



# Shipping Your Art

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Whether you are a “veteran” CPSA member or a “newbie,” the process of shipping your artwork to an exhibition can be challenging and expensive. Here are some things you can do to avoid extra charges, minimize mishaps or damage, and thwart Murphy’s Law.

First, assume that others who handle your art may not take the same care and concern that you do. All shipping companies, handlers, and storage companies work with bulk shipments for a profit. That said, getting your package to its destination in good condition rests with you. You are the first of many people who will be handling your work along its journey.

So, how can you get that precious artwork safely to its destination? There are three areas of concerns you need to attend to: the box, the paperwork, and the shipping company.

## It begins with the box

The recommended packaging is a professional box designed specifically to ship artwork. (You will find purchasing options at the end of this article.) These boxes have rigid, but lightweight, reinforced top, bottom, and sides that help support weight and prevent punctures. They usually come with a foam liner insert that can be adjusted to snugly fit your frame. All you need is the required paperwork (more on this later) and a loose wrapping, either lightweight brown or tissue paper, that can be reused for the return trip.



## If you want to reuse a box

- Reinforce the top, bottom, and sides with mat board or foam core.
- Create a foam cushion to completely surround the artwork so that it does not move around while shipping.
- Secure the foam to the box to prevent it from shifting or getting lost when the box is opened.

## NEVER use the following

- A box that is old, worn, or overly taped and labeled from previous shipments. The cartage company will mark this box as arriving in “poor” or “substandard” condition. It may not withstand a returned trip.
- Styrofoam peanuts! They are an absolute NO-NO under any circumstances.
- Excessive bubble wrap secured with excess tape. The tape must be cut away and renders the box unusable for return shipping. You will be charged for replacement shipping supplies.
- Plastic wrap that wraps around and around and around and around the art. Cutting away all that wrapping causes extra work for the handler and the wrapping is not reusable. Again, you will be charged for replacement supplies.
- Those little air bags that came in the art supplies you purchased online.
- Old fabric, cotton balls, stuffing, and other creative ways to cushion your artwork.

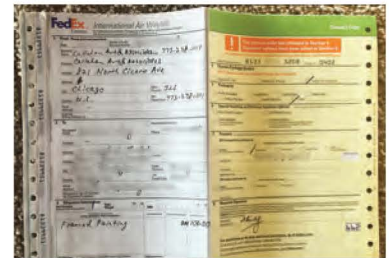
You can make an envelope out of bubble wrap. An idea from **Mary K Moehl, CPSA**, is to make an inner thermal envelope (taped on three sides for a custom fit) from a car windshield protector used to reduce heat in a parked car. The reflective materials on one side helps with fluctuations in temperatures during shipping.

Another good tip is to buy pipe insulators from a hardware store. These are hard foam tubes with a slit through them that easily fit around your frame to protect it from being bumped or scratched.

## The paperwork

Fill out paperwork completely. Make sure your writing is legible. Print and use black or blue ink, and make a copy for your records.

Be aware of the various labels and forms required for shipping your work (see examples here).



Shipping labels have a bar code (also called a QR or scan code) on them. First, you will need a shipping label addressed to the cartage company (not the gallery) and securely attached on the front side of the box. If you are using a recycled box, remove all old labels. You will also need to provide a return shipping label (addressed to you) for the cartage company to use when sending the box back.



Whether you print these labels yourself or have a carrier print them, be sure to copy both for your reference.

Shipping forms, on the other hand, are for the internal use of the cartage company and differ from year to year.



That shipping form, your return shipping label, the artist’s release statement, and any other required information should be inside an envelope attached to the wire on the back of your frame or artwork. On the outside of the envelope, write your first and last name and list the contents of the envelope.

Payments to cartage companies vary in procedure and amount. Check your shipping instructions for exact directions. If you are asked to pay through our CPSA website, payment must be made BEFORE you ship the work. If payment is to be made directly to the cartage company, include the check in the envelope with the return shipping label and release statement.

### Working with your shipping company

Check the shipping dates and don't wait until the last minute to get everything in order. Shipping "Express" does not always mean faster and it can be costly. "Ground" is less expensive and if you plan carefully, it should be a sufficient option for all U.S. locations. Once you know the shipping dates, your shipping company can give you a best estimate for arrival within the specified time. Items that arrive at the cartage company before or after the specified dates will cost you for extra handling. (Did I mention not waiting until the last minute?)

Do not check "signature required" on the shipping form. The cartage company will have to make special arrangements for pickup at a shipping hub with the cost passed on to you. And remember that you, not CPSA or the gallery, should be listed as the contact person with the shipping company.

And last, but not least, attach a label with your name, title of your art, and the name of the exhibition (do this for all shipping to art venues, not just CPSA) on the outside, lower left corner of the box. It helps the cartage company easily identify your box when it's time to repack.

### A few tips

- Do not seal up your box unless you are sure the return shipping label, shipping form, and any other



required paperwork are properly enclosed within.

- Always insure your work. Most shipping companies will allow added insurance.
- Do not use excessive tape on the box.
- Label with your first and last name all items in the box, including frame corners and any packaging materials that might be removed or lost.
- Do not specify a monetary value.
- Make a checklist, and check it twice.

This is a lot of information, and there are lots of rules for shipping, but your work has taken time and effort to create. Getting it to its destination safely and in good shape is worth the effort. And remember, we are here to help. Feel free to contact me at [exhibitions@cpsa.org](mailto:exhibitions@cpsa.org).

### Art box companies

- [www.airfloatsys.com](http://www.airfloatsys.com)
- [www.masterpak-usa.com/masterpak](http://www.masterpak-usa.com/masterpak)