



# Smithsonian American Art Museum

## INVENTORIES OF AMERICAN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING WORKS

The INVENTORIES OF AMERICAN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE were created by the Smithsonian American Art Museum to assist researchers in locating American paintings and sculptures in public and private collections around the country. The database for the Inventories references over 360,000 works from two ongoing national census projects -- The INVENTORY OF AMERICAN PAINTINGS and the INVENTORY OF AMERICAN SCULPTURE.

To be included in the INVENTORY OF AMERICAN PAINTINGS, a piece:

- may be painted in traditional media such as oil, watercolor, or pastel;
- must have been created by an artist who was born or who worked in the United States;
- must have been done by an artist who was active by 1914

Generally excluded are wash drawings, works done in chalk, and prints.

To be included in the INVENTORY OF AMERICAN SCULPTURE, a piece:

- may be modeled, carved, cast, assembled, or constructed;
- may be sculpted using contemporary materials or techniques such as plastics or neon, assemblage, or site construction;
- must have been created by an artist who was born in or worked in the United States;
- may be located in either an indoor or outdoor permanent setting

Generally excluded are numismatics, decorative arts, minor architectural ornaments, and gravestones.

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**REPORT FORM:** USE OF THE FORM IS NOT MANDATORY, but it provides a guide to the type of information recorded in each Inventory. Categories of information to be recorded for each work listed in the Inventory include: Artist, Title, Creation Dates, Medium and Support, Dimensions, Markings, Owner, Location, Provenance, and Subject description. If you have a published collection catalog or computerized checklist of works, those can be used in lieu of the report forms. Please type or use a pen and print when filling out a report.

Although not mandatory, photographs are welcome additions to the descriptive details provided in the report forms.

**INVENTORYING:** When examining a work you are less likely to overlook details and items of importance if the examination is carried out in a logical sequence. You may wish to work from top to bottom and/or in a clockwise direction, both for an overall evaluation and for a description of

individual details. All observations concerning the work should be made from the point of view of the work itself -- as if you were standing in the painting, or on the sculpture's base, and looking out in the direction it faces. For a portrait, if the sitter holds a book in his/her (your) right hand, "proper right" would be the position of the book. The terms "proper right" and "proper left" should be used when describing figures only.

If you are reporting works first hand, please be safety-conscious both for yourself and the work you are examining. A painting's surface should not be touched--pressure may crack the glaze of paint or varnish; already loose paint may be further detached from the backing; natural oil from the hands will remain on the painting and will show up months later. Don't rest a ladder or climb up on an outdoor sculpture or its base to get a better view.

**OWNER/  
ADDRESS:**

List the specific name and address of the owner. The owner may be an individual, a museum, historical society, or a government or other institutional agency. For sculptures, indicate whether the work is located indoors or outdoors.

**LOCATION:**

If the work is actually located elsewhere than at the owner's address, list the work's location with sufficient clarity to enable someone else to easily find the work. It is not necessary to note a temporary absence, such as a short-term loan of the piece to a museum exhibition.

**CONFIDENTIAL:**

Owners may choose to "restrict" their names and street addresses from appearing in the database of the Inventories. If you would like to select this option, check the appropriate box.

**ARTIST:**

The person who was primarily responsible for the overall conception and creation of the work. Frequently, the artist's name or initials will appear toward the bottom of the work. A painter's name may also appear on a label on the frame of the painting or, less frequently, on a label on the back of the stretcher. A sculptor's name is often followed by an abbreviation for "sculptor" (e.g., SC., Sculpt., S.) and sometimes a date. A sculptor or foundry or fabricator's name or marks may also appear on the base. Enter this information as found. If a symbol is present, attach a hand-drawn copy of the mark.

If the work is stylistically a copy after another artist's work, that artist should also be mentioned (e.g., Thomas Cole after Asher B. Durand).

If the identity of an artist is not known, list artist as "Unknown."

**TITLE OF WORK:**

Indicate the complete title of the work as designated by the artist. If unknown, indicate "Unknown."

**FORMER TITLES:**

Record any other titles by which the work is known. These titles might include previous titles the art work was exhibited under.

## EXECUTION

### DATE:

This is the date that the work was created and is frequently found beside the artist's name. If only an approximate date is known, precede it with the phrase "circa." If unknown, leave blank.

For sculptures, there may be other dates associated with the piece, such as the date the piece was commissioned, copyrighted, cast (often found next to the foundry's mark), or dedicated (often located on the pedestal of the sculpture or on an adjacent plaque). Please be sure to specify the type of date.

### MEDIA:

The medium or material the art work is made of or rendered in. Please check the appropriate boxes.

For paintings, the Inventory includes works executed in oil, pastel, tempera, watercolor, or gouache. Please indicate whether the painting is on canvas, paper, board, etc.

For sculptures, the Inventory references the media of both the sculpture and the base. List the specific medium, such as bronze, red oak, Vermont marble, if known. If the medium cannot be identified, the term "undetermined" should be checked.

### DIMENSIONS:

For paintings, the measurements should be given in inches, with height preceding width. For works on canvas or board, measure from the back, holding the ruler along the outer edge of the wooden stretcher bars or along the edge of the panel. Check if the work is a mural or a miniature. For watercolors and other works on paper, reference the paper dimensions, not the measurements of the image.

If it is impossible or inadvisable to disturb a painting from its hanging position or to remove the protective glass and paper backing, an approximate measurement of the visible area within the frame or mat-border can be given.

For sculptures, the goal in measuring is to determine the dimensions of a cubic volume that would enclose the object (i.e., the extreme dimensions). Enter height by width by depth and indicate the unit of measure (inches, feet, etc.).

Always indicate if measurements are exact or approximate.

### MARKINGS:

Check as appropriate if the work is signed or dated. In the second section, record the text or form of any markings that appear on the work itself. These may include the artist's name and date. Indicate location and style of markings (e.g., Roman script, capital or lower case letters, etc.) and use a slash (/) between lines of text.

**SUBJECT:** Please give a brief description of the work, including its theme. In describing the work, start with the main element in the painting or sculpture and answer such questions as:  
--Who or what is being depicted?  
--How are they depicted? (reference postures, objects held, etc.)  
--What events are taking place?

For abstract works, you might describe the predominant forms, colors, shapes, sizes, or textures.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Please list any additional information you think would be helpful to a researcher. Such information might include, for example, biographical information on the sitter or artists (for lesser known sitters or artists), previous owners of the art work, or where a published illustration might be found.

If you have any further questions regarding reporting paintings or sculptures with the Inventories, please do not hesitate to contact us at:

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