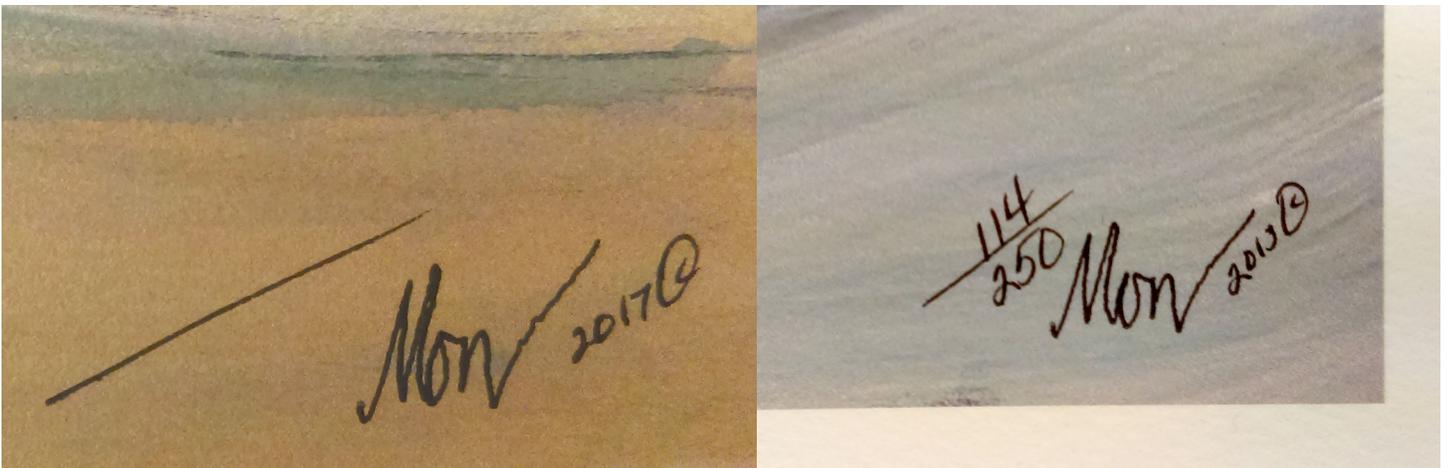


# What Does it Mean That a Print is Numbered?

Many times there is confusion on what it means to have a numbered piece of art. To have a numbered piece of art means that the artist or printer has indicated on the art that this piece is the X numbered print out of a total of YY prints printed in that particular edition, making it a limited edition. A limited edition is the entire number of copies of an art reproduction printed from a single original work, with no additional copies to be made after this release.

This form of assigning numbers to limited edition reproductions of art is fairly new, beginning after the 20th century. At that time many prints were published with the number of the print without indication of the total number of prints in the edition. Artists typically now number their prints so that collectors will know that this print edition is limited and that their print is part of the official edition. The numbering of a print does not in itself make that print any more or less valuable, but it does give collectors some important facts about the print.



*Most artists also apply the year the reproduction was published on each print. The year is typically put near the signature. A © symbol, indicating this reproduction is copyrighted by the artist, is placed beside the year.*

*The image on the left shows the mechanically applied signature of the artist, the year, 2017, in which the print was published and the © symbol. This print has not been numbered yet. The image on the right has been numbered and indicates that it is print #114 out of an edition of 250.*



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This numbering system is usually indicated in the lower margin in the form of X/YY. When the second number, which is the size of the edition, is smaller, that print edition typically has far more value since fewer of those prints were produced. A print edition may also have the abbreviations of AP, typically before the top number. AP – stands for the “artist’s proof” and these are reproductions meant for the artist.

Limited edition prints are typically signed by the artist or contain a mechanically applied signature of the artist. When a particular print edition is numbered by the artist, any impression without a number is probably not a valid reproduction and not from the original edition, which means that impression may be unauthorized.



*Many artists who publish their works of art in higher volumes apply a mechanical signature to their reproductions using an Autopen, or signing machine, such as this one. Autopens use a plastic matrix or signature smart card to apply the artist’s original signature with almost any writing instrument.*

The numbering of prints is normally limited to fine art prints that are marketed to collectors. There are many “commercially” printed reproductions on the market today that are not numbered as they are not intended to be marketed to art collectors. These mass produced pieces of art are generally printed on lower quality paper that may be non-archival.

So the question remains, are the prints from numbered editions worth more? Most of this depends on when the art was produced and who the artist is. As mentioned, this



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new form of numbering artwork did not become common until after the beginning of the 20th century; so, for the purposes of this article, we are only discussing artwork printed after the beginning of the 20th century. An original reproduction or print is defined as a print coming directly from the plate (or other matrix) that the artist created. These prints are numbered showing that this edition printed directly from the plate or original piece of art is limited to a specific quantity and not mass produced.

So it is wise to understand the edition from which a numbered or unnumbered print comes. Ask who printed it and when. Did it come from the original plates/matrix? Who numbered it? The wiser you are about an artist and their work, the better chance you have of acquiring a print that has greater value.

*Researched and written by Angela Clawson,  
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*P. Buckley Moss is an American and Virginia artist, whose art expresses her interest in strong family values and cultural heritage in her own distinctive style, giving us a collection of art that is filled with a lifetime of experiences. She is known as America's most celebrated living artist. She currently lives in Radford, Virginia and travels around the country to attend shows with galleries and meet her collectors and sign her work for them.*



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