

## We Wuz Robbed!!

By George Leeson

**T**he crime scene: A huge conference room at the World Congress Center in Atlanta.

*The victims:* Dozens of open and limited edition art publishers.

*The evidence:* Hundreds of knocked-off artworks stacked against the walls, enough to start a small trade show of their own.

*Time of the crime:* Then. Tomorrow. Right now.

*The crime:* You guessed it: Copyright infringement.

The pirated images on display that day two years ago at DecorExpo were courtesy of my colleagues, Garry Peters of Art in Motion and John Chester of Wild Apple. The images were but a fraction of the knockoffs that the two had found on previous trips to China. They were also a collective punch-in-the-gut to



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my fellow art publishers, many of whom had heard about the problem but had never confronted it in such dramatic fashion.

But if pirated art is a major headache for art publishers, it can also be a pain in the neck for framing companies and retailers. That's because, under copyright law, legal culpability for knockoffs flows up and down the supply chain. If a picture framer even unknowingly sells pirated art to a retailer, both the framer and the retailer have legal exposure. And it's no secret that art publishers, frustrated in their efforts to stop the problem in China, are turning their investigative and legal efforts toward framers and retailers.

Founded four years ago primarily by open-edition publishers, the Washington, D.C.-based Art Copyright Coalition has developed several weapons to go after art pirates. It shares and disseminates information about knockoffs, assembles "joint enforcement teams" to seek

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legal redress against infringing retailers and websites, tracks containers arriving from China, and has even formed an impressive lobbying effort in Congress to amend a proposed new law that would make it easier to infringe art under the banner of "orphan works."

In addition, the Art Copyright Coalition is now working with several framers and retailers who want to make sure they are not selling pirated art, especially art that comes from China. Because China is the place where the main culprits are located, there's reason to think the problem of knockoffs will eventually cure itself. Why?

Think Japan. Think of all those internationally recognized Japanese brands—Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi, Mazda, Yamaha, Sony, Hitachi, Nintendo.

Now think China. Think of the brands we associate with that country—none, nada, zippo. The day that China develops its own brands is the day the Chinese government begins to enforce copyright law, just as the Japanese government does today.

In the meantime, several major framing companies have joined the Art Copyright Coalition. I urge more to do so. The more resources we have in the fight, the easier will be the fight.

To those framing companies that are sympathetic to the plight of artists and art publishers but just don't think that this is their fight, I would make one final appeal: Lost business. When knockoffs flow straight from China to major American retailers, picture framing companies lose business, too.

To find more information about the ACC, you can go to [www.artcc.org](http://www.artcc.org) or call 202-344-8500. You'll be helping yourself and the entire framed art industry. ■