

IFPDA

What is a Print?

A print is a work of graphic art which 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 are called an edition. Plates are not to be used in subsequent printmaking 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.

Glossary of Printmaking Terms and Techniques

Aquatint

An intaglio technique in which gradations of tone or shadow are produced rather than sharp lines; often this technique is used in conjunction with etching for images that can resemble watercolor washes. In this process the artist applies a layer of granular, acid-resistant material to the plate before submerging it in an acid bath that "bites" in and around the layer, creating large areas of texture. The use of varying granule sizes produces different degrees of tone. **Spitbite aquatint** involves painting acid directly onto the aquatint coating of the prepared plate. Traditionally, a clean brush was coated with saliva, dipped into nitric acid and brushed onto the plate, hence the name of this process. Now artists may use chemicals like ethylene glycol or Kodak Photoflo, in combination with or in place of saliva, to control the strength of the acid applied.

Artist's Proof

A category of proof which relates to a practice dating back to the era when a patron or publisher commissioning prints provided an artist with lodging, living expenses, and a printing studio with workmen, supplies and paper. The artist was given a portion of the edition (to sell) as payment for his work. Though artists today are paid for their editions, the tradition has persisted and a certain number of impressions are put aside for the artist. Artist's proofs are annotated as such or as A.P., or *preuve d'Artiste* (E.A.).

Artists' Book

Unlike an art book or catalog, an artists' book is a contemporary publication that has been created as an original work of art. It is not a book of works of art, but rather the book itself is the work of art. It's created using traditional printmaking methods and can be editioned.

Bon à Tirer (B.A.T.)

Literally "ready to pull," the B.A.T. is the final trial proof - approved by the artist - which tells the printer exactly how the edition should look. Each impression in the edition is matched to or modeled after the B.A.T. This proof is used principally when someone other than the artist is printing the series. There is only one of these proofs for an edition.

Carborundum

A technique used in intaglio printing which utilizes a gritty paste that is applied directly onto the plate resulting in a painterly and impasto effect. Watch a carborundum print being made at IFPDA Member Stoney Road Press in [this video](#).

Catalogue Raisonné

A Catalogue Raisonné is a published reference that covers every known work of an individual artist up to the year of the book's publication. Catalogues raisonné typically apply to artists who are advanced in their careers or deceased and are written by the leading expert on that artist's career. In addition to images of all the artist's works to date, these studies usually also include biographical information, provenance, examples of the artist's signature and/or marks, condition reports for individual artworks, bibliographies of literature related to individual works of art, and discussions of

questionable or "attributed" (but not authenticated) works of art. The Print Council of America's Index to Print Catalogues Raisonné (IPCR) will help you find out if an oeuvre-catalogue of an artist's prints exists. An oeuvre-catalogue is defined as any listing of the artist's total output, or some clearly defined section of that output: for example, all the prints in one technique, or all the prints made up to a certain date. Catalogues of the output of print publishers and print publishing houses have been included as well.

Chine-collé

A process developed in the 19th century which enabled artists to print on delicate papers imported from China. This paper ("Chine") was attached ("collé") to a heavier paper support as it passed through the etching press. This process gave the artist access to greater variety in their etchings; they could add color to the print by choosing a thin paper in a shade that differed from the backing sheet. In early practice, the thin paper was usually the same size as the etching plate but the paper can also be shaped by cutting or tearing to create a print and collage combination.

Chop

A symbol, or logo that is either embossed or stamped on each print of a finished edition, including all proofs, as a way to identify the printer and publisher of the edition. A printer will often have his/her own individual chop that is separate from the publisher's chop

Cliché-verre

Cliché-verre, also called Glass Print, is a print made by placing photographic paper beneath a glass plate on which a design has been scratched through a coating of an opaque substance and then exposing it to light. The fluid lines possible with cliché-verre prints are reminiscent of etched lines and act a negative image with the parts of the image allowing light through printing on the paper.

Collagraph

The word Collagraph is a combination of collage and graphic. Traditionally, a collagraph plate is made like a collage: adhering textural elements onto a solid board (usually cardboard, wood or plastic). Rather than existing as a collage, the plate is printed like a relief. The term has grown to include any intaglio printing plate that is not created on metal with traditional etching or engraving processes.

Counterproof

Counterproofs, most notably favored by Impressionist artists, were made by placing a dampened sheet of paper on top of a pastel drawing and applying pressure, be it through a press, or by hand, to transfer the image to a sheet of delicate Japan paper. The result was an impression that was softer and, because of the introduction of water, more aqueous and subdued than the source image.

Cyanotype

Cyanotype is a photographic, blueprint technique where paper is treated with special, light-sensitive chemicals. Objects, films or negatives are then used to block light on the treated paper to create a composition. When exposed to light, the paper turns the characteristic blue color and the blocked areas remain white.

Digital Print

When artists use computers to create and manipulate their works, a large-scale inkjet printer can be used to print the works. These complex printers use a sophisticated print head to disperse the ink on the paper in a fine mist in order to deliver a consistently toned image. A digital print is only considered an "original print" if it was created by the artist to be realized specifically as a print. A digital print which is a copy of a work that originated in another medium, such as painting or drawing, is a reproduction and therefore is not an original print.

Drypoint

A form of engraving in which the artist incises the surface of the plate with a sharp needle or stylus. This intaglio technique gives the artist the greatest freedom of line, from the most delicate hairline to the heaviest gash. As the artist scores the plate to create the image, ridges of shavings called **burrs** are pushed up to the surface and sit alongside the lines. Because the burr is not cleaned from the plate it is able to hold ink, yielding lines that are characteristically soft and velvety. Drypoint plates (particularly the burr on them) wear more quickly than etched or engraved plates and therefore show far greater differences from the first impression to the last. Consequently, drypoint editions have fewer impressions.

Edition

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.

Engraving

An intaglio technique characterized by clean tapered lines made by incising a metal plate (traditionally copper) with a sharp tool called a **burin**. A range of line widths is possible depending on the size of tools used, making delicate tonalities also possible. The incised lines hold the ink when the image is pressed. Engraving is the technique most commonly seen in Old Master prints.

Etching

With a visual result similar to drawing, etched lines are usually free with blunt terminations as a result of the artist drawing with a sharp tool through a soft, often wax-based, coating on the plate. Volume and contour is created using a technique called hatching, where the artist changes the spaces, angles, lengths and qualities of the lines. The plate is then placed into an acid bath, where the acid eats away, or "bites" the exposed metal of the incised lines leaving the areas that are coated, untouched. The artist can achieve a broad range of tonality with etching by controlling the time the plate spends in the acid-bath.

Heliogravure

See definition for Photogravure.

Hors Commerce (H.C.)

Translated from French as "Not to sell," publishers use such impressions as exhibition copies, thereby preserving the numbered impressions from overexposure or rough handling. These proofs started to appear on the market as extensions of editions printed in the late 1960's. They may differ from the edition by being printed on a different kind of paper or with a variant inking; however, they may also not differ at all.

Impression

One of a number of printings from the same plate. A term frequently used in qualitative descriptions of prints from earlier periods, before editioning was common, when an artist would experiment with the application and wiping of ink on the plate as they printed it to create tonal variances among prints produced from the same plate. In some cases, different types of paper could also be used to achieve different effects due to the manner in which the ink was absorbed by the paper. Today's master printers still create editions by hand however, impressions in an edition, when created, are virtually identical. Variances among impressions can also be due to damage or exposure to light and humidity.

Intaglio Printing

The term intaglio comes from the Italian word *intagliare*, meaning "to incise". In this technique, acid or a pointed tool is used to incise the composition into a metal plate, usually made of copper, but sometimes of steel, iron or zinc. After the image has been drawn, the plate is covered with ink, and then wiped so that only the incised areas contain ink. The pressure of the press forces the paper into the incisions where they pick up the ink, resulting in the raised character of the lines on the impression. Because often the sheet of paper is larger than the plate, an indentation of the plate edges, or platemark, appears around the edges of the image area. Before it became common practice to coat plates with steel for reinforcement, a plate, especially one containing drypoint lines, would degrade over time as the pressure of the press would dull the burr. As a result, the first impression was often crisper than the last and in turn, the edition was numbered in order. The different types of intaglio prints are distinguished by the technique used: etching, aquatint, and photogravure are made using acid to corrode the metal plate, while engraving, drypoint, and mezzotint are made using a sharp tool to incise, or scratch, the surface of the plate. Often several different intaglio techniques are used in the same print to achieve variations in contrast and tone. A video created by IFPDA Member BORCH Editions explains the process further in [this video](#).

Linocut

This technique is a variation of relief printing, which uses a sheet of linoleum mounted on a plank of wood. Because linoleum has a smooth surface rather than the grainy texture of wood, the resulting prints are characterized by even areas of color and ink. As with woodcuts, linocut printing is a relief process where the areas which are carved away do not receive ink. Separate blocks must be

carved for each color in the print, however, artists can, using a reductive technique, use one block to print in multiple colors. In this instance, the artist carves further into the block after each color is editioned to reveal the next layer to be printed. Blocks are usually worked in color from light to dark, and as a result their surface is almost completely carved away, making it impossible to edition the print again.

Lithography

Literally meaning "stone drawing," this type of print is made by drawing or painting onto the surface of a limestone using a greasy crayon or liquid wash and is best known for its flat painterly surface. Because lithography is planographic, the resultant design lies on the surface of the paper, rather than pressed in or raised up from the page, as in other techniques. Colors appear smooth and uniform in tone. It is possible to use multiple colors in a lithograph, each color, as in the other techniques described here, requiring its own stone and several subsequent runs through the press. This process can also be used with metal plates, most commonly aluminum which allows the artist to easily incorporate photographic techniques in the composition. In the 19th century it was popular to use zinc, thus called a **zincograph**.

Matrix

From the Latin word *mater*, meaning mother, the matrix is the surface on which the artist creates an image prior to printing; for example, a woodblock, a linoleum block, a metal plate, a lithographic stone, or a mesh screen.

Mezzotint

Mezzotints are best known for their rich and luscious black tones and soft, subtle areas of light. The resulting image appears hazy and atmospheric, almost like a photograph. Unlike the other intaglio processes, this technique is worked from dark to light; the entire surface of the plate is abraded using a spiked tool called a **rocker**. These grooves will hold the printing ink and if inked at this point in the process, the plate would print entirely black. To create variations in tone, the artist scrapes and burnishes the abraded plate to smooth out the surface so that those areas will hold less ink and thus yield lighter tones in the image.

Monoprint

Monoprints are made when an artist alters the image on an already etched and inked plate by adding ink to the surface. When printed, this addition produces an impression that appears different from a conventionally printed impression from the same plate. By manipulating the ink on the plate in each successive printing, the artist creates a series of unique impressions with similar compositional elements.

Monotype

In this technique the artist creates a composition in printing ink or paint on any smooth surface which is then covered with a sheet of paper and passed through a press, transferring the image to printing paper. Because of the smooth surface, the pressure applied irrevocably alters the composition, making multiple impressions nearly impossible. In the rare instance that two prints can be pulled from the same surface, one will be strong and the other weak.

Numbering

While the numbering of individual impressions (prints) can be found as early as the late nineteenth century, it did not become standard practice until the mid-1960s. Before steel facing and other ways of preserving plates for longer print runs, the order in which the edition was printed was important. Today, all limited edition prints should be numbered, and because of advancements in technology and a master printer's ability to print reciprocal, identical images, the numbering sequence is no longer intended to reflect the order of printing. Numbering is transcribed as a fraction with the top number signifying the number of that particular print and the bottom number representing the total number of prints in the edition. The edition number does not include proofs, but only the total number of prints in the numbered edition.

Paper Pulp

Fibers (like waste paper, wood, hemp and cotton) are macerated in a specialized beater into a substance used to create individual sheets of varying textures and thickness. Pigment can be added to the pulp to create compositions within the paper. As in printmaking, two-dimensional works are run through a hydraulic press which forces the water to escape and joins the fibers

together. For three-dimensional works, the paper pulp is packed into a rubber mold, allowed to dry, and subsequently released as a sculptural form.

Photogravure

Photogravure is often characterized by photographic images that have moody, velvet-like black areas and a broad range of tone. Combining photography processes with traditional etching techniques, it allows the artist to print these photographic images on untreated printmaking papers. This process is also known as Heliogravure.

Planographic Print

In this method of printing the ink is neither pressed down into the paper nor raised above its surface, but lies exclusively on the plane of the paper. This means that with planographic printing the printed and non-printed areas on the surface of the print exist on the same plane. Planographic techniques include: lithography, serigraphy, pochoir, monoprints, monotypes, screenprints, digital prints, and counterproofs.

Pochoir

This technique was developed in France in the early twentieth century. Translated "stencil," this process allows the artist to directly add hand-colored areas to an impression by painting these areas through a stencil. The stencil itself is usually knife-cut from thin coated paper, paperboard, plastic, or metal and the ink or paint is applied with a brush. This technique is sometimes combined with other planographic methods, such as lithography.

Portfolio

A set of prints by a single artist or group of artists, often with a unifying theme. Over time, a portfolio of prints may be separated and each print sold individually.

Posthumous Edition or Impression

When an artist's heirs give permission for the printing of an edition or second edition, it is known as a posthumous edition. Posthumous editions should be limited and documented just as in standard printing practice, though they are not necessarily hand-numbered. Editions that were pencil-signed

in their original edition frequently bear stamped signatures authorized by the artist's heirs or the publisher in their posthumous state.

Printer's proof

A complimentary proof given to the printer; there can be one or several of these proofs, depending upon the number of printers involved and the generosity of the publisher.

Proof

This term generally refers to any impression pulled before the official printed edition of an image. The artist may make changes to the image after examining a proof, much like an author makes changes to a rough draft of a manuscript before sending it to the publisher. If the composition is altered after the proof, the proof becomes a "state".

Publisher

This person provides the financial support to produce and market an artist's prints. A publisher brings together an artist and a printer (assuming the artist does not do their own printing) or the publisher may also be a printer themselves, a business model which dates back to the sixteenth century. The great majority of original prints made in the nineteenth century were commissioned and brought to market by publishers.

Relief Printing

Relief prints are characterized by bold contrasts of dark and light. In this technique the artist first sketches a composition on a hard, flat surface such as a wood or linoleum block; then the parts of the image that are not to receive ink are carved away from the surface, leaving only the composition visible on the top surface of the matrix. Ink is then applied to this raised surface with a roller. The raised image on the block is transferred to paper with a mechanical press or by pressing the block into the paper by hand. Since the areas of the block that were cut-away did not receive ink, they appear white in the printed image. The inked areas are slightly impressed into the surface of the paper from the force of the press and so appear indented into the paper. The primary relief techniques are woodcut, wood engraving and linocut.

Restrike

Restrikes are later impressions that have not been authorized by the artist or the artist's heirs. While some restrikes are of good appearance, the excessive printing of the matrix tends to wear it out and many restrikes are only ghostly images of what the print is supposed to be. In the case of images that may be intrinsically valuable (i.e. compositions by Rembrandt), the worn-out copper plate is often reworked several centuries later so that, while the restrike may be said to have come from the original plate, there is hardly anything left of the original work on the plate, even the plate's signature often being re-etched by someone else.

Screenprint (Serigraph, Silk Screen)

A process based on the stencil principle in which material is attached to a mesh screen to block the flow of ink to the paper in a particular area. A squeegee is used to force the paint or ink through the exposed areas of the mesh screen. A separate screen is required for each color in the artist's composition and the same piece of paper is printed with each screen in succession. The resultant image is simple, yet bold and often has a graphic quality.

Second Edition

A second edition is a later printing, usually authorized by the artist or by the heirs, from the original matrix, after an edition of a declared number has already been printed. It should be annotated as a second, or subsequent, edition. A photographically produced replica of the original print, whether printed in a limited edition or not, is not a second edition; it is a reproduction.

Signatures

Signatures tell a viewer a lot about the authenticity and dating of a print. The very earliest prints did not have signatures at all, although by the late fifteenth century many artists indicated their authorship of a print by incorporating a signature or monogram into the matrix design. This kind of composition is called "signed in the plate" or a "plate signature." While some prints were pencil signed as early as the late eighteenth century, the practice of signing one's work in pencil or ink did not really become common practice until the 1880s. Today, it is customary for original prints to be signed. When a print is described simply as "signed" it should mean that it is signed in pencil, ink or crayon. A plate signature or a stamped signature should be described as such.

State

Often an artist will work on a composition to a certain point and then stop to print an impression of it to consider how it will look in its final appearance. Plates are composed in reverse making states an essential step in creating a final image. This single stage in the evolution of this image is called a state. Each time the composition is changed a new state of the print is created. These changes can range from the addition of a plate signature to drastic alterations in the composition. Today artist's may choose to edition a state before moving on with the composition.

Trial Proof

An impression pulled before the edition in order to see what the print looks like at that stage of development, after which the artist may go back to the matrix and make adjustments. There can be any number of trial proofs, depending upon how a particular artist works, but it is usually a small amount and each one usually differs from the others. In French, a trial proof is called an *épreuve d'essai*, in German, *Probedruck*.

Watermark

An important role in the connoisseurship of a print, a watermark is an image, logo, or symbol embedded in a sheet of paper that identifies the mill at which the paper was made as well as the paper type/style, and in some cases, a date. The mill's logo is woven with wire into the mesh of the paper mould and as a result less pulp collects on top and around the image making that area of the page thinner. Watermarks, which are typically located in the lower right corner of a sheet of paper, are often only visible when the sheet of paper is held in front of a light.

Wood Engraving

The appearance and line quality of a wood engraving is similar to that of a copper-plate engraving. The lines are rigid, noticeably tapered at the ends, and vary in thickness and length to create tone and texture. Wood and copper differ insofar as a copper engraving is printed using an intaglio technique where the incised lines receive ink, and print on paper as black. Wood engravings are printed in relief; the ink is rolled onto the surface, so the incised lines remain white.

Woodcut

Woodcuts are identical to linocuts in process, but have a unique appearance because the inked surface of the block often picks up the texture of the wood grain, which in turn transfers to the printed image. Woodcuts were some of the first kinds of prints made in ninth-century China, and the practice was later adopted by the Europeans. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Japanese artists using woodcut techniques reached an exceptional level of artistic achievement through a style called **ukiyo-e**. Multiple colors can be achieved by creating a separate block for each color, however around 1915, artists in the Provincetown art colony developed **white-line woodcuts** – a process which allowed for many colors to be printed on one block. By cutting a groove between each colored surface in the composition, the artists were able to apply ink only to the raised areas while the groove, which does not receive ink, prints as a blank or "white" line which separates each area of color. [See The British Museum's short film.](#)