

## **About prints**

A print is a work of art made by transferring an image from one surface to another (usually onto paper and usually in multiple impressions). Traditional methods fall into four general areas: intaglio (incising an image into a metal plate via these techniques: engraving, drypoint, etching, aquatint); relief (carving around an image in wood or linoleum so the remaining image receives and transfers ink to the paper; includes woodcuts, Japanese color woodblock prints, and linoleum cuts); lithography (a drawing in greasy crayon or liquid called tusche is made on a stone or aluminum plate to which ink will adhere and print on paper); and screenprint (ink is pushed through a stencil-like image on a fine mesh screen with a squeegee). There are variants of all of these, of course, as well as unique prints like monotypes, but these are the basics.

The question “is it an original work of art” has a long history of debate, which has been thoroughly parsed by the Print Council of America. People often ask about editions and if there is more than one, how are they considered original works of art and not copies. Basically, it has to do with the artist’s intention. The good news is because there are multiple impressions of a print, more than one person can own it.

Here is a more thorough explanation from the International Fine Print Dealers Association:

“A print is a work of graphic art that has been conceived by the artist to be realized as an original work of art, rather than a copy of a work in another medium. Prints are produced by drawing or carving an image onto a hard surface (known as a matrix) such as a wood block, metal plate, or stone. This surface is then inked, and the image is transferred to paper or another material by the application of pressure, thus creating an impression, or print. The printed image that results is the exact reverse of the image on the plate.

“Unlike paintings or drawings, prints usually exist in multiple impressions, each of which has been created from the same inked plate. Artists began to sign and number each impression around the turn of the 20th century to ensure that only the impressions they intended to make would be in circulation. The set of identical impressions (prints) made from an individual matrix created by the artist, either working alone or in conjunction with a master printer is called an edition. Plates are not to be used in subsequent printing runs without the artist’s explicit authorization. The process of printing the edition is therefore just as important to the authenticity of a print as the act of inscribing the image onto the plate.”

**Editions** are the idea of creating a limited number of impressions of a particular work of art. The number in any given edition is decided upon by the artist and printer. As impressions are sold reducing availability, an artificial rarity may create demand.

In contemporary prints, edition numbers are indicated on the face of the print, shown in the form of a fraction. The numerator indicates the number in the sequence of impressions, and the denominator indicates the total number in the edition. While 1/25 may seem more desirable than 25/25, there is really no difference in the quality of these prints.

### **Proofs outside the numbered edition**

**B.A.T.** stands for *bon à tirer*, a French phrase meaning good to pull. This is the impression that the artist has approved and is the one to which all subsequent impressions will be compared.

**T.P.** stands for trial proof, which indicates an experimental proof pulled in the process of determining the final image. These can vary wildly from the final as an artist experiments with different colors or combinations of elements.

**State proof** is an impression printed during the course of the matrix's development. A print can go through multiple stages and many printers pull impressions to check progress as they go. Generally, few impressions of these states are pulled.

**A.P.** stands for artist's proof, which is made at the time of the general edition and is counted outside of the edition's published number. These are impressions reserved for the artist and sometimes come on the market.

**P.P.** stands for printer's proof, which is made at the time of the general edition and is counted outside of the edition's published number. These are impressions reserved for the printer(s) and sometimes come on the market.

**Chopmarks** are embossed (inkless) stamps on the face of a print that indicate who printed the work. Chops exist for shops and sometimes for individual printers. These help to identify the printer and validate the work's authenticity. Actors in this area include the artist, the printer, and the publisher. Sometimes the printer is the publisher, too. Secondary market dealers are involved when a print comes back onto the market after the initial owner is looking to sell it.

**Catalogue raisonné** is an annotated list of an artist's works, generally organized chronologically. For prints, a catalogue raisonné provides information on states, edition sizes, techniques, and other pertinent information. Scholars and collectors depend on these tomes to catalogue works in their collections.

### **Caring for prints and works on paper**

Works on paper (drawings, prints, photographs) are highly susceptible to changes in temperature and humidity as well as light whether direct or indirect. Archivaly framed

prints should be hung away from direct sunlight, away from radiators, and, if possible, on interior walls to avoid drastic changes in temperature.

Works on paper need to be framed and/or stored with high quality, archival materials. For instance, cardboard should not be in direct contact with your work of art. It will discolor the paper over time due to its acidity. Storage in basements and attics is not recommended.

If you find yourself in need of a paper conservator, one may be found through the directory of the American Institute for Conservation.