

Creative Drawer

Certificates of Authenticity

Does the Certificate of Authenticity, CoA, protect you from fraud or is it the instrument at the heart of great art scams? The answer is yes to both: it can protect you and it can help fleece you.

Anyone who watches TV at odd hours or glances at the magazine ads for commemorative plates, coins, or limited edition investment based art prints is well aware of the Certificate of Authenticity (CoA). Let's face it, it has to be real if it comes with a CoA! The idea of the CoA is, it seems, most often abused, but, and this is a big, big, "but": currently 14 states* require some sort of CoA, and many more states without statutes requiring a CoA could still prosecute artists, publishers, and dealers who sell prints without a CoA.

To confuse matters, there is no uniform Certificate of Authenticity. Some states require more or less information than others. And, some countries require CoA's.

We are not lawyers, and would refer you to one if you have questions. An additional source of information come from the Art Publishers Association, who has published, Fine Art Limited Edition Print Disclosure Laws, by Joshua Kaufman, esq. (email ppfa@ppfa.com).

Because there is no uniform model, we would suggest that a CoA should contain as much information as possible: the idea of which is to prevent fraud. Although some states limit the CoA to limited editions, others require it for any image or art object that can be produced in multiples.

Here's our list of "shoulds":

- It should come from someone who has the au-

thority to actually create a CoA—the artists, or the artist's agent or publisher—and that should be stated on the CoA.

- Samples of the CoA should be available prior to any sale.
- CoA's should be provided for all sales of all art.

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The CoA should (as much as applicable) include:

- Name of artist
- If the CoA comes from someone other than the artist, who and what is the relationship.
- Title
- Description or photograph of print or object
- Dimensions
- Year printed
- Year the original was created
- Medium of the original
- Medium of the print
- Number of prints: signed/numbered, signed only, unsigned/unnumbered
- Number of proofs signed/numbered, signed only, unsigned/unnumbered
- Edition size
- Restrike edition?
- Posthumous edition?
- Status of artist's signature
- Edition is part of a series of editions:: artist proof, press proof, transfer, etc.
- Name and location of printer
- Status of the plate or master: destroyed, on file, etc.

It might be obvious that an offset lithographic print of a painting is just that, and not an original piece of art. But not every knows that, and with some of the high-end, museum-store,

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3D textured reproductions, not everyone can know. Inkjet printers that produce a stochastic dot do not have the telltale birds eye dot pattern of an offset lithographic print. Prints on art paper instead of glossy coated paper further distance the high end reprint from its cousin, the poster. Again, the legislative idea behind the CoA is to prevent fraud, so anything that helps identify a print and describes the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of it is good for the buyer, and good for the seller.

To the consumer we would add, the CoA should not be a sales tool. It does not guarantee that the print will go up in value. It does not guarantee that the print can be resold even at the original purchase price.

* Arkansas, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Wisconsin.

Set your imagination free!