

PRINT ANNOTATIONS/EDITIONING

There are no hard and fast rules for editioning and annotating prints but there are a number of accepted standard practices. Much of this comes down to personal integrity.

EDITIONING

Things to consider:

Edition Size

This will depend on a number of factors – the demand for your work, the durability of the plate, the technique and materials used, the time it takes to print, storage for completed prints, costs of materials etc. The artist can determine the number themselves, but it isn't necessary (technique depending) to print all of the edition at the same time or to strictly number the prints in the order they are made (again this can depend on technique)

However, once the number is determined the edition should not go over that number.

Artist's proofs are traditionally a maximum of approximately 10% of the total edition number so an edition of 30 would have 3 A/Ps and one of 60 could have 6 A/Ps. Sometimes these numbers are determined by contract with publishers/commissioners.

It is customary to strike the plate/block, etc when the edition number is reached. Etching plates are traditionally scored or drilled through or cut up.

It is considered unethical to pull more proofs or prints after the edition number is reached without making changes to the plate. These then become different 'States'.

It is rare that an edition goes beyond 100 (in England in the 1970's the limit for an edition was 75. Beyond that the Inland Revenue imposed its own restrictions and claimed tax on the understanding that the 'original' print had become a reproduction). New technologies, as well as older ones such as steel facing, allow for many more images to be made but tradition and practicalities as above tend to keep numbers down.

Keep good records of edition sizes, the number printed, any colour notes, plate order, paper used etc. Also note where the edition numbers are held by galleries, exhibitions or when sold.

Numbering & Signing Editions

'The custom of numbering prints is fairly recent, certainly no more than 100 years old'

'Signing prints is a relatively recent practice in the history of print. James Abbott McNeill Whistler was one of the first to do so, and numbering became a twentieth-century custom'

Ross, R. T. R. C. J., & Illustrated, P. (1990). Complete Printmaker: Techniques, Traditions, Innovations (Revised ed.). Free Press.

The accepted method of signing and numbering is to use pencil below the image.

- The number on the left as a fraction i.e. 1/20, 2/20, 3/20, etc.
- The title in the centre
- Signature and date on the right

TYPES OF PROOFS/ANNOTATIONS

These annotations replace the edition number under the image on the left. These are not considered as part of the edition.

A/P – Artist’s Proof - prints reserved for the artist and not included in the numbered edition (approximately 10% of the total edition number is acceptable). Artist Proofs can also, but don’t have to be, numbered A/P 1/5, A/P 2/5 or A/P I/V, A/P II/V, etc.

BAT - Bon à Tirer - a print indicating the standard to which all other prints will be held to. The expression is French for ‘good to pull’, and it is the print that meets all the standards dictated by the artist. There is usually only a single print denoted as the BAT.

C/P – Cancellation Proof – Sometimes at the end of an edition the defaced plate, stone, block, etc is printed with cancellation marks to show no more impressions can be made

C/P - Colour Proof - A Colour Proof is used to test out different colours to see which best expresses the intention of the piece. These prints are usually done prior to signing off the BAT.

H/C - Hors d’Commerce (Not for Sale) or Presentation Proof – This marking denotes a print that has been destined for promotional use. They may be signed by the artist and were often intended to be used as samples for galleries and dealers or dedicated to an individual.

P/P – Printer’s Proof – if working with a printer these are proofs presented by the artist to the printer. Usually held by the printer in their archives as a record of the print and is usually signed by the artist as a gesture of appreciation.

U/P - Unique Print or U/S – Unique State or 1/1 - Unique Print or Unique State refers to prints that are produced as singular entities, rather than a part of an edition, such as monotypes.

V/E – Variable Edition or E/V - Edition Variable or Variée – An edition that uses a common plate throughout but introduces additional elements (such as a hand-painted background) that are unique to each individual print in the edition. Often used with monoprints.

W/P - Working Proof or T/P Trial Proof– Trail proofs that the artist has altered by hand, usually through drawing or painting for the purpose of working out subsequent changes to the composition on the printing plate.

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