

Prints and Printmaking - some basic Terms and Protocols

Some basic terms and protocols have been compiled especially for those new to printmaking. It includes **how to sign a print** and definitions of those mysterious beasts **monotypes**, **monoprints** and **unique state** prints as well as what makes an **edition**. Please see the links below for further information about printmaking, its terms and protocols.

A very important aspect of printmaking is health and safety. All art materials contain chemicals, some of them harmful. They can be absorbed through breathing them in, skin contact or by swallowing them accidentally if you eat or drink in the studio. Check out **Health and Safety Principles** prepared by Australian printmaker Leslie Duxbury. This is important for your own safety and for others who may access your studio, or who you may be teaching in a workshop.

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 generally produced by drawing or carving an image onto a hard surface (known as the MATRIX) such as a wood block, metal plate, lithographic stone; they can also be created by stencil on a silkscreen, or input to a computer, or a combination of methods. If the matrix is a block, plate or stone, the surface is then inked and the image is transferred to paper by the application of pressure, thus creating an impression, or print. The printed image that results is the mirror image on the plate or matrix.

Unlike paintings or drawings, prints usually exist in multiple impressions, each of which has been created from the inked plate. The total number of impressions made is called an **EDITION**. Artists began to sign and number each impression around the turn of the 20th century to ensure that only the editions they intended to make would be in circulation. 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. In an edition all impressions/prints are the same, no variations are permitted. All prints should be as close to identical as possible. Artists also produce Unique State Prints which are usually hand coloured or changed in some way, and the kind of print is indicated when signing the edition.

Glossary

A la poupée (poupée is French for dolly): One or more colours applied separately to the plate by hand using a small pad of fabric. This is done after the plate has been inked up with the main colour. It means that the plate can be run through the printing press once only i.e. each time you make an impression. The disadvantage is that it can be harder to produce identical prints for an edition than if you used individual plates for each colour.

Artist's Proof (A/P): 10% of the total number of prints in an edition *remain the property of the artist*, and are called Artist's Proofs. They are identical with the other impressions in the edition.

Archival Quality: A term used to denote materials having a high degree of permanence.

Bleed Print: A print where the image is printed up to the edge of the paper.

Bon A Tirer (B.A.T): (French:"Good to Pull") Identifies a proof which will serve as the standard to be maintained during the printing of an edition. Also written as "OK" or "Ready to Print". Sometimes known as a printer's proof or working proof, *it remains the property of the printer.*

Catalogue Raisonne: A complete list of prints by an artist. It includes titles, dates, editions and condition of all known prints. It could also include exhibitions each was shown in, price, or prizes etc. It is a good idea to begin one of these as soon as you start producing prints and keep it up to date along with your CV.

Chop: A small embossed mark made in the margin of a print which identifies the printer or publisher.

Colophon: An inscription found at the beginning or end of a book, including the printer's name and other information relevant to the publication.

Counterproof: A proof obtained by offsetting a wet print onto a sheet of paper. The wet print may also be offset onto a plate, block, or stone. The image is always identical with the image on the plate.

Edition: The total number of prints/impressions pulled from the plate, stone, etc, numbered and signed by the artist. An edition is a number of prints pulled from one plate, usually at the same time. This may be a *limited edition*, with a fixed number of impressions produced on the understanding that no further impressions (copies) will be produced later, or an *open edition* limited only by the number that can be sold or produced before the plate wears. Most modern artists produce only limited editions, normally signed by the artist in pencil, and numbered as say 10/25 to show the unique number of that impression and the total edition size.

The plates of prints are often "cancelled" by defacing the image to prevent more than the original stated number of prints being produced. This is often expected by collectors and investors, who want the prints they buy to retain their value.

Ghost Print: A print taken from the plate as a second print without re-inking, re'tirage.

G.S.M: The weight of one square metre of a given paper expressed in grams. Although a heavier paper is usually thicker than a lighter one, the weight is not directly related to the thickness of the paper, but to the density of the paper.

Impression: A print in an edition made directly from an inked stone, plate or woodblock, screen or digital printer.

Impression Number: The number delegated to a print in an edition

Margin: The area outside the plate mark or drawn border of a printed image. Margins are spotless - no ink marks, smudges or finger marks.

Monoprint: A print that has been altered by colouring the paper before printing or by varying each impression during or after printing. A monoprint derives at least part of its image from a printing matrix (block, plate, etc).

Monotype: An image is painted directly onto a plate and then transferred to paper in a press. These prints are often hand-coloured and may include collage elements. It is a unique image printed from a polished plate, glass, metal, or other material painted with ink. Although a monotype impression is generally one of a kind, a second, lighter impression from the painted printing element can be made (ghost print). This process was invented in the 1640s by the Genoese etcher Giovanni Castiglione.

Paper: printing papers are good quality and acid free for archival purposes. They are usually rag papers made from cotton linter but some papers with wood pulp are now chemically treated to make them acid free. It pays to check if you are not using a well known brand such as BFK Rives for example. Papers should be described as acid-free or pH neutral.

Printer: A printer is the person who printed the edition. This may be the artist or another person such as Theo Tremblay who is a master printer.

Printer's Proof (P.P): A proof reserved for the printer, sometimes known as B.A.T. They are identical with the other impressions in the edition.

Progressive Proofs: A series of proofs of a multi-colour print showing the progressive addition of the individual colours to the image.

Proof: An impression/print pulled from an inked plate, block, stone, or screen before editioning.

Publisher: A person who has purchased an edition from the artist and subsequently sells it.

Register: Multiple printed images/colours in correct alignment upon the surface of the paper

Register Marks or Registration marks: Marks, drawn, printed or cut in the margins of the paper for a print as a guide to registration.

Registration: Correct placement of an image on a previously printed image of the same print. Prints, whether of one plate or more, are always placed in the same position on the printing paper.

Signing an Edition: Each impression/print is numbered, titled, signed and dated. The examples below show how to sign the various categories of impressions/prints which are pulled from the block or the digital printer. These are the standard impressions/prints which you will pull in the production of an edition. **See examples below.**

States: Once editioned, plates are occasionally reworked to produce what is called a second state. The second state may be editioned and titled as below. They may have a different number in the edition to the first state.

Trial Proof: A proof pulled to determine the appearance of the image. Many trial proofs may be pulled before the B.A.T, W.P or P.P which indicate the finished state of the work. The edition is then printed.

Unique State: Each impression is original and unlike any other in the edition. Each may be hand coloured in different colours for example or changed in some other way.

Working Proof (W.P): An impression of the finished work that is identical to the numbered copies. Sometimes called Bon a Tirer (B.A.T.) or P.P.

How to sign an edition



1/20

A way of flying

Goya 1815

The number of the impression or print/Number of impressions in the edition

Title - centred

Signature followed by year in full or abbreviated to the last two digits.

Sentence case is used, i.e. capital letters only for first word and proper nouns

Placed In line with the left side
of image (not the edge of the
paper)

In line with the right side of
image (not the edge of the
paper)

Note: A bleed print may be signed on the front or the back of the impression

The following are the impressions that are produced before editioning is commenced. Not all are required for every edition, it depends upon the complexity of the processes for each individual print. For example, number of plates, number of colours, etc. Note B.A.T, W.P, P.P are often used interchangeably.

T.P 1/4	A way of flying	Goya 1815
B.A.T	A way of flying	Goya 1815
P.P	A way of flying	Goya 1815
W.P	A way of flying	Goya 1815
A/P 1/2	A way of flying	Goya 1815

Example signatures for Unique State Prints and Second State editions. They will also have all or some of the above stages as well e.g. W.P., T.P, B.A.T. etc.

U.S.P 1/15	A way of flying	Goya 1815
1/20	A way of flying (second state)	Goya 1815

Monoprints and monotypes are U.S.P prints which may have trial proofs

Most of the definitions of terms have been drawn (some amended) from:

[Printmaking Sisters,](#)

[Ken Tyler glossary of printmaking and papermaking terms reproduced ...,](#)

[http://www.polymetaal.nl/,](http://www.polymetaal.nl/)

[The International Fine Print Dealers Association](#)

which are recommended for when you need much more information!

Goya image: Signature line is invented as an example. Goya did not sign his prints in this manner.