramatically increase in value when used to make art. This is particularly evident in a project by the artist Daniel Knorr called *when trash becomes art*.

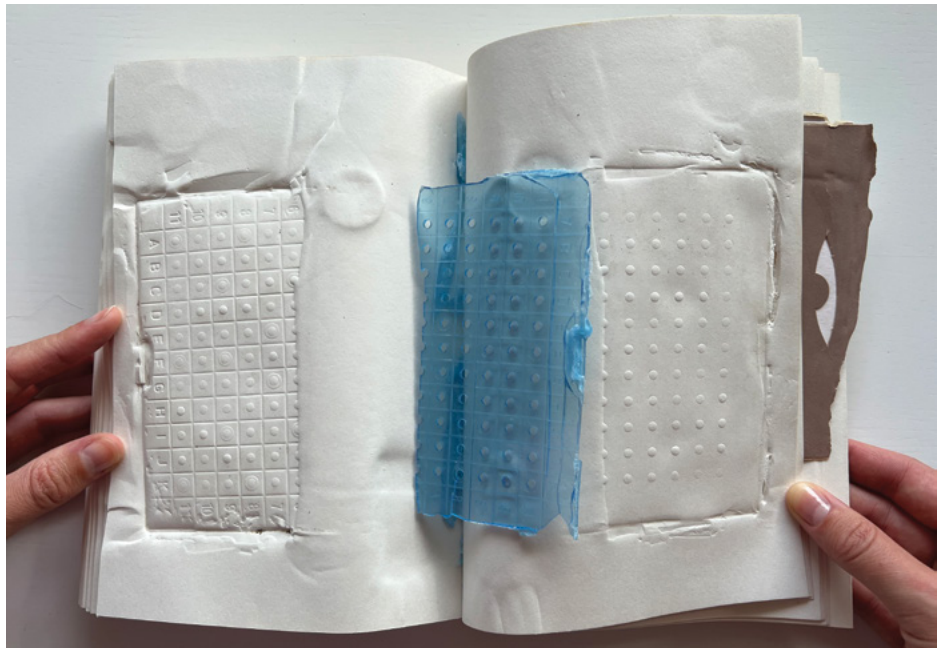
From the streets to in-between sheets

Daniel Knorr collects trash: discarded, lost and forgotten objects. During long walks through city streets, industrial sites, parks, villages and nature, he collects leftover crown caps, cords, plastic spoons, cans, coins, barbed wire and cardboard boxes. Street trash becomes his work material.

In his studio in Berlin, the artist selects one object after another, placing them individually between the blank pages of a book which he then squashes inside a printing press. The objects, flattened out between 200 blank pages, leave their mark on them. Objects with higher volumes, like pieces of iron wire, leave deeper impressions than do, for example, paper receipts. Traces of the found objects are visible across several pages, overlapping images that become relief-like drawings. Each artist book is characterized by its uniqueness and individuality since each object can only be pressed once.

In 2007, Knorr published his first artist book under the title *Carte de Artist*, or “artist card.” After establishing his procedure, Knorr went on to produce limited edition artist books — all of which feature the same measurements — with found objects collected from the streets and squares of such cities as Istanbul, Los Angeles and Berlin and countries including China, New Zealand and Armenia. He also repeated the process for works displayed at documenta 14, the art exhibition held in 2017.

Knorr’s project aims to make a global encyclopedia of artist books reflecting as many countries as possible.



Knorr, Daniel: Βιβλίο Καλλιτέχνη (Artist book), 425/1100, 23.05.2017, Athen 2017
Courtesy Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Wien / Copyright: Daniel Knorr und VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023

Knorr, Daniel: Carte de Artist, 28/100, 23.05.2007, Rumänien 2007
Courtesy Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Wien / Copyright: Daniel Knorr und VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023

Worthless material as artistic material

In the throwaway culture of the 20th and 21st centuries, trash can be many things: broken, outdated, overproduced, but also out of fashion. In 1883, Vincent van Gogh romanticized a garbage dump in a letter to his friend and fellow painter Anthon van Rappard. Later, the first attempts to create art from discarded, seemingly worthless materials emerged at the beginning of the 20th century among Cubists, Futurists and Dadaists who worked with dry paper waste. In the 1920s and 1930s, Surrealist circles increasingly used organic materials, such as bodily waste products in the form of hair and spit.

In 1920, Marcel Duchamp experimented with dust, a self-generating waste product. As evidenced by comments in his notebooks and a photograph by Man Ray, Duchamp intentionally let his work *The Large Glass* accumulate dust during a six-month stay in Europe. His experiment exemplified the turn to discarded and rejected materials in visual arts in the post-World War I era.

In the 1950s and 1960s, other artists in the U.S. and Europe — reacting perhaps to the increasing consumerism of the era — also began incorporating seemingly worthless materials into their art. For example, starting in 1954, the U.S. artist Robert Rauschenberg integrated trash, boxes, signs and pieces of furniture he found in New York City into his paintings in a collage-like fashion, which he called "combine paintings."

The French artist Arman brought the principle of using trash as artistic material to its climax in 1960 when he emptied entire trash cans into glass boxes and presented them as works of art. He called these works *Poubelles*, French for "trash cans." He sorted their contents according to various social groups, such as the bourgeoisie or children, allowing the viewer to draw conclusions about the producers based on seeing their trash. Like an archaeologist, Arman collected found objects that he categorized and arranged, declaring himself an "archaeologist of the future."

Trash as a memory of society and time

Daniel Knorr's work is particularly special in how he deals with found objects because the artist becomes a researcher during the creative process. Like an archaeologist, Knorr himself examines the material relics of contemporary society. For days, he searches for trash and then creates an order out of the chaos of objects he finds. By processing debris into a book, the waste products of society are shed of their worthless status, since a book has always signified the preservation of knowledge. Reminiscent of a botanical herbarium, Knorr places the trash between paper pages, and just as botanists press and preserve plant species, the artist preserves the remains of our culture. The found objects in his books relate patterns of everyday consumption and waste and become evidence of the waste society as a global phenomenon.

Knorr leaves no personal imprint besides a date and his signature in these artist books. By selling the books, the trash finds its way back into the circulation of consumption; thus, the content of each book is both a product and a witness of our time. Knorr emphasizes, "I understand my artistic activity as contemporary archaeology."

As long as there is society, there will be trash, and it will undoubtedly be composed of new materials in the future, such as digital garbage, a new frontier for future artwork. Nevertheless, whether analog or digital, trash will always remain a memory of civilization, a memory of society and time.

"Act for human progress by protecting what matters"

Garbage is evidence of our consumption and overconsumption of resources. And especially in the context of the climate crisis, the topic of waste is increasingly part of social discourse.

At AXA XL, we believe that acting responsibly is central to moving the world forward. From offering our expertise, products and services to help build more resilient communities, to advancing understanding and response to climate change, our approach to sustainability is the same as our approach to business: constantly seeking to provide innovative solutions to the world's most complex problems.

Focused on frames

Focused on frames: An interview with Werner Murrer

Name: Frances Erb

Role: Underwriting Manager, Fine Art & Private Clients and Senior Art Expert

Qualifications: M.A. in History of Art and Business Management from the University of Glasgow, GIA certified in diamonds, colored stones and pearl grading

Interests: Modern and contemporary art, art market, fine jewelry

A maker's thoughts on framing artwork: Frances Erb in conversation with specialist Werner Murrer

For most of us, a frame is simply an afterthought relative to its content. Werner Murrer, one of the world's few experts on high-value frames, makes compelling arguments as to why shifting some attention toward what holds our collections on the wall is important and even beneficial to appreciating an artwork and its context more fully. "The choice of a frame reveals to me whether the artwork it is framing has truly been understood," he explained and elaborated further, "A suitable frame doesn't always have to be the most expensive option but certainly should be a well-thought-through choice."

Leading with passion and professionalism

During the past thirty years, Murrer has built a multidisciplinary frame workshop with fifteen skilled professionals — from carpenters to wood sculptors, artists to art historians, and gilders to glaziers — as well as a specialized research archive focusing on frames and their historical context. Originally the frame expert had founded an art gallery with a friend. However, the need to save costs combined with a talent for craftsmanship started his journey toward a different career path. Murrer's frames rapidly gained popularity due to their aesthetic and quality, and soon his night job turned into his true calling.

Today, his Munich-based company, WERNER MURRER RAHMEN, has taken on a leading role in the growing international frame community.

His workshop currently houses a collection of 2,500 antique frames created during the 15th through 20th centuries. The company also has a unique stock of original German Expressionist artist frames and manufactures historically accurate copies. This specialization in historical framing has given Murrer and his team access to notable projects far beyond their workshop.

Inside the showroom at WERNER MURRER RAHMEN

Determining the right frame

"Framing Art the Right Way" is the workshop's tagline. Reflecting on what this means, Murrer said, "Ideally, a frame and the artwork it holds become one unit. There are factors that go into choosing the right frame beyond proportion, material, and personal aesthetic preferences."

The primary function of a frame is relatively straightforward: protecting the artwork it holds and allowing us to hang it on the wall. Initially, frames were conceived as integral pieces of their surrounding architecture, such as part of religious altarpieces, but have long since evolved to become independent, moveable works of decorative art. With the help of advanced technology and modern materials, frames can now be crafted to achieve optimal results according to the newest conservation standards.

Apart from the conservational and practical considerations, there is the aesthetical component to choosing a frame. This is where Murrer and his team go the extra mile, and their academic research extends beyond just aesthetically pleasing solutions. Murrer confirms that the final pairing of artwork and frame is often a gut feeling, but the aesthetic of the period during which the artwork was created should always be considered and honored when choosing its frame. An early painting by Wassily Kandinsky, for example, would hardly be the ideal match for a Bauhaus-style frame, even though the artist later worked in this style and was invited to be a teacher at the Bauhaus in Weimar.

Moreover, many artists provided detailed specifications describing how a piece should be framed. Here, for example, Murrer cites Vincent van Gogh, who distinguished between warmer and colder tones of white in his notes about frames he commissioned for specific paintings. Edvard Munch similarly recorded his thoughts about frames, which Murrer and his team used as their source of information for a large project they carried out for the Munch Museum in Oslo, recreating historically accurate frames using the newest technical means while basing the design on the artist's original wishes.

"Frames are often subject to and determined by trends: the Sistine Madonna, for example, has had nine different frames since it was painted," remarked Murrer. According to him, understanding the context of a painting is particularly important before choosing the frame to go with it. That is why, for each assignment, Murrer's workshop of experts first develops a proposal for the client with various options drawn from the team's technical know-how and extensive historical research.

Photo archive and academic work

"In almost all fine art publications, the artwork is documented without its frame. Even if the frame is mentioned in the subsequent text, the frame usually is nowhere to be seen." This presents a challenge that Murrer believes is essential to meet. "We search through newspaper articles, exhibition photos and documentation to complete the picture, including the frame." This research approach visibly sets an impressive standard and lends serious intention to the process.

Murrer's archive has grown from analog photographic prints, organized in shoeboxes, to a database with over 120,000 digital images of frames. His commitment to documenting historical framing, aided by digital technology, has allowed the database to grow into a reference library that many art world professionals consult regularly.

Artist frames

Investing time, energy and financial resources into giving an artwork the correct antique frame or creating a historically accurate reproduction is one kind of success, but re-uniting an artwork with its original frame — especially one that was crafted, designed or painted by the artist — is the ultimate level of successful framing. This is where frames cross the line from decorative art into fine art.

With his specialization on German Expressionist frames, Murrer reveals, "The necessity of exhibiting Brücke paintings with their corresponding frames, crafted and painted by the artists themselves, has always been obvious to me. There is a mile of literature on the paintings but nothing on their frames!" As a curator of the exhibition *Never Apart* and its accompanying publication, Murrer changed this. In collaboration with the Buchheim Museum in Bernried, Germany and the Brücke Museum in Berlin, artists' frames and artwork were finally shown in unison. Future exhibitions include a traveling exhibition on Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and his frames in the Buchheim Museum and in the Kirchner Museum in Davos, Switzerland in 2024-25, for which a catalog also will be published.

Portrait of Werner Murrer taken by the photographer Albrecht Fuchs

Considering a frame's value

"In times of war, canvases are rolled up and rescued, if possible, while frames commonly vanish in fires or are even intentionally burned," Murrer observed. As a result, original antique frames are extremely rare and valuable and can command very high prices. Thus, it is important not to overlook the frames' worth when making decisions about an artwork's transport, storage or insurance.

Despite being neglected by most art professionals and collectors in the sales process, a frame that complements the artwork it holds can make a difference in the total value. This is especially true of artist-created frames that complete artworks, either when originally kept together or re-unified. In collaboration with the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Werner Murrer has determined that an artist's frame can make a difference of up to fifty percent in the combined value of the painting and frame together. Apart from the added art historical and cultural significance, the financial benefit can be remarkable.

Developments and impact

The lack of interest in frames with which Murrer was formerly often confronted has been replaced with growing enthusiasm for the subject. Whether the artwork is displayed with its corresponding artist frame or with no frame at all — as in a recent exhibition of works by Auguste Renoir, *Renoir Unplugged*, at the Museum Langmatt in Baden, Switzerland — Werner Murrer is delighted that frames and their potential positive or negative impacts are being presented, analyzed, and discussed.

Werner Murrer is modestly confident and infectiously determined in his pursuit of elevating understanding about the value of framing. As he said, "Every profession calls for attention to detail, but there are only a few others who've engaged a special focus on this topic, which has fueled my deep, inner desire to make a contribution."

Art as a token?

A conversation with AXA XL experts about NFTs

Name: Jennifer Schipf

Role: Global Chief Underwriting Officer, Fine Art & Specie

Qualifications: B.S. in interior architecture/history of decorative arts, B.A. in art history/economics

Interests: Portrait painting, design, travel and skiing

Name: Christopher Bentley

Role: Head of Fine Art & Specie, UK & Lloyd's

Qualifications: Associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute and Chartered Insurer, B.A. (Hons) in art history

Interests: Intersection between the worlds of art and technology, world cuisine, cricket

Name: Victoria Leong

Role: Global Graduate Trainee, UK & Lloyd's

Qualifications: M.S. in insurance & risk management, B.S. in international business

Interests: Modern and contemporary art, NFTs, art techs

There's something happening here?

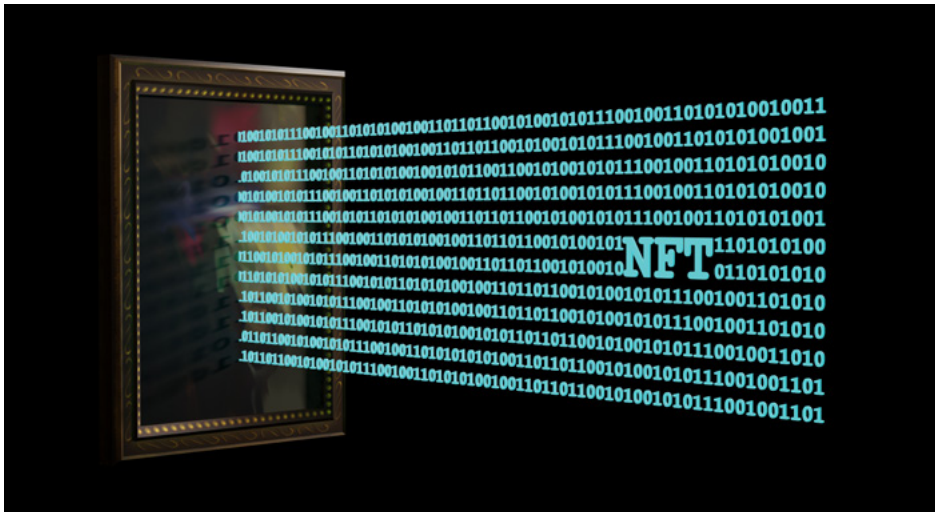
In 2021, after an opening bid of USD 100, Christie's sold a non-fungible token (NFT) of a digital artwork for USD 69.3 million. The piece was created by an artist named Mike Winkelmann, known professionally as Beeple. Entitled *Everydays: the First 5000 Days*, it is a collage comprising 5,000 digital images. *Everydays* was the most expensive NFT sold to date, and Beeple now has the distinction of earning the third-highest auction price for a work created by a living artist. (Jeff Koons and David Hockney currently occupy the top two spots.)

Shortly after the sale, it was discovered that *Everydays* was bought by a Singapore-based programmer and cryptocurrency investor named Vigness Sundaresan. In what many observers concluded wasn't mere coincidence, Sundaresan was also the majority owner in a speculative asset, called B20 tokens, comprising twenty other Beeple works. That prompted extensive speculation that Sundaresan and Beeple wanted to drive up Everydays price to spur interest in, and higher prices for, the B20 tokens. Which did indeed occur; after *Everydays* sold for a record amount, the value of the tokens soared. However, in a pattern we've witnessed in the cryptocurrency markets, their value plummeted shortly afterward.

One critic characterized this episode "as either the moment before the short-lived crypto art bubble burst or as the first chapter in a new story of art." Was this, as some described it, a "USD 69 million marketing stunt?" Or, was Christie's role in facilitating this sale an influential validation of NFTs in the traditional and contemporary art world? And, if so, how will this convergence impact the NFT market?

To sort through these and other issues surrounding the nascent NFT market, Jennifer Schipf, AXA XL's Global Chief Underwriting Officer for Fine Art & Specie, recently spoke with Christopher Bentley and Victoria Leong, two of AXA XL's London-based art experts.

Jennifer Schipf (JS): Victoria, for those of us, like me, who grew up in an analog world, could you start by describing what NFTs are?



Shutterstock

Victoria Leong (VL): A non-fungible token is a unique digital identifier that cannot be copied, substituted or subdivided and is recorded in a blockchain. A blockchain is simply a digital ledger associated with an asset where authorized users can view and record the history of transactions in the asset.

NFTs were first introduced in 2014 by a digital artist named Kevin McCoy; he and other digital artists were looking for new ways to monetize digital art. As McCoy told *ARTnews*: "We would organize happenings and make work for biennales, but the thing we weren't doing was interacting with collectors or making sales." By storing the images in a blockchain, and recording who sold it to whom and for how much, McCoy and others offered buyers a safe, secure option for owning and trading digital assets.

Chris, what kinds of images are we talking about?

Christopher Bentley (CB): As Victoria noted, the NFT market is less than ten years old. So, not surprisingly, there is much experimentation from artists, and would-be artists, taking place. That said, three broad categories of NFTs have started to emerge.

One is a collectibles market akin to trading cards. These include NFTs used to ticket different types of events. Or to commemorate something. For example, Jack Dorsey, a co-founder of Twitter, created an NFT of his first tweet; it sold for USD 2.9 million. NFTs also appear as tradeable objects within video games.

The second category is the profile pic or PFP; these are digital portraits people use as avatars on social media. This category has been immensely popular. Prominent examples include monkeys with whacky accessories from a collection called *Bored Ape Yacht* Club and another aimed at empowering women called *World of Women (WoW)*. Both use a similar approach: Buyers construct a personalized avatar by selecting different features, some rarer than others and, thus, theoretically more valuable. For the WoW collection, Yam Karkai, a co-founder of the company, drew 172 visual assets — e.g., eyes, skin tone and hairstyle — that could be swapped in and out to generate 10,000 unique images. Reese Witherspoon, for example, bought a WoW avatar with aviator sunglasses and blue skin.

The third category encompasses the kinds of NFTs bought and sold at places like Sotheby's or Christie's. Beeple's *Everdays* is emblematic in this regard, notwithstanding its tangled backstory. Although Beeple didn't have a visible presence in the traditional art market before the Christie's auction, critics agree that he is a skilled artist with a distinctive style. (Although one noted that some images appear to convey racial, misogynistic or homophobic stereotypes.) This new digital art market has many of the same economic features as the "real world" art market and some of the same players. Damien Hirst, for instance, seems interested in straddling the NFT and traditional fine art worlds.

JS: After the recent collapse of the FTX crypto exchange, the cryptocurrency markets have fallen

into what many call "crypto winter." How are these developments affecting the NFT markets?

VL: So far, the NFT markets are holding up much better than the cryptocurrency markets. The key here is that while NFTs use blockchain technology and typically are bought with cryptocurrencies, that is not the same as speculating on a cryptocurrency. Or, to put it somewhat differently, while we can debate their artistic merit, NFTs aren't some magical entity imbued with value where none existed before. These are real objects — albeit in digital form — created by real people.

In fact, some NFT dealers and collectors believe the NFT markets could benefit from a prolonged crypto winter. As one put it, "I'm glad that it crashed. It happens in every period that the market shrinks, and a handful of artists succeed and move forward. The serious artists stick around and become bigger and better."

JS: The three of us are art lovers and insurance professionals. What are the risk and insurance issues around this new class of art?

CB: The answer here is a mix of good news and less good news. On the good news side, because of the blockchain, ownership disputes and provenance questions aren't an issue with NFTs. And digital assets are naturally much less susceptible to fires, floods or similar perils. Consequently, the risk profile for NFTs is significantly lower from an insurer's point of view than for traditional artworks.

The less good news is that NFTs can still be stolen or destroyed, and the current options for mitigating these risks with insurance range from extremely limited to non-existent.

Before I get into why that is so, I'd note, briefly, that NFTs — and cryptocurrencies — are stored in either "hot" or "cold" wallets: hot wallets are connected to the internet, while cold wallets are hardware devices like thumb drives where the private keys used to control ownership are stored offline. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Hot wallets are considered more convenient for people who regularly buy or sell NFTs, while cold wallets are less vulnerable to online hacks or thefts.

Currently, NFTs can only be insured on a third-party basis, and even then, only minimally. That is, NFT owners can entrust their cold wallets to companies set up to store digital assets, and the facilities, which are highly secure to begin with, are insured against physical loss or damage. However, since the value of the assets could be vastly greater than the insurance limits, in the improbable event a facility is destroyed, there is no guarantee that the insurance payouts would be enough to cover all of the losses.

A more significant risk is cyber theft, either by hackers who are able to breach a hot wallet provider's defenses or, as recent events demonstrate, by unscrupulous crypto wallet providers. Unfortunately, while the need and demand are there, designing an affordable first-party hot wallet cover for NFTs is proving to be highly challenging. AXA XL and other insurers are working closely with the cyber and crime insurance markets to try to address this risk. I co-chair a London Market Association sub-committee on NFTs that is assessing possible approaches, but the industry isn't there yet.

VL: Adding to what Chris said, cyber theft isn't the only challenge associated with this new class, although, as he noted, this is indeed a big challenge. Another is how to appropriately value NFTs. Coverages for traditional artworks typically are based on agreed values from independent appraisers applying established frameworks. With NFTs, it isn't clear who would perform this function. And, more important, how they could develop valuations all could agree on without historical data and considering the market's extreme levels of volatility.

JS: That is a rather sobering assessment, Chris and Victoria. Nonetheless, developing versatile, affordable insurance products to protect NFT owners is imperative, and I hope we'll soon see substantive progress toward closing this gap. In the meantime, how do you see the NFT market evolving in the coming years?

CB: Given how the whole crypto-blockchain ecosystem that spawned the NFT market continues to surprise, predictions about what the future holds naturally come with significant caveats. In six months, I may have completely different views on the things we've discussed today.

That said, I think we will continue to see more awareness of the NFT space in the traditional fine art world and more works by people like Damien Hirst, who aim to make a mark in both worlds. Or, to put it differently, there will be a point in the not-too-distant future at which NFTs is simply another department at Sotheby's, like Old Masters pictures or modern and contemporary art are now.

Never waste a good crisis

How the pandemic fostered opportunities for auction houses. A conversation with Diandra Donecker, Managing Director and Partner, Grisebach auction house, Berlin

Name: Jennifer Heusgen

Role: Underwriter, Fine Art & Specie

Qualifications: M.A. in art history, law and Byzantine art history

Interests: Art market, looted art, contemporary art and design

Auction houses are integral parts of the art ecosystem and offer collectors a straightforward buying process, price transparency and, in some cases, the opportunity to acquire artworks and collectibles that aren't available in the primary market. AXA XL recently talked with Diandra Donecker, managing director and partner of the Grisebach auction house in Berlin, about new digital formats in the auction business, how to attract young collectors and the courage to break new ground.

The world has changed significantly in recent years. What changes have you experienced as an auction house?

Due to the pandemic, a lot has happened in the international and German auction markets. True to the saying "never waste a good crisis," Griesbach has been looking at how to remain open and connected as a place of dialog for our clients and friends. A big step was starting online-only auctions in the summer of 2020. To date, we are the market leader in online-only auctions throughout Germany. I want to emphasize that Grisebach not only became more digital due to the pandemic but also sincerely trusts the online market and its customers.

In addition to our auctions, we moved our diverse range of events, such as talks and book presentations, to digital platforms, hosting for example online talks with Daniel Birnbaum and the director of the Pompeii excavation site, Gabriel Zuchtriegel. We were also the first auction house in the world to have our own podcast, in which we've talked to artists and gallery owners, among others. Of course, Grisebach, like many other auction houses, has invested a lot in its website, online presentation, and social media, a path that has now become commonplace and successful in the art world.

Are digitalization and online auctions encouraging new, young collectors who might not have attended an auction before to bid?

Porträt Diandra Donecker: © Markus Jans

Absolutely. Many people still perceive the auction world as a closed, elitist, detached world that they find difficult to access. Thanks to digitalization, people can look, click and marvel anonymously from home or wherever they are. Perhaps not surprisingly, this online platform has proven to be especially popular with a younger, more international audience.

You intend to make Grisebach an engaging, interactive site that brings together cultural approaches and perspectives across the arts and encourages young people in particular to gain access to the auction system. How do you do that? What kind of events do you organize?

Grisebach is housed in a beautiful villa built at the end of the 19th century. Our fundamental idea is to use it as a venue for auctions while also hosting international visitors. We offer different live event formats in which we invite a wide assortment of young people and their friends. For example, at Breakfast @ Grisebach, we start the day with an art lecture prepared by one of our in-house experts, along with coffee and croissants. We also organize exhibitions for up to three thousand visitors, as well as expert talks on forgery, provenance and restoration. With these different formats, we — as an auction house — can reach many different target groups, some of whom are very familiar with art and the market and others looking to become more knowledgeable about various artists, periods and so on.

Abteilung Zeitgenössische Kunst © René Fietzek

What are younger collectors buying? Have you observed a particular interest among this target group?

Young collectors, by their very nature, usually have smaller budgets. Therefore, their focus is generally on photographs, works on paper, prints or editions. These can usually still be bought quite affordably and promise a good increase in value over the years.

What drives people to collect art?

In one sense, we are all collectors. The urge often starts in childhood as a mixture of intuition and needs that are deeply rooted in us all, almost a primal desire. Collecting is like an impulse to make sure of one's existence in the world.

One often finds affinity with particular artists or a specific regional art genre. Or, one creates an image of oneself through the art one acquires and collects, an extension of one's personality. Collecting can also be biographically motivated. For example, some of us here in Germany are drawn to collecting art from the former East Germany. Or, one finds joy in the subject of portraiture and grows a collection built around figurative art. Others follow the collecting patterns of their parents or grandparents, re-imagining a collection according to their own zeitgeist.

In other words, while there are different approaches and motivations, collecting is a kind of beautiful addiction that offers a measure of fulfillment and satisfaction.

„Die Zeit nagt I“. 1992 und und „Søm – Sommer“. 1988 von Per Kirkeby in der Villa Grisebach © Noshe

How often do buyers purchase art on the auction market, especially online, without seeing the artwork beforehand?

This happens often and is increasing. We have adapted accordingly and illustrate our art so carefully and extensively that anyone clicking on an online image gets the best possible impression of the work and feels confident in their buying decision. Many people have become accustomed to making remote purchases and want to do the same when buying art. Of course, nothing can replace a look at the original. Still, it is our responsibility to bidders who cannot physically find their way to Berlin to enable them to experience artwork from a distance!

The pandemic, of course, prompted the rapid transformation of the art market to digital formats: and, in turn, a new generation of younger art collectors has started shaping the industry. Overall that is a good development, but admittedly it has been challenging for smaller galleries that focus on discovering and developing new emerging artists.

Thus, while digitalization is bringing the world together, at the same time, exhibitions and art fairs are becoming more regional; both can be seen as opportunities!

You are one of the youngest female leaders in the German art market. What do you wish for the future of the art market?

Even more exchange and synergy between auction houses, galleries and museums. Even more young women and men who stir up the sometimes conservative analog art market with their originality and creativity!

From mine to you

Transforming raw materials into luxury goods

Name: Steven Lawrence

Role: Global Practice Leader, Jewellers Block, Specie and Cash in Transit, AXA XL

Interests: Cricket, swimming, golf, musicals, father to two active young children

In 1947, Frances Gerety, a young copywriter with the American advertising agency N.W. Ayer & Son, penned the tagline A Diamond is Forever. Over the next 25 years, Gerety and a colleague, Dorothy Dignam, were the creative forces behind one of the most successful advertising campaigns ever.

Their remarkable achievement was to create a belief among U.S. consumers, later embraced by people in other countries, that “a girl is not engaged until she has a diamond ring.” In essence, they successfully repositioned diamonds as a “must-have” item for people in all social classes; they were no longer solely for the moneyed elite. Fortuitously, this notion coincided with the rapid economic growth many countries experienced in the latter half of the twentieth century.

However, the success of N.W. Ayer’s campaign wasn’t limited just to diamonds. While diamond production has increased more than seven-fold since the 1950s, demand for such luxury goods as fine jewelry and watches — and, by extension, gold and other gemstones — has also soared.

A multi-stage process that starts in the ground

Luxury goods are created over multiple stages, each with different players and business dynamics, and carried out in different parts of the world.

Throughout the process, insurance plays a vital role in mitigating the risks associated with each segment of the value chain, from the mines to the cutting/fabricating operations, to the wholesale distributors, to the retail businesses and, finally, to the end customer. While these operations have distinct risk profiles — a mining company is markedly different from a family-owned jewelry store — a common thread runs across all of them: safeguarding valuable, easily concealable and readily resalable commodities.

The path to becoming a luxury good starts in a less luxurious mine site where precious metals and gemstones are extracted from the ground. Once

that happens, the materials acquire value and, in turn, need to be protected on-site until shipped off for production and also while in transit.

However, it is no secret that many mining operations are located in less-developed countries featuring substandard—to say the least—business practices, labor conditions and environmental protection standards.

AXA XL, as a leading provider of specie insurance — i.e., specialized coverages protecting valuable goods like precious metals and gemstones, held by a third party or in transit — is well aware of these issues. And consistent with the AXA Group's overarching purpose to "act for human progress by protecting what matters," AXA XL carefully vets each potential client to ensure its goals and practices align with ours.

Geographically concentrated

After they are extracted, the raw materials require processing. In the case of diamonds and other gemstones, that involves cutting and polishing. While there are a vast number of mines operating all over the world, this segment of the value chain is highly concentrated geographically. For instance, about 80 percent of all diamonds are cut and polished in Surat, India.

Once cut and polished, the materials are traded on primary and secondary markets. This activity is also concentrated in a few locations, particularly Antwerp; 80 percent of all rough diamonds and half of all cut diamonds are traded there. Antwerp is also home to the Antwerpsche Diamantkring, the oldest and largest diamond bourse dedicated to rough diamonds. New York City, Mumbai and Ramat Gan, Israel, also are important hubs for buying and selling diamonds. And in recent years, trading volumes in Dubai have increased significantly in response to the soaring demand for luxury goods in that region.

A scattering of uncut diamonds © Shutterstock

Keeping valuable assets safe and secure

In crime fiction, the jewelry heist is a familiar trope. And the plot often revolves around one of two scenarios: breaking into the building and busting open the safe or exploiting a vulnerability in their handling when not secured in a vault.

Although the details and particulars are usually not as glamorous or dramatic as portrayed in books, movies or plays, our loss experiences indicate that these scenarios are not atypical. And, not surprisingly, our underwriting generally focuses on these same critical aspects: the physical protection systems and the practices and patterns of the people responsible for the custody of the gems.

Assessing the former is generally more straightforward than the latter. Today's security systems and vaults are quite stout, and industry professionals are expected to be highly knowledgeable about the latest developments in security methods. Nonetheless, we carefully assess clients' protection measures and work with them to address potential vulnerabilities.

We also look closely at how clients carry out their business. Many dealers in the major trading centers usually stay close to their offices and only carry small quantities of gems around with them. In some cases, however, a dealer will travel between different centers with substantial inventories or participate in trade shows in other parts of the world. In these instances, stones are vulnerable to physical theft or loss from switching genuine goods with fakes or lesser quality gems. Brazen "snatch and grab" thefts like what occurred last summer at TEFAF Maarstrich also have to be considered.

Between well-planned attacks by criminals and clients' carelessness, complacency or outright fraud, losses can happen at any time. This is why we partner with specialized brokers who work with established traders who take appropriate precautions to protect their inventories.

AXA XL's dedicated global Specie team also works closely with trade associations, security experts and loss adjusters to ensure we are apprised of the latest modus operandi for criminals worldwide. We then use this information to help clients harden their defenses and lessen the possibility of being targeted.

White gold and diamond engagement rings © Shutterstock

Specialized goods require specialized coverages

From this handful of trading centers, diamonds and other gemstones are ultimately transformed into rings, necklaces, earrings, pendants and bracelets sold in outlets worldwide, including mass-market retailers, family-owned jewelry stores and high-end boutiques.

AXA XL also insures many of these businesses, e.g., standalone jewelry stores, through our global offices. With these clients, we often create tailored solutions consistent with their specific operations and needs. Nonetheless, security remains the paramount concern. Like the traders/wholesales we insure, we work closely with our retail clients to review their physical security setups and business practices.

Finally, AXA XL also insures individual private collections. Although a general property policy often adequately protects items valued in the tens of thousands, people with more valuable collections — especially those that include jewelry, fine art, antiquities, antiques, watches, fine wines and/or classic cars—are encouraged to protect these with standalone policies crafted by experienced underwriters and tailored to the client's particular needs and circumstances. Here, too, AXA XL frequently reviews a private client's security systems and processes and, as need be, recommends appropriate measures to deter would-be thieves. Also, if items are damaged, private clients benefit from ready access to experts who can assess the damages and specialists who can restore items to as close to their original condition as possible.

In 1999, the industry publication AdAge cited A Diamond is Forever as the most memorable slogan of the century. Although AXA XL can't guarantee that a client's diamond pendant will last an eternity, we can help ensure that it is protected and preserved for future generations.

Fundación Botín

A long and successful commitment to art and young artists. An interview with Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz, Director of Exhibitions and the Collection of Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain

Name: Marta García

Role: Underwriter, Fine Art and Private Clients

Qualifications: M.A. Art history degree, art appraisals specialization

Interests: Contemporary art, art fairs, Spanish artists, museums, galleries and exhibitions

Interview with Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz, Director of Exhibitions and the Collection of Fundación Botín.

Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz is responsible for managing the Fundación Botín art collection and oversees curating the different exhibitions. She also represents the Centro Botín in the visual arts field at local, national and international levels while establishing and strengthening relationships with other art centers and museums, and with artists, curators, collectors and galleries.

How was the Fundación Botín art collection formed, and what are your criteria for incorporating new acquisitions?

Fundación Botín's art collection reflects the trajectory of its Art Program over more than forty years and anchors our commitment to research, education and supporting contemporary artists. The Art Program comprises three areas:

- **Art Grants** that support personal and research projects developed by international contemporary artists. A yearly exhibition at Centro Botin, titled *Itineratios*, presents the resulting work and has become a unique opportunity to observe current debates in contemporary art. Since 1993, our Art Grants have benefitted more than 200 creative talents, including Teresa Solar, Sandra Gamarra, Wilfredo Prieto, Carlos Bunga, Basma Alsharif, Leonor Antunes and Leonor Serrano Rivas.

  The Fundación also recently launched *ENREDOS*, a new program for artists who have previously received Art Grants, inviting them to respond to the Fundación's collection, building, site and audiences. Through *ENREDOS*, Centro Botín will provide fresh readings of the collection, experiment with the display and activate our exhibition spaces while continuing to nurture the Fundación's ongoing relationships with the grantees and their networks. The Catalan artist, Eva Fábregas, begins the *ENREDOS* program in 2023.

Belén de Benito © Centro Botín

- **Art Workshops** led by established international artists such as Miroslaw Balka, Tacita Dean, Carlos Garaicoa, Mona Hatoum, Joan Jonas, Jannis Kounellis, Julie Mehretu, Antoni Muntadas, Juan Uslé and Cristina Iglesias. The workshops are envisioned as platforms for exchange between leading artists and groups of artists or creative practitioners who are selected via open call. These are intensive programs that take place in Santander over two weeks. Since Centro Botín opened in 2017, the artists running the workshops have presented their work at Centro Botín in solo exhibitions conceived for the gallery space, with its unique architecture designed by Renzo Piano for the surrounding environment of the bay and the city.

- **Drawing**. Fundación Botín is engaged in scholarly and curatorial research into Spanish drawing and has recently renewed this focus with the first respective of drawings by Juan Muñoz. Since Centro Botín opened in 2017, this steadfast commitment to drawing has become a priority for the Art Program, as witnessed by the exhibitions of drawings by Goya and Millares, and expanded to other regions and contemporary contexts with, for instance, the show by Ethiopian artist Julie Mehretu.

  Since 1993, our Collection has grown, year after year, with new works by artists leading Art Workshops and by emerging and mid-career artists who have received Art Grants. Together these works form a mosaic of concepts and trajectories displaying generational differences and disparate positions, creating a rich testimonial of contemporary art.

What is the primary purpose of Centro Botín?

Centro Botín is an international art center in Santander, Spain, offering new experiences and perspectives on art. Our social mission is to create a greater understanding of art, fostering its power to stimulate creativity and develop emotional intelligence. Fundación Botín aims to bring social and economic strength to the communities it supports, with Centro Botín playing a significant role in helping promote Santander and the broader region on both the national and international stage.

Situated in a unique enclave in the heart of the city and overlooking the bay, Centro Botin has become a cornerstone in the cultural arc of the Cantabrian Coast in northern Spain.

Fundación Botín has been awarding grants to visual artists since the 1990s. How are the candidates selected?
The Arts Grants are intended to support the development of personal and research projects. Recipients are selected by an external jury that varies yearly, comprising curators and artists who have received these grants in the past. More than two hundred artists have benefitted from these grants since the program was launched in 1993.

In addition to offering financial support, this program showcases works created by the chosen artists in an annual exhibition at Centro Botín called *Itinerarios*, which celebrates its 28th iteration this year.

You organize workshops led by such important artists as Miroslaw Balka, Mona Hatoum, Jannis Kounellis, Antoni Muntadas, Juan Uslé, Gabriel Orozco, Julião Sarmento Paul Graham, Julie Mehretu, Carsten Höller, Cristina Iglesias and Martin Creed. How do you think they contribute to the development of future artists?

Yes, their workshops have been intensive platforms for exchanging knowledge, skills and experiences. They reflect our commitment to making long-term investments in the research and work of all the creative practitioners involved. The outcomes of the workshops are open-ended and depend on the relationships established between the leaders and the participants, Centro Botín and the city of Santander. Sometimes the participants even take part in the leading artist's work, as was the case of Joan Jonas and Martin Creed!

Research on drawing is a priority at the Centro Botín. At what stage now is your project to catalog Goya's drawings? What are some of the next projects you'll undertake?

In 2006, Fundación Botín began a research project on drawing in Spanish art, which includes the publication of catalogues raisonnés and exhibitions, guided by the conviction that drawing is an outstanding facet of our art from the 16th century to the present.

Based on this research and with the support of the Prado Museum, in 2019, we published the first of five volumes of the catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), which concludes the research of the great Spanish masters (17th-20th centuries). We have also edited the catalogues raisonnés of Eduardo Rosales (1836-1873), Antonio del Castillo (1616-1668), Pablo Gargallo (1881-1934), Alonso Cano (1601 -1667), Mariano Salvador Maella (1739-1819), José Gutiérrez Solana (1886-1945) and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682).

We are expanding this line of programming to include contemporary drawing. In 2018, we presented the drawings of Ethiopian artist Julie Mehretu and in June 2021, on the occasion of Centro Botín's fifth anniversary, we presented *Juan Muñoz: Drawings 1988-2000*, the first retrospective of drawings by the Spanish sculptor, highlighting his career as a draftsman and examining how his practice changed over two decades.

What has the opening of the Centro Botín meant for Fundación Botín?

Set in the heart of Santander, Centro Botín opened its doors to the public in 2017. Designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, it is the most ambitious project of Fundación Botín to date and has rightly taken its place as a leading international arts center. Centro Botín continues the Fundación's work of more than 40 years by presenting innovative, inspiring exhibitions, publications and public activities that, alongside its collection, amplify contemporary debates within the fields of art and culture while awakening audiences' creativity.

How is the annual exhibition program of the Centro Botín designed, and what projects does it include?

Centro Botín's Visual Arts Program has an outstanding reputation among artists and audiences for commissioning and producing bold exhibitions and catalogs. These conceptually rigorous, emotionally compelling exhibits powerfully inspire audiences to engage with art as part of their daily lives.

Cristina Iglesias workshop © Centro Botín

Centro Botín aerial view by Stéphane Aboudaram © Centro Botín

Since opening in 2017, Centro Botín has staged 27 historical and contemporary exhibitions shaped by its advisory panel, composed of Vicente Todolí, Paloma Botín, Maria José Salazar, Udo Kittelmann, Manuela Mean and myself. In October 2020, we opened *Ellen Gallagher with Edgar Cleijne: A Law … a blueprint… a scale*, the first exhibition in Spain by the internationally acclaimed American artist Ellen Gallagher, which included paintings, works on paper as well as three film installations created in collaboration with Dutch artist Edgar Cleijne. Through an immersive itinerary that explores issues of race, identity and transformation, the exhibition invites visitors to submerge themselves beneath the ocean's skin with reference to such themes as Modernist abstraction and marine biology.

In 2023, we will present *Roni Horn: I am paralyzed with hope*, an exhibition carefully conceived by Horn in dialogue with Centro Botín's exhibition rooms, architecture, light and visitor flow. This will be accompanied by a publication with newly commissioned texts by American author Carmen María Machado and Spanish curator, researcher and author Isabel de Naverán. We will also stage Tino Seghal's first institutional exhibition in Spain, in dialogue with El Greco's seminal painting *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1577–1579), originally realized for the Capilla de Santo Domingo del Antiguo, Toledo.

How do you think the building has influenced the urban landscape of Santander?

The building is part of a broader urban intervention that has enhanced the connection between the old town of Santander and its Bay, freeing up an old port area that had been closed to the public and integrating the historic Pereda Gardens with the Bay. Centre Botín is part of the daily lives of Santander's residents, a place of encounter through art and culture. It strengthens the social and cultural fabric of the city while also attracting national and international visitors.

axaxl.com