

MARKETING — FINE ART PUBLISHERS



Master Printer Cole Rogers & Senior Printer Zac Adams-Bliss editioning Willie Cole's large-scale screenprints, 2012. Image Courtesy of Highpoint Editions.

The following was written by Jessica Kruckeberg, the Gallery Director, of Highpoint Center for Printmaking in a response to our request to give fine art students more information about how a fine art publisher works and what Highpoint Editions is looking for when they decide to do a collaboration with an artist.

Our Background

Highpoint Editions publishes fine art prints made by invited

professional artists in collaboration with Highpoint Editions staff and Master Printer Cole Rogers. Our publications can be found in numerous public, corporate, and private collections around the world. We will often exhibit our publications in our gallery space and many of them have been included in exhibitions at artistic institutions.

Highpoint Editions is part of Highpoint Center for Printmaking, which was founded in 2001 in Minneapolis. Highpoint is a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the art of printmaking. Its goals are to provide educational programs, community access, and collaborative publishing opportunities to engage the community and increase the appreciation and understanding of the printmaking arts.

Let's start at the beginning, what are fine art prints?

The International Fine Print Dealers Association (IFPDA) defines an original fine art print as: 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. In most cases, the artist creates an image on a matrix made out of metal, stone, wood, or other materials. The matrix is then inked, and the inky image is transferred to a piece of paper, often with a press, to create an original image. This process allows an artist to create multiple impressions of the original work.

How does a fine art print publisher decide who/what to publish?

There are many different types of fine art print publishers so we can only speak for ourselves. However, many of Highpoint Editions' practices are relatively standard; this description should give you an idea of the way publishers function.

Highpoint Editions is an invitation-only publisher. Our artistic director Cole Rogers, myself and an advisory committee discuss possible artists that we would like to work

with and would fit our artistic program. Sometimes artists will reach out to us, and they can certainly be considered, but the only way to actually make an edition with Highpoint is to be invited to do so. A participating artist does not need to have a printmaking background and can be from anywhere in the world, they just need to fit our program. We then reach out to the artist and start a dialogue, which can include the artist visiting the workshop or our artistic director going to the artist's studio. If both parties think producing a print would be interesting, enjoyable and advantageous, then the creative process begins! Deciding what artwork to make is a collaboration between the artist and the workshop. The artist brings their ideas and their practice and the printmakers translate those ideas into print. The process is different with every studio and every artist, but collaboration is key.

What are the advantages to creating a fine art print with a publisher?

First and foremost, making a print with a publisher means benefitting from the years of expertise that comes from working with a master printer and their staff. Even if an artist is familiar with printmaking, the publisher's staff will usually have far more experience and will know how to troubleshoot many issues that come up. Also, having multiple people on staff makes the process faster. Once a BAT, which is an artist-approved proof, is signed, the artist does not need to be present: HP Editions staff will print the rest of the edition. Once editioning is done, the artist signs and numbers the work. Working with a publisher also means working with their resources and equipment. When an artist works with Highpoint, HP provides much of the materials and labor, and the artist has the great opportunity to use our state-of-the-art facility. Once the edition is complete, the publisher also markets the works. This can include getting press coverage, hosting an exhibition, art fairs, mailings and general sales

practices. Many publishers have a sales person on staff with existing client relationships that will sell the works. An artist gains exposure and connections when they partner with a reputable fine art print publisher. They will also receive a sizeable percentage of each print sale. Sometimes, it is difficult to sell a more expensive unique work and it can be months between an artist's paycheck with their normal artistic practice. Due to the lower price point and the connections that the fine art print publisher has, prints usually move faster and with more frequency, providing the artist with a steadier form of income. There are many advantages to working with a fine art print publisher, but most important is the relationship that is formed between the artist and the workshop. The best type of these relationships promote and benefit both parties.

How do you get your work published by a fine art print publisher?

Because every publisher is different, it is best for the artist to do some research into the publisher's background. By looking at the type of artists and projects that have been done previously by the publisher, an artist can get a good idea of what the publisher looks for or what hole their own practice could fill in the publisher's resume. It is also important to know what type of printmaking the publisher does. Highpoint prints in all traditional printmaking mediums, but we do not use digital printers. That is good to know if an artist is not interested in traditional methods or knows that they want to include digital printing. By understanding the publisher's capabilities, an artist will better understand if it is a good fit for their artistic practice.

Most fine art print publishers do not consider the invited artists they make editions with as part of their 'roster'. Although they are very supportive of the artists, publishers represent the prints that they make with an artist, not their career. Having said that, it is always good for an artist to

build a relationship with a publisher that they like and keep an eye on their projects. Because so much of the publishing process is built on collaboration, having a pre-existing relationship with fine print workshop can be extremely advantageous.

If an artist does have some exposure and wants to submit their work for consideration, I suggest first seeing if the publisher accepts submissions. Submitted work should always be copies or photography if it is being sent remotely. Artists should also connect with someone at the fine art publisher before submitting. A publisher may be swamped with projects and any submission during a certain time may be overlooked. Connecting ahead of time will also provide context when the images are viewed.

Getting published by a fine art print publisher can be challenging, but by continuing their studio practice and educating themselves about printmaking and publishers, artists have a much better chance at success.

What happens after your work is published?

In present day, publishers use a number of factors to decide the edition size and price per impression. Some examples are: physical size; medium; complexity and cost of production; and artist's market. The prints are then marketed and sold by the publisher via a number of avenues. The artist will get a number of artist proofs that they can do with what they wish. Each printer on the project will usually get an impression as well, called a printer's proof. Most publishers will also make handling copies of an edition. These prints are not sold and are used for presentation purposes only, in order to keep the signed and numbered edition safe. For posterity, Highpoint also prints an archive proof. This proof is for the publisher to keep or to place with an institution so that the complete archive of prints made by a publisher are in one place as a full catalogue. Publishers keep most of the impressions in

their print drawers. Usually it is safer and many artists do not have flat files to store the prints flat. When a work is sold, it is shipped to the buyer and a documentation sheet is sent as well. A documentation sheet, or doc sheet, is a description of the production steps taken to produce the edition that is signed by the master printer and the artist. It is similar to a certificate of authenticity, proving that the artist and the publisher both consider the work authentic and original. As the impressions sell and the publisher receives payment, the artist is paid their percentage. This will often happen on a schedule, such as monthly or quarterly.

What makes a successful published artist?

A successful published artist is very similar to a successful artist in general. A major difference is the collaboration aspect with the printers. Since the printers are usually more skilled at printmaking than the invited artist, it is important to keep an open dialogue and consider each other's opinions. The artist is very much in charge of the art, but listening to the skilled professionals will make a far more successful project.