

# **INVENTORY RECORDS:**

## **Documentation & Provenance of your work**

### **Introduction**

It is critically important to keep accurate and complete records of your work, regardless of whether that work is production, limited edition, commission, or one-of-a-kind work.

The value of this information cannot be overstated. The artist's INVENTORY RECORD serves as documentation for the future, establishing the provenance (origins, exhibition and publishing history) of a particular piece. This is especially important in the case of one-of-a-kind work which is the work most likely to be acquired by museums in the future.

On a more concrete or practical level, complete and accurate INVENTORY RECORDS can be quite useful in conducting day-to-day business. For example, as new opportunities to exhibit work are proposed, an artist can quickly refer to their INVENTORY RECORDS while talking with a curator. These records will reveal whether that work has been shown in the same city on a previous occasion. If the INVENTORY RECORD indicates that it has, the artist can then suggest new work that has not been shown in that area and so offer an exhibition organizer and audience a fresh and different view of the artist's body of work.

Each piece (or in the case of limited production – *each series*) should have its own INVENTORY RECORD page. The Professional Guidelines Committee suggests you print the companion form, **INVENTORY RECORD: Documentation and Provenance** (downloadable as a pdf file in the Professional Guidelines) so that while you read the following text you can understand each component and understand what kind of information you need to document for your work. The following text highlights the categories on the sample form. Fill in each space on the form as appropriate and keep it in a binder for your convenience. Additional information, such as any pertaining to transfer of ownership, should be recorded on the back of the form.

In summary, the information in the INVENTORY RECORD for each piece should include:

- I EXHIBITION RECORDS**
- II PUBLICATION RECORDS**
- III GALLERY SALES and COLLECTOR RECORDS**
- IV MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS**
- V UPDATED VALUATION OF YOUR WORK**
- VI TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP to another collector or museum.**

Also included in this document is information relating to:

**Keeping Estate Records**

**Keeping Records Up-to-Date**

**Repair and Restoration**

**Inventory Records: Documentation and Provenance *an itemized list***

**Inventory Records: Documentation and Provenance form (in the pdf version only)**

## I EXHIBITION RECORDS

Looking at the sample **INVENTORY RECORD: Documentation and Provenance** form you'll notice several columns under "**Exhibition Record.**"

Information listed in the "**Title of the show,**" "**Museum/Gallery/Non-profit,**" and "**Catalog title**" columns creates a provenance—a documented history -- that adds to the value of the work and may help to build your reputation. The data may be useful to future writers, critics, historians, museums or even family members interested in researching the exhibition and publication record of your work.

When the work is committed to an exhibition, pencil in the exhibition opening and closing dates in the "**Show Dates**" column (literally use pencil on the INVENTORY RECORD just in case the exhibit dates change). When the exhibition dates are firm or the work is shipped out for the exhibition, revise your records *in pen* to include the exact exhibition dates in the "**Show Dates**" column.

In the "**Date Shipped**" column, write the date the work is supposed to be shipped out to the exhibition sponsor. The dates that the work needs to arrive at the exhibition venue (in advance of the opening) can vary considerably according to the needs of the exhibition sponsor. This, of course, affects the "**Date shipped**". Sponsors may need advance time to plan displays, promote the exhibition, produce a catalog and install the exhibition. For example, if the organization is planning to photograph the work for a catalog, they may need the work up to six months in advance of the opening dates for photography, graphic design and printing.

In the "**Date Returned**" column, estimate the return date for work in the exhibition so that you don't commit the work for two different exhibitions at the same time.

**HINT:** If the exhibition installation dimensions are significantly different than the dimensions of the work, or if the work requires a base or special mounts, make a note of this on your INVENTORY RECORD. Always send this information to the exhibition sponsor early while they are planning the exhibition installation.

**HINT:** It can be very helpful to record your shipping method and shipping costs for future reference. Next time you want to send similar work to a show you will have a handy way to create an estimate for shipping and contact information for what shipping company to use.

**HINT:** Keep the name and contact information of the exhibition curator and the exhibition staff in a separate file folder for each show. Also keep at least one announcement, a catalog or brochure, (if there was something printed), and the contract which includes the exhibition dates as documentation that you were in the show. Keep this information in a safe place forever. This information should also include the theme, title, and whether this was a group show, including the other artist(s)' name(s).

## II PUBLICATION RECORDS

In the INVENTORY RECORD under "**PUBLICATION RECORD**" you should include the author, title, publication, volume number, and issue for every image of your work in print. This

is important information for updating your resume, and a resource for historians, museum curators and writers researching your work.

For similar reasons, keeping a Publication Record for each piece reduces the possibility that the same image will be used a second time in the same magazine or newspaper. Book publishers usually like to have *fresh* images for their books rather than images of artwork that have been published previously. Your ability to direct the author or publisher to new images will be much appreciated.

**HINT:** Keep an original copy of the catalogs and articles. Sometimes magazines and newspapers will send you an original “tear sheet” (a “tear sheet” is an original page(s) from the magazine). Exhibition catalogs are rarely available later, keep at least one copy for your archive.

**HINT:** Always record the photographer used for the photography of each piece. This goes on your INVENTORY RECORD: Documentation and Provenance form in the “**PHOTOGRAPHER**” space. Also include the “**TYPE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION**” on the INVENTORY RECORD for a handy reference.

### **III GALLERY SALES and COLLECTOR RECORDS**

When one-of-a-kind work is purchased, make every effort to get the complete name and address of the collector for your INVENTORY RECORD. Keeping records of important pieces can be very beneficial. In the future, you may have an opportunity for a retrospective exhibition in which case the inclusion of older work is an intrinsic necessity allowing the audience to see the development of your work. Additionally, collectors of your work should be kept informed as your career develops. Keep them updated and on your mailing list.

**HINT:** The expectation that a gallery or exhibition sponsor will furnish the *complete name and address of the collector* who purchased your work should be discussed in advance with the gallery or exhibition sponsor. (*See the Model Consignment Contract in the Professional Guidelines*). Do not rely on the gallery to keep these records. This is your responsibility as the artist. Galleries can and do go out of business for a variety of reasons. After a few years, galleries may not be able to find the records for the sale of your work and who purchased it. Galleries do not necessarily keep these records for years or have staff to maintain this level of record keeping. Never depend on someone else to do your job.

Often galleries or sales venues may not be comfortable giving the name and address of collectors to artists. Galleries may be concerned that artists will try to circumvent the gallery and attempt to make sales directly to the collector. And to their credit, most galleries consider it to be their responsibility to honor their collectors’ expectations of privacy. On the other hand, collectors themselves may be concerned that they will be bombarded with inappropriate overtures from the artist.

The positive side for both the collector, gallery and artist is that if the artist is given the collector’s name and address for their INVENTORY RECORD, the artist can then keep the collector informed about upcoming exhibitions, books, magazines, etc. featuring the artist’s work. This way the collector can keep their own file or record of provenance about the artists they collect and an informed collector may be inclined to purchase more work through the gallery.

These can be potentially difficult or uncomfortable issues for the artist and gallery to negotiate, nevertheless this discussion can foster a more open and beneficial relationship for all parties concerned. This should be clearly stated in the contract to put all parties at ease. You cannot expect a gallery to spend money and effort promoting your work if you violate the confidentiality of their clients or contact the collector without their knowledge. This is a two way street - everyone can benefit.

**HINT:** If you ever want to put information on your resume referring to private collectors who own your work, you should always ask their permission in advance. The same goes for publishing images of the work. Always ask permission before putting a collector's name in print in a catalog, magazine, book, or on the museum wall label. The collector may have many reasons why they do not want to be publicly recognized for owning your work. The flip side is that collectors may expect a publication to offer written acknowledgement of their ownership of the work along with its image in the publication as in: "Collection of . ." Always ask the collector their preference (if you can), which is another good reason to know the collectors name and complete address. You should first attempt to contact the collector through the gallery that sold them the work. Communication is the key.

**HINT:** If the work owned by a collector is exhibited in a public exhibition, the collector should be consulted about how they want the work attributed. Two options are: "Collection of..." and the anonymous "Private Collection." The exhibition sponsor should take responsibility for making arrangements with the collector for borrowing the work and the appropriate text for the exhibition labels and catalog.

#### **IV MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS**

Ultimately, if you earn a reputation for the quality of your work and the value of your artistic vision, your work may be purchased by a museum for their collection. Or you may choose to make your work a gift. As part of a collection in a public institution, most museums will consider it important to have some sort of written documentation about your work to establish its provenance: This is your INVENTORY RECORD. In fact, this exhibition and publication record may significantly influence the museum's decision to acquire a particular piece for their collection.

#### **V UPDATED VALUATION OF YOUR WORK**

Your INVENTORY RECORDS are a resource for establishing value for your work. In the future, an artist may be asked by collectors or museums to establish an updated value for older work in a private or public collection.

An updated valuation is based on many factors:

- The continued **visibility** of the artist through exhibitions, books, and magazines;
- The **reputation** of your work as occupying a unique position in the field;
- **Recognition** that the artist as made significant artistic, technical or academic contributions to their media or community;
- Change in the **value** of the materials used to make the work;
- The fact that you may be using **specialized materials** that are in a limited supply or are no longer available;

- Whether a particular piece is part of an **important series** in your work;
- Whether a particular artwork is **well known** because of exhibitions or publication;
- Whether your work is in important **public or private collections**;
- **Replacement cost** for insurance if you had to make a similar artwork now;
- **If a specific piece represents a change in the direction of your work.** For instance, this piece is the first or last in a series of work that is much larger (or smaller) in scale than previous or later work.
- **Production, custom/commission and limited edition artists should use the INVENTORY RECORD to track the cost of materials.** These artists can also quickly locate a specific supplier, an outsourced manufacturer or an obscure material.

This is not a complete list, there may be other factors that are not itemized here, however, the value of work is not static and can be influenced by external forces outside of the artist's control.

**HINT:** Artists and craftspeople should always strive for a steady increase in the value of their work. This is one of the reasons why discounts and fundraising auctions that sell work below retail prices can have a negative impact on the evaluation of your work.

Keeping accurate **INVENTORY RECORDS: Documentation and Provenance** can help you evaluate whether current work is priced correctly based on a comparison to past work, and why older work may need to be revalued to a higher valuation than the price paid years ago.

## VI TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP to another collector or museum.

The fact that your work may be resold by a collector or museum is generally outside of the artist's control. Admittedly, you may not even be informed about this transaction in advance and might find out about this by accident. It can be a rude surprise to see your work on e-Bay or donated to a fundraising auction. On the other hand, if a collector donates their collection to a museum, then your work becomes part of a public collection. Regardless, of the circumstances, if you are aware of a transfer of ownership for your work, try to update your INVENTORY RECORD with the information about the new Collector or Museum that owns your work. (Write this on the back of the INVENTORY RECORD form as necessary.)

- Complete name
- Address
- Telephone number
- Email
- Price that was paid for the resale of your work or its appraised value.
- Date that the work was purchased or donated to museum.

**HINT:** If a collector donates your work to a fund raising auction, make every effort to obtain the name and address of the new owner. The Professional Guidelines includes several documents about fundraising auctions. This information might help you navigate this awkward circumstance. (*Read the four documents about Fundraising Auctions in the Professional Guidelines for more information.*)

## Keeping Estate Records

After your death, family members, historians and museums may be grateful to have your completed INVENTORY RECORD. A prime illustration of the value of record keeping can be

found in the case of Margaret De Patta. The Oakland Museum of California was given a collection of record books belonging to Margaret De Patta after her death. These records include sketches of the work, including production pieces, prices paid for materials, such as the unique stones used in her work, and the retail prices charged for her work while she was alive. This archive represents an invaluable resource years after her untimely death.

Although her work received a limited amount of public recognition during her lifetime, it is now recognized for its exemplary design during the 1940s to the early 1960s. As another example, in 2005, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art (AAA) collected “correspondence, newsletters, price lists, receipts, photographs, newspaper, notes of Margaret De Patta”. See a great illustration and fascinating papers online at: [http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/recent\\_acquisitions.cfm](http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/recent_acquisitions.cfm)

## Keeping Records Up-to-Date

Creating a new Inventory Record is important when you finish new work. As soon as you finish a one-of-a-kind piece or start a new production item, record the date, title, estimated production number, materials and dimensions (and the weight, if this is significant factor). Do this while the work is still fresh and clean. When it is photographed, write down the photographer and the types of photographic documentation.

**HINT:** Make notations and updates while you are excited about an exhibition opportunity—while it is fresh and still a pleasure to enter this information. Also, when an article is published about your work take a moment to write down the image(s), title of the publication and author, if appropriate. Don’t wait until six months later when it seems like a tiresome, and overwhelming chore. If you take time to revise your documentation while the opportunity is still fresh, it will seem like a reward for a job well done.

## Repair and Restoration

The history of a specific piece should also include any known records or instances of repair or restoration. This can greatly affect the value of a piece and can even help establish authenticity.

## INVENTORY RECORDS: Documentation and Provenance of Your Work

Below is an itemized list of information to be kept as your INVENTORY RECORD: Documentation and Provenance. The Professional Guidelines Committee recommends that you print the form titled, **INVENTORY RECORD: Documentation and Provenance** provided in the Professional Guidelines, and keep a paper copy of your completed INVENTORY RECORD for each piece of artwork. If you decide to use your computer to record and store data, the possibility exists that a computer crash, loss of your hard drive, or the changing of computers could mean the loss of valuable information. If you do decide to computerize your INVENTORY RECORD, print a copy or backup your files on a regular basis.

- **Title of work**
- **Date**
- **Name of the series** (if appropriate)
- **Dimensions**
  - Height
  - Width
  - Depth
  - Other options:

- Length
  - Circumference
  - Weight (for shipping)
- **Price**
  - Wholesale Value
  - Retail Value
  - Include any history of price changes
- **Hours** involved in construction
  - **Assistants** that participated in fabrication
- **Independent contractors** for parts or materials
- **Materials** (be as specific as possible)
  - Estimated cost of each material at time of manufacture
  - Source of special materials if not readily available
- **Type of work**
  - One of a kind work
  - Limited Edition    Number in the edition \_\_\_\_\_
  - Custom or commission
  - Production of unlimited items. If you are making production pieces, then keep records for the development of the original prototype and then the number of items in production.
- **Photographic documentation**
  - Photo Credit:
  - Slides
  - Digital
  - Transparency
    - 2 ¼" x 2 ¼"
    - 4" x 5"

As strange as it may seem, the photographer actually owns *the image* of your work and must grant permission for its use in publication and in promotions. It is an unwritten rule among most photographers that artists may use the images freely for their personal publicity and the promotion of their careers. It is important to note that some publishers and photo labs won't reproduce an image without a photographer's signed copyright release form.

**HINT:** Photographers appreciate appropriate Photo Credit when your images are reproduced. More important, it is the legal and ethical thing to do. As the artist, it is your responsibility to send out all images and written materials with the Photo Credit on the slide, digital CD, and/or image description.

- **Exhibition record**
  - Exact **Title of the show**/exhibition
  - Exact **Show Dates** of the exhibition
  - **Date shipped**—Date work shipped out to the exhibition (for your convenience in scheduling another show for the same piece)
  - Indicate time needed by the exhibition space for shipping and exhibition planning.
  - **Venue**
    - Gallery
    - Non-profit exhibition space/community center/school
    - Museum
  - **Address of venue**

- City, state, country
  - Very important so you don't send the same work back to the same city for another exhibition—send a different piece to the same city
- **Catalog title**
  - Title of catalog
  - Was your work in the catalog?
  - Itemize image shown in the catalog and page #
- **Date returned**—Date work returned from the exhibition
- **Publication record** with images of your work
  - Name and date of **Publication**
  - **Title of the article**
  - **Author** (Keep Contact information in a separate author file)
  - **Page #**, content
  - City, State, Country (if this is a newspaper)
  - **Photographer**
  - **Date**
- **Repairs/Restoration**
  - Work completed and date
- **Collector's name** that purchased the work
  - Complete name
  - Date of Purchase
  - Street Address
  - City, State
  - Telephone
  - Email

Don't abuse this information with solicitations or inappropriate contact.  
Do not share this information with mailing lists or other artists.  
Honor this information with respect as a professional privilege, not a marketing opportunity.
- **Transfer of Ownership to another collector or museum.**  
(If relevant to the circumstances continue the information on the back.)
  - Complete name
  - Address
  - Telephone number
  - Email
  - Price that was paid for the resale of your work or its appraised value
  - Date that the work was purchased or donated to museum

SNAG Professional Guidelines Committee  
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