

Acquiring Modern Inventorying Technology to Serve a Modern Art Legend

By Yaniv Risman

We've been using Web as an efficient sales and marketing tool and successfully employed a moveware system for a while, but a recently completed "once in a lifetime" project has taken us to the whole new technological level. What was so unique about the project? Well... everything, starting with the shipper—one of the most famous modern Russian artists, who's decided to move within 20 days from a huge estate in New York state to an even bigger chateau in France.

Our pre-move survey showed that it'd take 16 x (!) 40' high cube (HC) containers to carry the content of five buildings (one of them being off-premises self-storage warehouse turned into a painting studio) that hosted various painting, sculpture and ceramic studios. The total container count quickly ran up to 19 x 40' HC units after the artist has nonchalantly decided that we also need to ship a huge collection of cast iron bollards (1- to 3-ton dock cleats used for docking commercial ships), numerous 6-foot bronze statues and sculptures scattered all over the estate.

And then there was a fine arts collection to deal with. The requirement was that Sea & Air International, Inc. produce an electronic fine arts inventory with each piece of art numbered (and labeled), photographed and described in great detail (item name, collection subcategory, title, author, year and notes). The final inventory (which looked more like a gallery catalog) would have to be printed and handed over to the shipper right away. We had to decide quickly how we're going to handle this because the art tenders (had to get the crew that works with Sotheby's and leading Manhattan galleries to satisfy the customer) couldn't touch the artwork prior to its getting labeled, photographed and inventoried. The alternatives were to either hire a highly specialized fine arts inventorying company or acquire the right technology to do the job. But what would that mysterious right technology be, if it existed at all?

We asked around and were referred to Toronto-based Voxme Software. It appeared as if they had exactly what we needed, which is on-site labeling, a handheld that allows to record detailed packing inventory with pictures and, most important, on-site training and presence. So we've decided to get the system and learn on the job, which meant that

Voxme would dispatch their member to do the on-site training and help our staff record the fine arts inventory. The initial estimate of the collection size, provided by the artist, was around 400 pieces so we figured that one and a half days would be enough. Well, it took four very long days and the final inventory count stood at 1725 (well, almost—the artist asked to print off 100 more labels for some more collectibles that his wife would bring from their Soho studio, photograph and send the pictures and the description to the office to add to the inventory). Thanks to the continuous on-site presence of Max Kreynin from Voxme and the endless dedication of our staff, we got it done. The artist looked genuinely shocked when we handed him the CD with the inventory in the requested format (item description with a small picture next to it, clicking on the small picture would display its full size version) the next day.

That's how we've acquired labeling and fine arts inventory technology (along with invaluable logistics experience and exposure to Michail Chemiakine's art). Do we stop our development here? Well, apparently Voxme has just the right in-residence survey tool...

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Above: Artist Michail Chemiakine and Max Kreynin (general manager at Voxme) have found common language. At right: Part of the high-value shipment.



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