A connoisseur (Fr. connaisseur, from Middle-French connoistre, then connaître meaning "to be acquainted with" or "to know somebody/something.") is a person who has a great deal of knowledge about the fine arts, or an expert judge in matters of taste.

Modern connoisseurship must be seen along with museums, art galleries and "the cult of originality". Connoisseurs evaluate works of art on the basis of aesthetic conclusions. Judgment informed by intuition is essential, but it must be grounded in a thorough understanding of the work itself. On the basis of empirical evidence, refinement of perception about technique and form, and a disciplined method of analysis, the responsibility of the connoisseur is to attribute authorship, validate authenticity and appraise quality. These findings can be collected and organized into a catalogue raisonné of the work of a single artist or a school.

During the 18th century, however, the term was often used as a synonym for a still vaguer man of taste or a pretended critic.

In 1760, Oliver Goldsmith says, "Painting is now become the sole object of fashionable care; the title of connoisseur in that art is at present the safest passport into every fashionable Society; a well timed shrug, an admiring attitude and one or two exotic tones of exclamation are sufficient qualifications for men of low circumstances to curry favour."

In 1890, Giovanni Morelli wrote, "art connoisseurs say of art historians that they write about what they do not understand; art historians, on their side, disparage the connoisseurs, and only look upon them as the drudges who collect materials for them, but who personally have not the slightest knowledge of the physiology of art."

In his Meaning in the Visual Arts (1955), Erwin Panofsky explains the difference between a connoisseur and an art historian: "The connoisseur might be defined as a laconic art historian, and the art historian as a loquacious connoisseur."

Internationally the term connoisseur is also used in the context of gastronomy, i.e. in connection with fine food, beer, wine, tea and many other products whose consumption can be pleasing to the senses.[1][2]

**References**

[1] "Connaisseur" in its original French
[2] 'Connaisseur' in the Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, 3rd meaning (http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/Connaisseur)
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