

Getting Value For Your Valuables

You can do it — with the right help.

Allan Nahajewski { Contributing Writer

There's a right time to part with the valuables you've acquired or inherited, and when that time comes, you will know. But how can you be sure you're getting maximum value?

Caroline Ashleigh has dedicated her career to that question. She's a certified appraiser, columnist, author and lecturer on art and antiques. She's been on staff at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Cranbrook Academy and major auction houses. We've asked her to share her story and a few tips.

How did you get into appraising fine art and antiques?

I was raised in Ann Arbor in an antiquing family and learned the business at my parents' knees. They were avid collectors all their lives and, from a very early age, I can remember going to country auctions with them. I later decided to learn as much as I could about the trade. Like my mom and dad, I developed an eye for interesting and unique items.

In their retirement, they bought an old church to house the objects they had collected; it's called Noah's Ark Antiques in New Hudson. I worked there as a college student in the summers, honing my skills, developing a critical eye and my own sense of aesthetics.

Have you had any celebrity clients?

Yes. One was Debbie Reynolds, who owned the Hollywood Motion Picture Collection and Museum, housing many incredible costumes from the silver screen. I appraised the white dress that Marilyn Monroe wore in the *Seven-Year Itch*, one of the most iconic dresses in pop culture. A number of years ago, I appraised it at \$2.5 million. Last year, it sold for \$5.5 million, setting a world record for a dress.

When did you start your own business?

In 1994, I created my own appraisal, auction and consulting firm, Caroline Ashleigh Associates, to provide services for private and corporate collectors, museums, auction houses, dealers, law firms, insurance companies and high net



Heritage Auctions



Caroline Ashleigh

What can you tell us about your new service to provide global reach to local clients?

I'm now working as consignment director with Heritage Auctions, the world's third-largest auction house with more than 750,000 registered bidder

members and annual sales of more than \$800 million. I'm happy to be part of such a forward-thinking company. I'm working locally in Birmingham to combine my expertise with Heritage's global marketing power. For example, recently a Bloomfield Hills resident came to me with a Renoir that he wasn't sure was authentic or not. Working with the experts at Heritage, we determined it was authentic and were able to sell it for three times over estimate.

Any advice to older people who feel it's time to downsize?

Downsizing is daunting for most people. You don't do it often, and many times it's tied to a move or a loss, and both are stressful. The best thing you can do is find the best adviser. Start by putting together a list of items and categorize them by value — high, medium and low. I can review the list and let you know which items I can handle. For the other items, I always give the best recommendation I can. I try to point people in the right direction.

How can readers reach you?

They can call me at (248) 792-2929 or visit appraiseyourart.com, auctionyourart.com, auctionyourestate.com or auctionyourwine.com. For a free Heritage Auctions catalog and collectors' handbook, a \$65 value, email me at info@appraiseyourart.com. □

worth individuals throughout the United States.

What services do you provide?

We provide advice on purchasing, selling, collection management and investing in art and antiques. Some of our specialties include prints, works of art on paper, paintings, sculpture, photographs, art glass, couture, manuscripts, books, tribal art, entertainment memorabilia, jewelry and estate liquidation services. I also appraise wine. There aren't many certified wine appraisers in this country. And we appraise Judaica or artwork from Israel. I get a lot of requests for that.

Do you only handle high-end items?

We generally handle estates valued at \$10,000 or more, and most estates are. We will assess whether a local estate sale is the best move, or perhaps in combination with an auction. Usually, it's both.

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