

Guidelines for Signing Your Fine Art Prints

There are many different opinions about signing your fine art prints. Most gallery owners feel that a signed photo increases the value of the print since it shows a level of authenticity. There are many different opinions as to how and where to sign them. If you do a search online on the topic of signing fine art prints, you will find many different articles. Below is a summary of signing options, as well as the method recommended by the PASNWPA.

How and where to sign your print:

1. **Recommended method - Sign the print below and outside of the image area.** Sign the print in the lower right corner in the white border around the print. If you leave the white space around the image when you mat and frame the piece, it will be visible. However, even if you choose not to leave a white space and place your mat right up to the image, the signature will remain there permanently.

- a. Do not use ballpoint pens, gel pens, uniball pens or any other “regular” pens or Sharpies as they can smear and/or bleed over time which will detract from your print. It is recommended that you use a mechanical pencil such as a Pentel P209 with a 2B lead. However, for other papers with a gloss coating it is better to use a pen which is archival and acid free and doesn't fade or discolor. For example, Sakura Pigma Pens. See links below to these recommended pens and pencils.
- b. If signing in this area, it is recommended that you include the print number (for limited edition prints), date (or year), title and your signature.

For limited edition prints, the left-hand corner should include the print number and total print inventory. For example, print 4 of 50 would read as 4/50. You can also include the date, if desired.

In the middle, you can add the title, if you wish to include it.

The right-hand side is the most important - your signature. Your signature is your brand, so it should be creative and distinctive, but also consistent. This should be your “artist” signature not the signature you use to sign checks!

2. **Just make the print with your digital signature.** This is certainly the easiest option since most photographers include their digital signature on prints when posting online. Most of the articles researched do not recommend this approach. An actual signature adds more value than one that was printed digitally. However, it is an easy option.

If you do decide to print the photograph with your digital signature, be sure it is not a prominent feature of the print and is placed in an appropriate place on the photograph – usually the lower right-hand corner. Since it is done digitally, the color can be changed to coordinate with your print so that it does not detract from the image.

3. **Sign the mat.** This is also a relatively easy way to sign, however, if the mat/frame for the photo is ever changed, the signature is lost. The same cautions apply in terms of using archival pencils and pens.

4. **Sign on the back of the print.** Again, use extreme caution. A graphite pencil works best or you can use an archival pigment pen as mentioned above. It is recommended that you sign in the corner of the print without applying a lot of pressure. Test your paper in advance to ensure that it does not bleed through to the front of the photo. Another thought on this approach is that if you dry mount your photos for framing, obviously the signature will be lost.
5. **Sign the actual print.** Extreme caution should be used with this option. Not all pens will work well on a printed photograph. Make sure that the pen is photo safe and of an archival quality. The pen should be tested on a test print prior to signing the actual print.
6. **Alternatives to signing or in addition to signing:**
 - a. **Certificate of Authenticity** – This is a document printed on Fine Art Paper and attached to the back of the framed photo and can include the following information:
 - i. Title
 - ii. Print Size
 - iii. Date Taken
 - iv. Date Printed
 - v. Print #
 - vi. Total Prints
 - vii. Copyright information
 - viii. Artist’s signature
 - b. **Print Embossing** – for anyone concerned about signing a photographic print, another option is to have a stamp created with your signature and/or logo. This requires that you create a design that meets your need and then order the stamp to be made

If you do choose to sign your photographs, it is recommended that you consider the following:

- Your signature, regardless of which method you use, should be consistent each time you use it so that it is recognizable.
- Your signature should be small and inconspicuous and not a prominent feature of your print.
- Practice, practice, practice! Make sure you are happy with your signature prior to working on an actual print.

For further reading:

Below are links to articles if you wish to learn more about signatures on prints.

Signing Your Prints:

<https://www.theartistsprintroom.co.uk/signing-fine-art-prints/>

<https://imagescience.com.au/knowledge/signing-inkjet-prints>

<https://improvephotography.com/52815/where-do-photographers-sign-prints/>

<https://www.adorama.com/alc/increase-the-value-of-your-fine-art-digital-photography-prints/>

Archival Pens and Pencils, COA, and Embosser

Pentel P209 Automatic Pencil:

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Pentel+P209+Automatic+Pencil%3A&crd=V2V0G6PV68RL&sprefix=pentel+p209+automatic+pencil+%2Caps%2C64&ref=nb_sb_noss

Pentel Mechanical Pencil with 2B Lead:

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Pentel+Mechanical+Pencil+with+2B+Lead&crd=Y00L4ZIYZSA&sprefix=pentel+mechanical+pencil+with+2b+lead%2Caps%2C67&ref=nb_sb_noss

Sakura Pigma Pens:

https://www.amazon.com/s?k=sakura+pigma+pens&crd=M5W1H01NYWXK&sprefix=sakura+pigma+pens%2Caps%2C84&ref=nb_sb_noss_1

Certificate of Authenticity (COA)

<https://www.keptlight.com/how-do-you-sign-your-photographs/>

Signature Stamp:

<https://makingamark.blogspot.com/2009/05/creating-signature-on-your-art.html>