



## An Analysis of the Creation and Marketing of Art Prints

By [RJ Wattenhofer](#) | Submitted On November 11, 2012



The mass marketing of fine art reproductions and art prints directed at multiple collectors has been a heavily debated topic since its inception in the late Nineteenth Century. The development of lithography in 1798 by Alois Senefelder created the potential for making duplicate art creations; however, it took another one hundred years of extensive technical developments before quality reproductions could be produced.

These advancements in lithography merged with a growing awareness by art dealers that an untapped (and highly profitable) new art market had opened up, whereas a piece of fine art could be sold over and over, exponentially inflating both dealer & artist profits and exposure, which drew in even more collectors from across America and Europe.

The intrinsic value of an art print, and its subsequent appreciation in financial value, was a happenstance occurrence that came with the almost immediate induction of limited edition prints: I am sure the dealers would have been tickled to create endless runs of art prints based on each popular original in their possession, but technical limitations (the copper and zinc printing plates gradually wore down) forced a production limit, as eventually the quality of each print deteriorated.

Except in rare cases, an art print never has and never will have the high collectible value of an original painting and the use of limited editions (typically a run of 1,000 prints or less and each individually numbered) offsets this problem to a degree by creating inflated value using the age-old marketing strategy of supply versus demand. There is a segment of the population who will buy an art print simply because they enjoy the look of that particular piece and want to hang it on their wall for personal enjoyment. The rest consider themselves modest or serious art collectors and desire a piece that they not only visually appreciate, but has investment potential.

It is human nature to strive to possess something your neighbors do not, and this desire can only be filled by offering your clients objects of exclusivity and scarcity: In this case, ending a print run at a certain point and selling those numbered prints as limited editions. It should go without saying that the smaller the edition, the more valuable the series: Less is more in this case. It is up to the individual artist to weigh potential financial gain against distribution numbers and decide on a reasonable & appealing total number of prints to release in each edition.

Modern Twenty-First Century technology has muddied the waters a bit, merging the once distinct lithographic quality art print into the realm of art reproduction. Originally balked at by purists, artwork recreated using high-end ink-jet printers has

finally come into its own, now widely accepted by both the public and art dealers because of its understood practicality and the extreme level of artistic detail rendered. Again, to maintain its appeal and create intrinsic value & investment potential, the artists rely on the practice of limited editions.

The modern world offers a bright future for the advancement and distribution of [art prints](#), something that previous generations could never have predicted. Telecommunications is the artist's best friend, opening up wide international consumer markets previously unavailable to their predecessors in the late Nineteenth Century.

Following non-traditional routes, there is an ever-increasing market for limited edition art prints in public areas such as lobbies & executive offices and as high-end gifts, where the gift-giver wants to make an impression at specific milestone events, passing on their sophisticated taste & knowledge of viability for investment growth to the receiver.

This may all seem appealing to the fledgling artist, but it must be stressed that, when dealing with limited edition prints, the artwork does not stand alone to be judged strictly on its own merit. The artist is just as important (maybe more-so) than the art print, as an art print is only as valuable as the reputation that precedes the name scrawled in the corner of the canvas.

A limited edition art print produced by a highly regarded & successful artist is vastly more valuable than an original painting by an obscure talent or up-and-comer. You may have great potential as a painter, but in this day and age, marketing yourself successfully is the key to adding long-term value to your work and creating the opportunity for your limited edition pieces to be sought after, not only for their obvious beauty & the technical application rendered by the artist, but for consumer investment opportunities presented years into the future.

You need to develop an attitude of full disclosure, exposing your process and thereby enabling art buyers and dealers to understand you are completely involved in the preparation of each piece (the more hands-on the better) and enmeshed in the final artistic result. Being privy to the technical involvement of the artist gives the art buyer the confidence to invest his time and money in you, with the added advantage that an ongoing artist/collector relationship will develop and spread to other parties in the buyer's circles.

If you, as an artist, are seriously considering making artwork a self-sustaining and long-term occupation, you will need to reflect on the advantages of art print creation and then cement a plan of action that will enable you to compete on both a national and global scale. You are an artist, but also a salesperson. Gone are the days of the tortured & penniless painter, creating great artworks in obscurity and lamenting a cold, cruel world which does not yet fully comprehend his/her genius. You have the tools and opportunities: Time to get to work.

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