

TPS Tech Sheet 27

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Do You Sign Your Work?

Introduction

At least several times a year I receive a call from some one asking if I wanted them to sign their image. I always reply, "If you are proud of the image sign it, if not, don't sign it." It is surprising how many images we receive that have been accepted into our exhibitions that are unsigned on the front, nor do they have a name on the back. Currently, I am sending back the prints accepted into *TPS 19: The International Competition*, 57 images in total.

Over 1/3 of the images do not have an artists name on them. A summary of my findings follows:

Members' Signing Prints

Total prints 57 / Number / Percentage

Front of image or mount board

No name	31	54.4%
Name below image	16	28.1%
Name on mount board	10	17.5%

Back of print / mount board

No name	21	36.9%
Written name	19	33.3%

I asked several gallery owners their opinions regarding artists signing of photographs: Missy Finger, Photographs Do Not Bend, Dallas; Ben Breard, The Afterimage Gallery, Dallas; Kat Kiernan, Kiernan Gallery, Lexington, VA and Amanda Smith: A Smith Gallery, Johnson City.

Signing your image

As a gallery owner, do you have a preferred method for the artist to sign their image?

Missy Finger: In pencil on print verso making sure their signature is not so heavy it indents the paper. Would love to see the photograph date and the print date. When the prints are too large and need mounting, the artist needs to provide a signature label to adhere to the back of mount. Signature, title, date, print date and edition (if numbered).

Ben Breard: I really don't have any preferred method, as long as the print itself is signed. If the print is dry mounted, then the mount must be signed somewhere. All my clientele wants to know is that there is an official signature somewhere. Now, some caveats: if you sign the back (or as we say in the trade, "verso") of a print, don't press so hard that your pen pressure goes through to the print surface on the other side (I've seen prints by famous photographers with this problem). Use ink that doesn't fade (another very common problem!). Pencil will solve this particular problem. If you sign on the "recto", just under the image on the print border or on the mount, don't make it large and obtrusive. Also, if you have a lousy signature that just isn't pretty to look at, keep it to the back of the print!

Kat Kiernan: I prefer one of two ways: a) signature on the mat on the lower right hand corner (with edition number if applicable). b) signature on 1/4" of white border on the image (lower right hand corner). If the image is matted and the artist does not wish to sign the mat, then the print should have 1/4" of white border before the mat and the signature should be on that border. If the image is framed so that there is no space between the frame and the image (no border of any kind and no mat, or if it is dry mounted), then it is acceptable not to have a signature on the front of the piece. However, if the front of the piece cannot be signed, there should absolutely be a signature on the back of the piece.

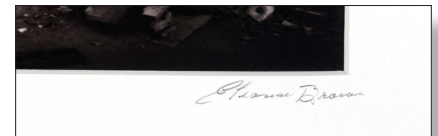
There is some debate about the placement of a signature. Some argue that signing the image itself (on a border) is best, because if the mat and frame are ever damaged or the piece gets reframed at some point, the value of the signature will not be lost. For example, I recently viewed an exhibition of Walker Evans' work. His signatures were only found on the prints themselves. It is possible that he had signed mats but over the years they hadn't held up and thus the signed prints were more valuable. However, not every artist likes the look of the white border before the mat. Ulti-

mately, I think the total presentation of the framing is more important than the location of the signature. If the piece looks odd with the print border, sign the mat.

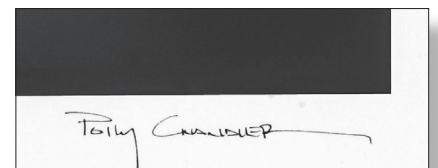
Amanda Smith: The signature should be on the print itself either on the front or back border of the image. The sig-

Example of Print Signing

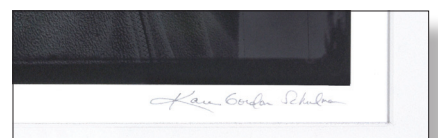
Note: Tonalites exaggerated.



Eleanor Brown [Austin] signs the over mat board in pencil.



Polly Chandler [Austin] neatly signs the print, below the image, in pen.



Karen Gordon Schulman [Steamboat Spgs, CO] dry mounts the print and signs the mount board in pencil.

nature should be small, neat and in black. Signing on the image itself is detracting and should be avoided. Many people sign on the overmat on

the lower right hand of the cutout beneath the image. This is certainly acceptable, but should be accompanied by a signature on the print as well. The

overmats can become damaged and in need of replacement, hence signature on the print itself is necessary.

Artists stamps for the mount board

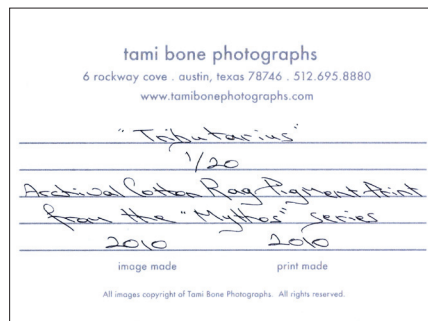
Do most of your artist use an Artists Stamp on the back of the mount board?

Missy Finger: No.

Ben Breard: A lot of them do, but not everyone. One must be careful with stamps. On the back of the mount board they are fine, but sometimes on the back of a print itself, the ink will eventually leach through to the print surface on the other side. This usually doesn't happen, but occasionally it does. It's helpful if you put the year the photograph was taken and the year the print was made.

Kat Kiernan: I have very few artist who use an "Artist Stamp" on the back of their piece, but I am very pleased when they do. Stamps or clear labels (similar to return address labels) are excellent. Much like writing your name on every page of an application, having your name on every piece of your work is extremely valuable. The exhibitor's form, the stamp on the back of the piece, and a business card should all arrive in the same package in case anything gets separated. This also helps the gallery if there is confusion when creating the exhibition labels to put under the pieces.

Amanda Smith: I see very few "artists stamps."



Artists Stamp.
Tami Bone – Austin, TX

Pet Peeve on signing image

What is your pet peeve regarding artists signing their image?

Missy Finger: Never sign in the image!

Ben Breard: I suppose the main pet peeve would be signing on the image itself in gold lettering. Fortunately I

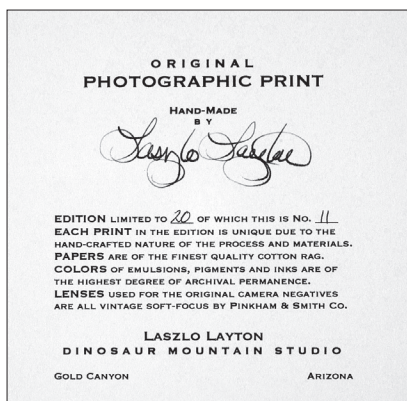
seldom see this. It's fine for a portrait studio but not a photographic art gallery. Another pet peeve is no signature at all, anywhere.

Kat Kiernan: Please stop signing pieces with a dull pencil. If you must sign a piece in pencil (although you should invest in a proper mat signing pen

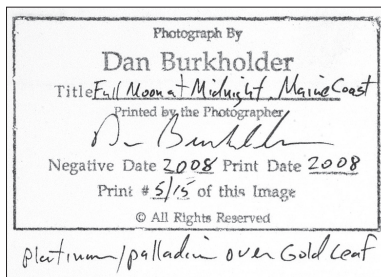
that won't bleed and is acid free), it must be sharp. Pencil fades and over time and a dull point will only make it look faded faster.

Amanda Smith: Signing on the print itself and/or embossing a logo on the print.

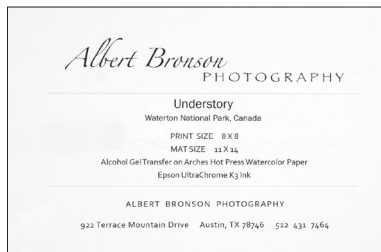
Photographers' Stamp



Filled in printed card
Laszlo Layton – Gold Canyon, AZ



Filled in stamp
Dan Burkholder – Palenville, NY



Printed card for each image.
Albert Brunson – Austin, TX



Business card and
printed label for each image.
Adrienne Defendi – Palo Alto, CA

The Texas Photographic Society is a non-profit organization of amateur and professional photographers with over 1,200 members from 46 states and 7 countries.

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Texas Photographic Society
6338 N. New Braunfels #174
San Antonio TX 78209
www.texasphoto.org