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Protecting Art, Preserving Heritage: Greece's New Legal Framework for Artworks and Collectibles

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Introduction

Law 5271/2026 ("New Law"), published in the Government Gazette on 30 January 2026, marks an important turning point for the protection of works of art and collectible objects in Greece.

Until its adoption, Greek law did not provide a dedicated legal framework to address some of the most serious risks facing the art market and the country's cultural heritage, namely forgery, unlawful circulation, damage and destruction of artworks.

The New Law seeks to close that gap. It introduces a specific criminal offence covering the manufacture, falsification and circulation of forged artworks, while also amending the Greek Penal Code to criminalize the damage or destruction of publicly displayed artworks.

In doing so, the New Law brings into the Greek legal landscape a level of protection that had long been missing, while reinforcing the State's broader effort to safeguard Greece's invaluable artistic and cultural heritage. The key provisions of the New Law are summarized below.

Key Definitions

*A "**work of art**" is defined as any work of artistic creation, in particular in the fields of the visual arts such as painting, sculpture, engraving, drawing, ceramics, photography and tapestry, the applied arts such as architectural drawings and models, graphic design and decorative art as well as art forms that make use of science and technology.*

*A "**collectible object**" is defined as any object with the characteristics required to be included in a collection, being relatively rare, not ordinarily used for its original purpose, the subject of a special transaction outside the ordinary commerce of practically useful similar objects and having significant value.*

Criminal Offence: Forgery

According to the New Law, any person who, with the intent to deceive as to the identity of the creator, the provenance, date, nature or composition of a work, manufactures, falsifies, exhibits, circulates, distributes, transfers, possesses or receives in their possession in any manner a work of art or collectible object, is punished by imprisonment of at least six (6) months and a fine of at least €5.000.

The penalties are significantly aggravated in the following instances:

- *Where the work or collectible object possesses a value exceeding €120.000, the penalty is imprisonment of up to ten (10) years and a fine between €10.000 and €300.000.*
- *Where the object has a particularly high value and the offence was committed by way of profession.*
- *Where the offence was committed on a commercial scale.*
- *Where the offence was committed by two or more persons, organized to commit similar*

offences or within the framework of a criminal organization.

- *Where the offender is professionally active in the field of art and collectible objects, the court shall additionally impose, as an ancillary penalty, a prohibition on practising the profession, through the participation in the management and/or operation of a business/legal entity, for a period between three (3) months and five (5) years.*

Independent Department of Works of Art

The New Law provides for the creation of an Independent Department of Works of Art established within the Ministry of Culture, operating under the General Directorate of Contemporary Culture. Its key role is to maintain an electronic register of the works of art and collectible objects falling within the scope of the New Law.

Registry of Sworn Experts

A further important innovation is the establishment of a Registry of Sworn Experts for works of art and collectible objects within the Ministry of Culture. These Experts will be responsible for assessing the authenticity of artworks and collectible objects, either at the request or order of the competent authorities or following a relevant petition by private persons.

Damage to Artworks - New Article 378A introduced in the Greek Penal Code

Another key development is the introduction of a new criminal offence for damage to artworks and collectible objects displayed or stored in public spaces or in premises of the State, local authorities, or museums of the Ministry of Culture or museums supervised or recognized by it.

Under the new Article 378A of the Greek Penal Code, any person who destroys, damages, pollutes, alters the form of or renders impossible or difficult the use of such an artwork or collectible object, is punished by imprisonment of at least two (2) years and a fine of at least €2.000. Where the act is committed negligently, the penalty is imprisonment of up to one (1) year or a fine.

The penalties are further aggravated where the work of art or collectible object has a value exceeding €120.000 and the offence is committed within the framework of a criminal organization or by two or more persons acting together. In such cases the penalty may reach imprisonment of up to ten (10) years and a fine of at least €10.000.

Final Thoughts

The New Law fills a long-standing gap in Greek legislation by introducing, for the first time, a dedicated and comprehensive framework for the protection of artworks and collectible objects. By combining targeted criminal offenses with new institutional safeguards, the New Law responds to risks that have long affected the Greek art world, from forgery and unlawful circulation to the damage or destruction of culturally significant works.

Its importance, however, goes beyond the creation of new offences. The New Law signals a clear legislative shift: works of art and collectible objects are to be treated not merely as private assets, but as cultural goods deserving enhanced legal protection. In doing so, it strengthens the fight against serious art crime, supports confidence in the Greek art market and reinforces Greece's broader commitment to preserving its artistic and cultural heritage.

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