

BLOG

Insuring Artwork in Transit

By Mary Pontillo

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Every once in a while, a major art heist makes headlines. Who can forget the elaborate caper of two art thieves disguised as Boston cops who gained entrance to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and made off with \$500 million dollar in Rembrandts, Vermeers and Degas – a crime still unsolved to this day?

But headline-grabbing heists that rock the art world are rare. The most common risk associated with fine art insurance is far more banal, namely, moving pieces from point A to point B. Accounting for the bulk of fine art claims, shipping and transporting artwork is fraught with peril. Anyone who deals with art -- collectors, gallery owners, museum directors, dealers, appraisers, conservators, artists themselves – whether they're buying, selling, lending or borrowing, needs to make sure they've got the right kind of coverage for when things go wrong en route.



Taking art off a wall, crating it, loading it in a truck or plane, uncrating it and putting it back on a wall in a different location without having it suffer any damage takes attention to countless details. Known as nail-to-nail or wall-to-wall, transporting art is a highly nuanced element in fine art insurance policies.

The care with which art is packed and shipped runs the gamut. On the lowest end, a piece of art might be stuffed in a padded envelope and sent to its destination through the U.S. Postal Service. On the highest end, it might be packed into custom-fitted foam in a high-tech crate outfitted with its own micro-climate, accompanied by a human courier, shipped on a plane, and set to climatize to its new surroundings before being unpacked in its new home. In some cases, the owner will buy the artwork its own first-class seat on a commercial flight, with its courier seated right next to it.

Often, professional packing and shipping companies will get input from the artist to understand the best way for a work to be handled.

But not all art is created equal, and neither is the care in moving it. Let's say you're shipping a piece of art from Santa Fe to San Antonio. One of the things you should ask the shipper is how many stops the truck will make along the way. The more stops, the more chances for damage. The truck might be left unattended with

valuable art inside during a rest stop. The artwork might be placed on a sidewalk while other art is being loaded. It might be crammed in with other pieces and damaged if wasn't not properly packaged.

To mitigate damage, consider a non-stop shuttle. Another trick of the trade: never send an express shipment out on a Friday, as it tends to sit in the warehouse over the weekend.

If a piece is on loan from a private collection to a museum, be sure you understand all the nuances of your policy. Does it require a "condition report" prior to leaving your home? Is the museum's policy adequate to cover your piece? Have you requested being named as loss payee under the museum's policy? Request that the museum's policy be listed as primary to ensure their policy responds first in case you also leave your artwork on your personal policy.

It can be hard to put a price on art. But for people who deal in artwork that needs to move from one place to another, it's a fact of life. Knowing the fine print of your fine art policy is critical to protecting its value for generations. Reach out to our knowledgeable team for help in finding the right policy [mpontillo@dewittstern.com].

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