Guidelines For Reproductions of Works of Art

Art museum directors are responsible for maintaining a climate of artistic integrity. Such integrity should therefore characterize all museum operations, including sales activities. In recent years, increasing enthusiasm for the arts has nurtured a growing market for items that go beyond those traditionally sold to complement the collections and exhibitions. These changing conditions must not compromise professional standards.

Income has been generated by art museums through the sale of such educational materials as catalogues, books, postcards, and reproductions. Recently, however, a proliferation of “art-derived” materials, coupled with the marketing of copies of original works, have created such widespread confusion as to require clarification if ethical standards of art museums are to be maintained.

To offer reproductions to the public as an adjunct to the work of art is one thing; to offer a surrogate for original works of art is quite another, and could lead to confusion in the public mind as to what constitutes originality in a work of art.

We endorse the educational role that reproductions can play as reminders of the original and as a way of making images of art widely accessible. There can be no quarrel with the manufacture and knowledgeable use of reproductions for teaching purposes or in a decorative context.

In view of these considerations, we recommend the following guidelines:

1. Museums, when producing and/or selling reproductions, should through the use of integral markings on the objects as well as signs, labels and advertising, clearly indicate that it is a reproduction. Signatures, print edition numbers, and printers' symbols or titles should not appear in the reproduction if in the original they occur outside the borders of the image. Similarly, signatures, edition numbers and/or foundry marks on sculpture should not appear on the reproduction.

2. Museums, when producing and/or selling reproductions of paintings and sculpture, should offer them in materials and/or size other than those used by the artist in the original work of art. It is recognized that reproductions of decorative arts serving functional purposes may pose special problems, but the fact that they are reproductions should be clearly indicated.

3. The so-called investment value sometimes touted in advertising is deplorable since the object or work being offered for purchase is not original and the resale value is highly in doubt. The retail pricing of reproductions should be in accord with cost effective and standard marketing practices.

4. When advertising these reproductions in public media, museums should not use language implying that there is any identity of quality between the copy and the original, or lead the potential buyer to believe that, by purchasing any such reproduction, he or she is in effect acquiring an original work of art.