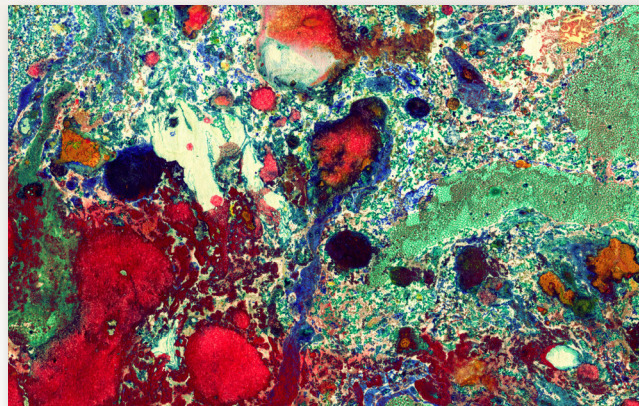


SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING AND FINE ART TRANSPORT



By Adrienne Reid and Isabelle de St. Antoine

Corporate initiatives to lower their own carbon footprint and cut operating costs have sparked recent discussions about transporting fine art by ocean freight.

This article explores some risk management factors and mitigation tips to consider when shipping via sea.

As sustainability is a focus area for the art market, cultural institutions and galleries are looking at implementing greener business practices to reduce their carbon footprint by reducing energy consumption, minimizing waste, and implementing more sustainable transportation methods¹. Specifically, the air transportation of objects incurs significant carbon emissions. Since ocean cargo utilizes around 80% less CO₂ than air cargo², sea transit has become a sustainable transit option for the art market.

WHAT ARE SOME RISKS FOR ARTWORK DURING SEA TRANSIT?

Artwork is vulnerable to potential damage when being transported. Approximately 60% of fine art claims are related to artwork damaged while in transit³ as artwork can suffer damage from inadequate packing, being dropped, or damages due to improper temperature controls during shipment.

Historically, the higher risk of sea freight over air freight have made both the art market and art insurers wary of the transit method.⁴

WHY?

- **Oversight:** There is limited oversight of artwork-packed containers at ports and onboard. Even if specific container placement directions are requested on the bill of lading, there is no guarantee that these directions will be followed at the port during freight loading.
- **Temperature and humidity controls:** Most artwork is highly sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity. According to studies on ocean cargo transit, the typical temperature range inside a shipping container can fluctuate between -21°F to 135°F, while relative humidity can vary from 40% to 90%.⁵ Sending art out to sea increases risks of exposing artwork to a range of climates, leading to damage.
- **Time:** Rather than a few days, shipment by sea can take weeks or months, prolonging the period in which the objects are at risk and outside of the owner's control. In addition, sea freight is subject to delays that often are unforeseen until after the voyage has commenced.

FINE ART INSURANCE AND OCEAN CARGO TRANSIT

Fine art insurance policies may not restrict or limit sea shipments. Although sea freight is not a recommended mode of transport for artwork, it is understood that this mode of transport is sometimes the only option for very large or heavy artworks which cannot fit in air cargo holds.⁶

As the shipping industry continues to develop new technology to better supervise and control packing, handling, and climate conditions, insurers are cautiously open to the idea of fine art being shipped by sea freight. For museum exhibitions seeking coverage through the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program administered by the National Endowment for the Arts, however, sea freight shipments are not currently an accepted mode of transport.⁷

Over, please.

For more information related to fine art insurance, please contact Huntington T. Block at HTBinfo@huntingtontblock.com

TIPS TO HELP SAFEGUARD OBJECTS DURING OCEAN TRANSPORT

- Consult with a conservator and determine if an object's condition is stable enough to withstand ocean cargo transit. An "Object First" approach seeks to prioritize preservation and protection of an object when planning transportation, exhibition, and display.
- Use a fine art packer and shipper who is knowledgeable and experienced in scheduling and overseeing sea freight shipping for art. The terminology, logistics, and protocol of ocean freight are different than that of air or truck freight, so it is important to work with a provider that is experienced with sea transit.
- Use temperature-controlled reefer Grade A containers and make sure that the artworks are packed in an exclusive FCL (Full Container Load) containers. FCL containers minimize handling, improve security, and mitigate contamination that is inherent in LCL (Less than Container Load), where multiple shipments share space in the same container. Make sure that the container is packed properly to allow for sufficient airflow of the container's ventilation system.⁸
- Seek guidance from conservators to determine the right amount of absorption polls and desiccants to include inside the container to absorb moisture and reduce condensation during the voyage.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As the art world continues to consider ocean cargo use for shipping to reduce carbon impact, the fine art insurance industry is working with their clients to understand their needs, support their sustainability objective, and offer risk management solutions for the safeguarding of their collections during transport. If ocean cargo is a mode of transport that you are considering using for your artwork, contact your broker ahead of time to discuss insurance coverage.

WHY HAVING A FINE ART BROKER IS IMPORTANT?

At Huntington T. Block, we understand that each collection is unique. Our fine art brokers provide our clients with personalized guidance. For more information, please contact a representative from Huntington T. Block at: HTBinfo@huntingtontblock.com.



For more information related to fine art insurance, please contact Huntington T. Block at HTBinfo@huntingtontblock.com



¹ *Mindful of Its Impact on the Planet, the Art World Aims for Sustainability* <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/23/arts/art-climate-change-environment.html>

² *New art sea shipping service promises 80% emissions reduction compared with air freight* <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/04/19/shippers-crozier-launch-art-sea-freight-service>

³ *60 Percent of Art Damage Claims Arise from Transport* <https://www.burnsandwilcox.com/60-percent-of-art-damage-claims-arise-from-transport/>

⁴ *Insurance for Sea Freight* <https://galleryclimatecoalition.org/ssc/insurance-for-sea-freight/>

⁵ *Temperature & Humidity in Ocean Containers* by David Leinberger <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/10676010/temperature-humidity-in-ocean-containers>

⁶ "The Federal Council requires each conveyance vehicle containing indemnified objects be accompanied by a courier on board. Vehicles must never be left unattended." Page 15: <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/FY25-International-Indemnity-Instructions-March2025-rev-8.9.24.pdf>

⁷ *Sea freight: unlocking the potential for international art transportation, page 12* https://assets.ctfassets.net/y3wgx2ncas6t/15KXlpAx4BAPQXRfrdX4k/9753a18fb89259a621937c07eda192c0/HW_2023-10_Sustainability_White-Paper-on-Sea-Freight_Final.pdf

⁸ Lloyd's Market Association (LMA) Joint Specie Committee Guidelines on Insurance for Sea Freight https://galleryclimatecoalition.org/usr/library/documents/ssc/gcc_ssc_lma_guidelines-on-insurance.pdf

This article is provided for general informational purposes only and is not intended to provide individualized advice. This article should not be viewed as a substitute for the guidance and recommendations of a retained professional and should not be construed as legal advice. All descriptions, summaries or highlights of coverage are for general informational purposes only and do not amend, alter, or modify the actual terms or conditions of any insurance policy. Coverage is governed only by the terms and conditions of the relevant policy.

Huntington T. Block Insurance Agency, Inc. is a licensed insurance producer in all states; Texas License #17489; operating in CA under license # 0825502.

© 2025 Huntington T. Block Insurance Agency, Inc.

N-14871-0425