

Artist's Copyright Protection Checklist

Every step an artist should take — before, during, and after — to protect their creative work.

01 BEFORE YOU PUBLISH

- Keep dated sketches, drafts, and source files for every project
- Save AI / PSD / SVG files with creation dates embedded in metadata
- Use descriptive filenames that include your name and date
- Screenshot early versions as you work — timestamped evidence matters
- Document collaborator contributions clearly and in writing

02 WHEN YOU PUBLISH

- Display the copyright symbol: © [Year] [Your Name] on all work
- Embed copyright metadata directly into image files before uploading
- Watermark images you share publicly on social media or portfolios
- Post at reduced resolution on social — retain full-res originals
- Screenshot your original post date as timestamped proof

03 REGISTER YOUR COPYRIGHT

- Register with the U.S. Copyright Office at copyright.gov (\$45–\$65)
- Register BEFORE publishing when possible — maximizes protection
- Register within 3 months of publication to preserve statutory damages
- Pre-infringement registration = up to \$150K per work + attorney's fees
- Keep your registration certificate and confirmation number on file

04 IF YOU DISCOVER INFRINGEMENT

- Screenshot everything with the URL visible — capture date and time
- Document where it appears: products, platforms, campaigns, stores
- Do NOT contact the brand, post publicly, or send a C&D on your own
- Locate your copyright registration certificate immediately
- Consult an IP attorney immediately — statutes of limitations apply

05 ONGOING PROTECTION

- Set Google Alerts for your name, signature, and distinctive titles
- Run periodic reverse image searches (Google Images, TinEye)
- Maintain a portfolio log: title, creation date, registration number
- Use a written licensing agreement for any permitted use of your work
- Review social media TOS — know what rights you may have granted

Think a brand copied your work?

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