

DCA

Dundee Contemporary Arts

What is an original print?

An original print is not a reproduction, or copy of anything else. Confusion arises because commercially printed reproductions of paintings, photographs or designs are often called 'limited edition prints'. However they are often 'limited' to thousands of photographically produced copies of the same image, and if the artist has any involvement at all, it is only to sign them.

Original prints as sold by print workshops such as DCA Print Studio are truly limited editions – sometimes as few as five copies, with a maximum of a few hundred. Each one has been hand printed by either the artist or a highly trained printer, using a manual press or screen-table, and hand-mixed inks. The image will have been conceived for printing, and will use the qualities of the particular medium chosen – etching, lithography, screen print or relief print for example. If printed by a printer the artist will be involved in every stage of the process, from making and proofing the block or plate, to the mixing of colours and hand-finishing of every print. The prints will be numbered (1/20,2/20,3/20 etc) according to the order in which they were printed, titled, dated and signed by the artist in pencil. (Pencil does not fade as ink might)

Best quality, acid-free, paper and archival inks will have been used so that the print should not fade or yellow (as long as properly handled, see below) and the colours remain constant. Rembrandt's etchings are often better preserved than his paintings!

The price of these prints can seem high compared to the reproductions mentioned above. This is because they are closer to original paintings, and involve a great deal of skilled and patient work, building up layers of colour over several stages, for example, each colour being applied to the plate or block by hand, then carefully registered and printed on a hand-operated press. It also reflects the quality of the materials that they are made of – reproductions will fade and yellow in at best a few years.

While there is absolutely no reason for not buying a reproduction if you like the image and want to have it on the wall, you should be aware that it is not likely to be an investment that will increase in value as will an artist's original.

Handling Prints

If you have bought one of our original prints, you will have something that only exists in a small number, and may even be unique (a monoprint). To preserve its value you should handle it very carefully. We use white cotton gloves to handle prints, as this prevents natural acids and grease from fingers contaminating the paper, which may in time show up as marks. Great care should be taken not to bend or dent the paper – handle it by two diagonal corners at all times and never lift it by one hand. If a print is frequently lifted by one hand you will see semi-circular creases appear in it. The print should not be exposed to damp or excessive heat, which may cause paper to 'cockle'; or strong sunlight which may fade even high quality inks and paper. Ideally prints should not be rolled unless absolutely necessary and then only with great care, and for the shortest possible time.

Framing

If you are having the work framed, check that your framer uses archival methods and materials – such as acid free tape and conservation standard mount board. If they tell you this is not necessary choose another framer. This may be slightly more expensive, but worth it in the long run to protect your investment. There should always be a space between the print and any glass, formed by a 'window mount' or a slip. This is to prevent mould or mildew (foxing), or pressure damage to the inks, and means that non-reflective glass is not suitable (non-reflective glass needs to be pressed against the image to work). However you may want to use

glass with a UV filter if you want to hang the work in a sunny room. The print should never be cut down or glued as this will greatly reduce its value. The frame should be sealed to prevent dust getting in. Never hang the print in a bathroom or kitchen.

If you would like any further advice contact Print Studio Staff.

If you would like more information on printmaking processes ask for our 'What is Printmaking' information sheet.

For more information about printmaking at DCA contact the Print Studio on 01382 909242