

Original Print:

An original print is an image that has been conceived by the artist as a print and executed solely as a print, usually in a numbered edition and signed by the artist. Each print in the edition is an original, printed from a plate, stone, screen, block or other matrix created for that purpose. There is no one original print form which copies are made. Each print is inked and pulled individually; it is a multi-original medium. The artist decides the number of prints in the edition. The sequential numbering provides an accounting for the number of prints in the edition. Each print has a specific number, i.e. 12/25 (the edition is 25, the particular print is numbered 12).

There is no greater or lesser value attached to a low numbered print than a high numbered print since each print is inked individually and is an original. However any plate wears down eventually, and thus later pullings of drypoints, mezzotints, engravings or woodcuts may not be as desirable as earlier pulls.

It is interesting to note that the numbering of prints has only in the last one hundred years become a standard convention. Prior to the mid 19th century, prints were not numbered or signed in pencil.

Reproduction:

A reproduction has no relationship whatsoever to an original print. It is a photo-mechanical copy of a work of art conceived by the artist in another medium (painting, watercolour, etc.). Numbering and signing a reproduction does not change its essence; it is still a reproduction of a painting, watercolour, etc. It is not an original print.

A clear differentiation can be made between an original etching, lithograph, silkscreen or woodcut and a photo-mechanical reproduction of a work originally conceived by the artist in another medium. Fuzzy or vague terminology such as "litho print", "fine art print", etc., must be eliminated since these terms are misleading and cause great confusion in the print market. A reproduction must be labeled a reproduction. It is important that the buying public know when a work is a reproduction, especially in the case of a signed limited edition reproduction.

The following are the main methods used by artists in the creation of original prints.

Intaglio: Engraving, Etching, Drypoint, Aquatint, Mezzotint.

In intaglio printing, a plate, usually of metal, is used and the lines or areas that create the image are engraved into the plate by sharp incising tools or bitten by acid. Once the plate has been fully prepared and inked, it is "pulled" through the press under great pressure, forcing dampened paper into the grooves to pick up the ink thus forming the image. The plate is inked again for the next print. While the plate used is the same for each print in the edition, each print is inked individually. If two prints from the edition are held up side by side, variations can be seen easily. Each inking is a unique process. The plate mark (edge of the plate area) usually shows up on the paper as a line of indentation.

A) **Engraving:** There is no acid bite, the copper plate image is engraved with a metal gouge or burin.

B) **Etching:** The plate is coated with a thin, waxy ground that is impervious to strong acid. The etcher draws through the ground with an etching needle to expose the copper beneath. The plate is immersed in acid and "bitten" or etched. After the etching process is completed, the plate is taken out of the acid and the ground is removed with solvent. The plate is then inked and wiped so that the ink is captured in the etched lines of the copper.

C) **Drypoint:** Drypoint is achieved by drawing directly on the plate with a steel needle that throws up a ridge or metal known as the burr. The burr holds the ink and gives the printed line a velvety quality. Because of the fragility of the burr, a large edition cannot be pulled since the burr wears down quickly.

Proof: An impression taken at any stage from the plate or stone, i.e. Artist's proof, trial or working proof, etc. These are outside the edition number decided by the artist. Some artists number all proofs, i.e. Trial proof II/III, thus keeping strict control over all proofs. Not all artists show or exhibit their working proofs.

D) **Aquatint:** Aquatint is essentially a tonal rather than a linear process. To prepare the plate, powdered resin or asphalt is fused to the plate by

heat. This leaves minute interstices that, when bitten by acid, result in a finely pitted surface.

E) **Mezzotint:** The mezzotint method produces a deep velvety black in the print. The plate is roughened by a metal roller with sharp teeth, (a rocker). This roughened area holds the ink to produce a deep black area. The engraver must work from dark to light to create the image by scraping and burnishing the copper.

Relief: Woodcut, Wood Engraving, Linocut.

The surface of a block of wood is carved away to leave the areas of the design standing in relief. The block is then inked, and the image printed from the raised lines. More than one block is usually used for a multi-coloured image. The two most common processes are woodcut and wood engraving. Other materials in addition to wood are also used, i.e. linocut.

Cancellation of Plate: The traditional method is for the artist to cancel the plate with some distinguishing mark when the edition has been completed.

Restrike: This usually refers to the reprinting of a plate, sometimes unsigned and not numbered and sometimes printed after the artist's death. Its market value is generally much less than a print from the original edition.

Varied Edition: An edition in which the artist purposely makes changes in colour or changes in paper from print to print.

Planographic: Lithography and Silkscreen

The printing surface is flat (as opposed to relief or the "bitten-into" process of intaglio). There is no indented plate line defining the boundaries of the print. There are two main media in this category.

A) **Lithography:** the lithographic process involves drawing on certain kinds of smooth, porous stone with a special type of wax pencil. The stone, prepared using acid, gum arabic, and water, accepts ink applied with a roller to the drawn areas, but repels the ink over the rest of its dampened surface. The print is "pulled" under great pressure. The stone or plate must be re-inked for each subsequent print in the edition. Several stones or plates can be used for a multi-

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Prints

Guidelines & Definitions

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coloured print. The same stone can be ground down and used for future lithographs.

- B) Silkscreen or Serigraph: These two names are synonymous. The silkscreen is covered by a stencil, which helps to determine the design of the image. Coloured ink is applied through the screen by means of a squeegee. For each colour in a print, a new screen is prepared. Differences can be found from one print to another in an edition usually due to the differences in pressure on the squeegee.

Framing: Works on paper are highly susceptible to light, pollution and other atmospheric conditions. It is imperative that these works be properly framed with acid free mat board. Professional advice is advisable.

Other Techniques:

Besides the basic processes described above, there are numerous other methods by which artists create original prints, often combining a number of methods in one edition. All the following methods are related to greater or lesser degree to the main processes.

- **Antiquated Methods:** A number of printmaking methods that were invented and used in past centuries are still employed by contemporary artists. Some of these are photogravure, cliché verre, blind embossing, frottage, rubbing, monotype (or monoprint), etc.
- **More Recent Methods and Technologies:** Collagraphy, xerography, plaster printing, cello cut, laser/lris prints, rubber stamps, metal print (collage intaglio), etc.

Artists have always experimented with and exploited new technologies and materials in their work. All of the now-established methods of producing original prints – intaglio, relief, lithography, and screen-printing – were first used for commercial purposes. Before the invention of photography, lithographic drawings and engraved plates were used to print images in magazines. Most signs, banners, and election posters were and continue to be produced by screen-printing. Artists are now using newer, contemporary technologies – laser printers, digitalized colour and advanced photocopying (xerography) techniques – to produce original prints.

In the same way that a photo-lithographic reproduction of an oil painting is not an original print,

a straight photocopy of a pen and ink drawing would also not be considered an original print, regardless of whether it is signed and numbered. If a xerograph is to be considered an original print, the artist must have been integrally involved in the xerograph's creation in such a manner that the effect of the work could not be achieved in quite the same way by another means. A xerograph claiming to be an original print should meet the above criteria and should be clearly labeled and advertised as a xerograph.

Regardless of the technology used, an original print is conceived and executed as a print, not as a reproduction of work in another medium.

The preceding information has been provided by the Professional Art Dealers Association of Canada as a guide only. More extensive information is available from books on prints and printmaking.

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