



Guide to purchasing authentic autographs

Originally from the Greek word αὐτός, autós meaning “self” and γράφω, gráphō meaning “write,” an autograph is a document transcribed entirely in the unique handwriting of the author. The word autograph, in addition, refers to a famous individual’s artistic and also unique signature. The hobby of collecting autographs is known as philography. The oldest autograph known to man is on a Sumerian clay tablet from roughly 3100 BC by an ancient scribe.

An individual’s writing style can change throughout a person’s lifespan. For example, an autograph of George Washington as president will be much different than one from when he was an 18-year-old land surveyor. Although the degree of change may vary, historically many celebrities have had added stylistic changes to their signature. Reasons for this include education, health and aesthetics.

Whenever searching online for that perfect autograph, stay wary of the following non-original autographs.

Secretarial Signatures

Celebrities often authorize secretaries, assistants or even close friends to sign their correspondence. Dating back as early as World War II, U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall felt obligated to sign every condolence letter, but as that number increased he was forced to assign an assistant to ‘forge’ his letter. Although he was able to please everyone, the authenticity of the autograph was not valid due to the fact that it wasn’t Marshall who wrote his own signature.

Autopen Autographs

Since the early 1950’s American presidents had a robot machine known as the auto pen for automatic signing signature for letters, photographs, documents and even memorabilia. Since that time auto pens have been used to accommodate the autograph request of celebrities who have a high demand.

Reprint Autographs

A reprint autograph is a reproduction of an original signed photo. In the celebrity autograph industry, many sellers purposely produce reprints by copying their own original autograph. Sellers often write confusing language to deceive buyers as well as placing the word reprint in a discrete location. They also can simply write ‘pp’ or ‘rp’ to make it even more deceptive.

Forged Autographs

Autograph collecting, while it is a thrilling hobby for many, requires proper knowledge to comprehend the risk one takes when purchasing an autograph. Forgers go to great lengths to make their forgeries appear authentic.

On October 13, 1999, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested many individuals on “Operation Bullpen,” a reference to all the bull (bullshit) being created by the sharpies (pen) of forgers. According to the FBI, forgers and associates defrauded American consumers of over 10% of the \$1 billion annual autograph industry. In 2002, phase two of the Operation Bullpen was staged and approximately 20 forgery rings were busted and over 60 individuals were charged, seizing tens of thousands of forgeries and over \$5 million in illegal cash.

Although the basis of this interview was created through sports autographs, celebrity autographs forgeries still exist.

Others things to considered upon your purchase

With the recent surge in the growth of autograph suppliers online and the apparent large growth of autographed memorabilia for sale, many individuals have sought to create their own ‘certificate of authenticity’ issued by the seller at the current time of sale. With that guarantee, the certificates are only as reliable as the seller who issues them.

Other tips

- Research the autograph you are about to purchase as well as the seller. Look towards Authentic Ink Graphs for example signatures to use as a comparison. When researching the autograph make sure the autograph isn’t described as anything but an original hand signed by the celebrity listed. Be sure to ask questions on specifics of where and when the autograph was obtained.
- Look for a Money Back Guarantee. A seller confident enough to promise this is the kind of seller you are looking for.