

Bracken Press print-workshop

Information sheet Printmaking Definitions.

Original prints are not reproductions. They are original works of art, conceived and created by the artist who is deliberately creating an effect that cannot be achieved in any other way. If you are looking to collect art then original prints are an excellent starting point. A print may be the fraction of the price of a painting by the same artist, but the effort and skill involved may equal the work put into a painting. Collecting prints does require a little more knowledge but this is easily acquired and will soon reward the collector.

There are numerous methods of printmaking each employing many techniques. They all have in common the fact that there is no “original” image that is being reproduced. With etching, for example, the “original” artwork is directly drawn onto the plate. When a plate has been inked up only one image can be pulled from that plate. To produce another, the plate has to be cleaned of ink then fresh ink applied. Every image printed from the plate will therefore be slightly different to the last.

Prints are produced in editions and each print is numbered and signed by the artist. eg 2/50 means that this is print number 2 in the edition and the edition size is 50. Once the edition is printed the plate is marked so it cannot be used again. Beware that reproduction prints (see below) may also be produced in editions in an attempt to justify their price.

Printmaking is a very skilled process. Some artists will make their own plates, and print the editions themselves. Other artists may collaborate with a master printmaker (such as Peter Kosowicz) who has the knowledge and skills to turn the artist’s ideas and concepts into reality.

Etching

This is of the earliest forms of printmaking – first used in the 16th century. The artist draws directly onto a metal plate that has previously been covered in a “ground”. The drawing exposes the metal itself. When the plate is dipped in an acid bath the acid bites into the exposed metal. It is this etched area that will hold the ink during the printing process.

Once the etching process is complete the plate is inked and placed in the press. The enormous pressure of the rollers transfers the image to the paper.

Collagraphy

It literally means collaged graphic. The plate, instead of being etched, is built up with various materials which may include board, plaster, different glues, resins and carborundum (fine grit that holds the ink). Different coloured inks may be applied to separate parts of the plate.

Bracken Press print-workshop

Information sheet Printmaking Definitions

As with etching, once the plate is fully inked a sheet of dampened paper is placed over the plate. In the press the plate may emboss the paper at the same time the inks are transferred. Brenda Hartill is one of the foremost artists currently developing this technique.

Lithography

The artist again works directly onto the plate or “stone”. However, unlike etching where a metal tool is used, the drawing is made with a pencil, crayon or painted with a brush. What is important is that the image created should be greasy.

When the artist is ready to print he dampens the surface of the plate then rolls it with ink. The ink only sticks to the greasy surface of the image. A sheet of paper is now laid on the surface and pressure is applied, transferring the image to the paper.

Screen-printing

Also known as silk screen, this method of printmaking came into its own in the 1960's, when the clean flat colours it produced found favour with artists such as Andy Warhol.

Essentially a stencil process, a fine gauze is stretched across a frame creating a screen. Areas on the screen are blocked off leaving open areas. Paper is now placed under the screen and inks forced through the open areas of the screen onto the paper beneath, forming the image.

Linocut / Woodcut / Wood Engraving

In this instance the “plate” is a flat piece of wood or lino. The image is drawn onto the plate, in reverse, and carefully carved out by hand. With etching, the ink is held in the grooves. With wood and linocut, it is the raised area that holds the ink for printing.

As with all methods of printmaking there are wide variations in the techniques used. The “suicide” technique involves cutting away the lino, printing a colour, then cutting away and printing again with the result that the plate is destroyed in the process of making the prints.

Reproductions

There can be confusion between 'original' and 'reproduction' prints. An original print by Picasso is worth many thousands of pounds while a reproduction print by Picasso has no real value. It is thus important to distinguish between them.

Essentially a reproduction is a copy of an original painting. It may have been photographed or scanned. The printing process itself will usually have been mechanical, with little or no input from the artist. The effort involved goes in ensuring the print closely matches the original as is possible. Some are produced in signed, limited editions but this does not make them any more 'original' but it will make them more expensive.