



Q: On several recent sailings we've wandered into the scheduled art auctions that seem to be a feature of every cruise. The art displayed is usually very colorful and splashy, often obvious copies of the styles of Picasso, Van Gogh, Matisse and other impressionists. From education (BFA, Philly Museum College of Art) and experience, we're a bit suspicious of the deals. Are those shipboard auctions OK or a bad deal? A: If you attend any of those auctions, you'll feel the pumped-up excitement of the bidding and the come-on spiels of the sales people. If you win an auction round, you may pay more for a copycat painting that resembles a Renoir than you should. However, while there's something of a used-car-lot hoopla in the sales, there's nothing dishonest about them.

As you wrote, the merchandise is very colorful, and if a passenger buys a painting just because it will look good in the living room, who's to say there's anything wrong with the sale? If you do attend a shipboard auction, just keep your cool and bid only on artworks you believe will fit in with your decor or as a gift. If the bidding seems to be getting too high, let it go on without you.