July 7, 2015

Dear Copyright Office,

I have been a practicing visual artist, musician, and poet for my entire life (more than 55 years). I am a graduate of Harvard College (Music) and I have an MBA (Finance). I have won many awards for my painting and poetry. As a flutist, I have performed in orchestras for 43 years.

I believe the existing copyright laws on visual art should be retained. As a visual artist, I make many paintings. It would be onerous and expensive to register every single painting I make – hundreds each year. In addition to being onerous, it would create additional costs on the part of the government (staff, processing, computers) that would have to be paid by taxpayers like myself.

I routinely license my work for use by calendars, book publishers, and in other settings. My images appear on gallery websites. I have been hesitant to create my own personal website for fear of impending changes in the copyright laws like what is now being proposed. It is important for me to know who is using my work and where.

Over the years, I have seen many blatant and flagrant violations of the laws. People come into galleries where my works are hanging and take photographs that will likely be enlarged, printed and hung on walls, without my permission. I have seen copies of paintings by other artists sold as if they were originals. I have seen paintings of photographs by very famous photographers being sold as originals. If artists are to make any money in the business of visual art, their works must be automatically protected. Otherwise, there would be hours and days of busywork required to register every image. And the expense of fighting these lawsuits would be prohibitive for artists, thereby taking away any protection of the "original work." In fact, the proposed changes, in my opinion, basically take away the copyrights of all artists except the very wealthy, who have the funds to challenge infringement. The proposed changes would be regressive, contrary to our government's approach to taxation.

My work does not lose value upon publication. Sometimes it is "published" online in connection with advertising for a gallery show. The artwork is still for sale and retains its entire value. No one else should be able to use or reproduce the image without my permission.

We stand by our copyright laws on the written word. Students are punished for plagiarizing. Entire lawsuits have been fought over a musical phrase.

Visual art must not be treated any differently. It would be a disservice to artists, to their lifetimes of dedication, and it would be detrimental to the paucity of income that we already scrape to earn.

Thank you for hearing my concerns.
Rosanne Sterne