

Curating Your Editions

How are prints signed and numbered?

The traditional way is to sign and number prints at the bottom of the image on the original paper, in pencil. A pencil mark cannot be reproduced by computers, making it less vulnerable to fraud.

The signature will be on the lower right and the numbering on the left.

The title is in the center. The numbering shows both the number of the print (the first number) and the total number of impressions in that particular edition (second number).

Example: "3/5" - "Don Quixote" D. Meeker signature
This means that this print is #3 of a limited edition of 5 prints. Its title is "Don Quixote" and was made by D Meeker in 1988.

More about numbering prints

This is a practice that started during the latter part of the nineteenth century. At the request of publishers, some artists started numbering certain editions of their prints, which were numbered "No. 1," "No. 2," "No. 3," etc., until the end of the edition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, prints were published mostly with the number of the print but without indication of the total number of prints in the edition. By 1915 the size of the edition was indicated on the print like we do today, "1/100," "2/100," "3/100," etc., showing both the number of the print and the total number of prints in the edition.

Unfortunately, the numbering sequence does not necessarily reflect the order of printing as the prints are placed to dry in racks without any specific order and days or weeks later removed for the signing and numbering, which happens haphazardly.

Of course, there will be some additional prints in excess of the numbered edition which are not considered part of the edition. These are: trial proofs,

printer's proofs (PP), artist's proofs (AP also known as *épreuve d'artiste*, or E.A.) and a *bon à tirer* (BAT), which in French means good to print. Some prints are even marked N.F.S (not for sale) or H.C. (*hors commerce* which in French means not to sell).



Mono Prints and Mono Types

Numbering a Mono Print is a bit confusing because the edition is not all the same other than a particular matrix that shows up in each print. An acceptable numbering system is the use of MP with the numbers. example "MP 3/5"

In this case the MP tells you it is a mono print and it is the 3 print in a series of 5 Mono Prints.

As for a Mono Type it can be curated with a 1/1 or simply MT however you don't usually use both MT and 1/1 .. it is either or but not both.

What is an artist proof?

Traditionally, Artist Proofs were an impression of a print taken in the printmaking process to see the current printing state. Today, an Artist Proof is a good impression of the finished work that is identical to the numbered copies.

It is often numbered with Roman numerals e.g.: II/V (copy number two of five A.P. prints) and should not exceed 10% of the total number of the edition.

In earlier times, when artists used the services of a master printer to pull their prints, they would just have a sample/demo print to give the publisher which would act as a guide to make sure that the result would be as close as possible to how the artist wanted it. This copy, often accompanied by notes on color, wiping or printing) was called "*bon à tirer*" and the three letters BAT were written in pencil in place of the numbering system. Today, Artist Proofs are a customary gift to the technicians who pull the print, in addition to their wages.

Artist Proofs can be particularly desirable to collect because of their rarity and especially in the case of working trial proofs, which represent a record

of the work in process. Especially in the case of dead artists, they can be the only evidence of the artist's incremental development of an image.

Collectors may prefer final artist's proofs even when they are identical to the main edition because of its extra rarity and its possible differences from the "standard" print, factors that are often reflected in its price.

In the late 1950s there started to appear other additional prints in excess of the Arabic numbered edition, such as hors commerce (H.C.) proofs and Roman-numbered editions. Other editions, on different paper or with changes of ink color, appeared and were called E.V. (edition varied). By the late 1960s artists and publishers added such refinements as editions A 1/100, B 1/100, C 1/100, etc., and editions for various countries or continents (where numbers would duplicate the other editions). These "refinements" are some of the ways artists and publishers devised to multiply the actual total quantity of an edition of prints, yet retain the illusion of a small limited edition by keeping the hand-inscribed numbers low.

Other kinds of proofs

TRIAL PROOF is a working proof pulled before the edition to see what the print looks like at a stage of development, which differs from the edition. There can be any number of trial proofs, but usually it is a small number and each one differs from the others.

BON À TIRER PROOF. The "good to print" proof. If the artist is not printing his own edition, the bon à tirer proof is the final trial proof. There is usually only one of these proofs. This is the trial proof that the artist approves, telling the printer that this is the way he wants the edition to look; it is often accompanied by printing notes, such as paper, ink or inking process and it is the one print used as a reference for the printing of the whole edition.

PRINTER'S PROOF. A complimentary copy of the print given to the publisher. There can be from one to several of these proofs, depending on how many craftsmen (printers) were involved in the production of the print.

HORS COMMERCE PROOF. Proofs annotated "H.C." are supposedly not for sale. These "proofs" started appearing on the market as part of editions; they are another method to extend the edition beyond the stated number of prints.

What are editions?

AN EDITION is the total number of impressions from a given matrix.

If you want to know the "total" edition size of your print you must add up all the ways the edition has been numbered, for example:

Print "X" has been numbered the following way:

200 Arabic - 1/200 through 200/200
20 Artist Proofs - AP 1/20 through AP 20/20
30 HC (Hors d'Commerce) - HC 1/30 through HC 30/30
1 Bon A Tirer Proof
1 trial proof
3 PP (Printers Proofs) - PP 1/3 through PP 3/3

Total Edition Size for print "X" is 255 (unless there is a second edition or posthumous edition)

A SECOND or even **THIRD EDITION** is a later printing from the matrix after an edition of declared number has already been printed. It should be annotated as a second, or subsequent, edition.

A POSTHUMOUS EDITION is one printed from a matrix after the death of an artist