

Lasting Impressions?



'The Cornfield' John Constable

Featuring large in memories of my 1970s childhood kitchen is a framed print of Constable's 'The Cornfield'. It hung for years, fading imperceptibly to a blueish version of its original pastoral self. A great painting, a celebrated painting, an image which, for me has added nostalgic value but this was, all the same just a mass-produced photographic print.

What inspires us to decorate our homes with copies of works of art? Is it the comforting sense of familiarity? Is it the cost? Is it a fear of 'getting it wrong' by venturing beyond universally recognised artworks? Or is it simply because we want to complete our interior design with a few complementary frames?

I am always astonished, and a little dismayed, when I come across second-hand framed prints of well-known masterpieces. These faded replicas fill the walls of most Antiques and Collectables centres, and it's a puzzle why anyone would consider buying a worthless piece of paper. Cynically, I hope it's for a nice frame! There are, of course important and extraordinary exceptions and some printed art is far more than just a 'Print'.



'Going to the Match', L.S.Lowry 1928

A fantastic, fairly local example are signed, limited edition prints of LS Lowry. During his later years, in the 1960s and 1970s Lowry had many of his artworks reproduced. These turn up regularly in auction, particularly Northern Art sales and can achieve huge sums: in the last few years signed prints of Lowry's 'Going to the Match' have sold for up to £75,000. The original oil painting, now on display at the Lowry Centre in Salford, sold in 2022 for around £8m. Checking authenticity of a signed print is, of course essential and whilst Lowrys may have sound, provable provenance the prints of other artist super stars are less easy to validate: 'signed' Salvador Dali prints can be found in their hundreds on selling platforms. Caveat Emptor!



*'Settsu Province: Idemi Beach
at Sumiyoshi', Utagawa
Hiroshige Woodblock,*

A less well-known type of print, and one dear to my heart, is '**woodblock**' especially as practised by Japanese artists in the 19th century. The technique of printing both images and text was developed over centuries in China and Japan culminating in some of the most glorious, coloured woodblock prints by artists such as **Katsushika Hokusai** and **Utagawa Hiroshige**.

'The Great Wave off Kanagawa' by Hokusai has got to be one of the most popular, reproduced prints ever. Authenticity again is paramount and can be tricky: an original woodblock print produced by applying multiple layers of colour from several carved woodblocks on to paper made, usually from Mulberry may have an artist's name, a publisher's seal, an edition number.



Sudden Shower over Shin-Ohashi Bridge and Atake,
Woodblock
Utagawa Hiroshige, 1857



Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige), Oil on canvas
Vincent Van Gogh 1887

Japanese woodblock prints were adored by a few late 19th century artists: Van Gogh did his own version of Hiroshige's 'Bridge in the Rain' and 'Flowering Plum Orchard' even adding Japanese-style lettering around the borders. Other artists, including Monet and James McNeill Whistler were also profoundly inspired by **Ukiyo-e** prints with their magical conveying of natural transience and bold use of colour.



Knight, Death and Devil, Engraving,
Albrecht Dürer 1513



The Mask, Linoprint
Frank Weitzel, 1930

Other 'Prints' to look out for are lino cuts by artists such as Enid Marx (1902-1998) and very early etchings or engravings by Albrecht Duerer and Rembrandt. The printed image can be a rare, valuable and beautiful thing and for anyone keen to decorate empty walls *can* be a reasonably cost-effective solution, however, in my opinion if it is a choice between an empty wall and one filled with a Van Gogh 'Sun Flowers' or Munch's 'The Scream' or a Monet 'Water Lilies' or, Yikes! 'The Mona Lisa', keep the wall unadorned!