

PHOTOGRAPHY & INTERIOR DESIGN

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"From today, painting is dead!" So – as legend would have it – proclaimed French history painter Paul Delaroche upon presenting the daguerreotype, a forerunner of the modern photograph, to the French government in 1839. Indeed, the rug was pulled from underneath traditional painters: no longer was making a faithful record of reality considered art. Since George Eastman introduced his box camera to the world in 1888, anybody could be an artist. Or could you?

"Just as owning the best racing cycle money can buy won't turn you into Lance Armstrong, so owning a camera doesn't automatically make you an artist," says Martin Osner, eminent South African photographer and founder of the National College of Photography South Africa "Art photographers render their appreciation of reality into a permanent image that showcases their unique style."

And the art world is steadily taking notice. Early in 2007 "99 Cent II Diptychon" by Andreas Gursky sold for more than \$3 million, the first photograph to do so. Celebrities such as singer Sir Elton John and actress Jamie Lee Curtis are also catching on – in fact, Sir Elton boasts one of the leading private photography collections in the world. He owns more than 2 500 works from photographers such as Man Ray, Alfred Stieglitz and Diane Arbus.

"I never get fed up with looking at the images. I can honestly say that of all the things I've collected in my life, nothing has endeared me more than collecting photography," he told the Traditional Fine Arts Organization.

Part of the rising popularity of art photography can be attributed to the development of giclée printing in the early 1990's. Before this, photographers used vintage printing methods like Cyanotype, platinum; Van Dyk Browns and silver halide black and white processes to achieve archival quality prints and these images are still popular with investors today. Both Cyanotype and Van Dyk Brown processes date as far back as 1842 and these monochrome processes involve exposure to sunlight. Unlike colour, traditional black and white prints have always offered archival permanence, if printed correctly.

"Giclée" is a French noun that means "a spray or a spurt of liquid" and operates on the same principle as the desktop ink-jet printer found in many a study or office. What distinguishes giclée printing from its more common relative is the quality of the inks used. Most giclée inks contain carbon pigments that do not fade over time or damage paper. In a test by the company Wilhelm Imaging Research in the United States different giclée inks demonstrated life spans of between 130 and 230 years. As a testimony of faith in the process, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City is one of the prominent art institutions around the world that displays giclée prints.

"Previously, besides cibachrome, which is a specialized process to make prints from colour slides, the archival permanence of a colour print was not guaranteed," explains Martin. "After 20 years colour prints would fade quite dramatically. This has all changed with giclée printing."

Giclée printing has put art photography within reach of a greater number of patrons than just the traditional art collecting community. It is now possible to decorate your home or office with high quality photographs that will not fade before you have found the perfect matching image.

What are the important factors that people should keep in mind when buying a photograph for their home?

"If you like the work and it is priced right, buy it," is Martin's simple advice. "You must be able to enjoy it every single day and that depends more on personal taste than anything else."

Martin and his longtime friend and fellow photographer, Koos van der Lende, founded the Fingerprint Collection to offer both incidental investors and collectors with a variety of high quality art imaging. Koos was trained at the School of Photography in The Hague and worked as a commercial photographer for twenty years before pursuing his passion for landscape collectables on a fulltime basis. "We believe every artist adds a unique signature to their work, just as every human being has a unique fingerprint," explains Koos. "An artist should be known by their 'fingerprint' as nobody can forge that."

Koos' sweeping panoramas of the Southern African wilderness are worlds away from the sensual inscapes, social documentaries and abstract imaging that Martin captures. But however far removed their choice of subject matter may be their photographs share the most important trait: they have been meticulously captured and printed to ensure that people can admire them well into the next century.

Before you invest in photographic art it is crucial to scrutinise the production of your print as it determines the photograph's future value. Pay attention to:

Type of print.

On top of the limited edition that the artist prints, it is also accepted that they can produce exhibition prints (EP's) and up to five artist prints (AP's). Never buy an exhibition print – these images are printed to be displayed in order to sell the limited edition photographs and are essentially worthless. However, artist prints are produced in the run-up to actual edition and are of value.

Printing method.

Ensure that your image is printed to meet archival quality – such as the carbon pigment inks and acid free paper used in giclée printing guarantees. Although traditional black and white silver halide prints offer excellent permanence, don't be fooled when artists offer black and white images that are actually printed on colour lab paper. Rather consult a gallerist or interior designer if you are unsure.

Time of print.

Some artists prefer to print the limited edition all at once. It may take up to ten years or more to sell, which affects the longevity of the last prints. To avoid this, the Fingerprint Collection only prints on demand to provide patrons with their photograph's maximum lifespan.

Paper.

When making giclée prints the paper that carries it should be 100% acid free. "We prefer Hahnemühle's museum etching paper, because it has such a lovely feel to it," says Koos, "but there are many other brands that also offer fine art mould made paper of similar quality." The Fingerprint Collection also attaches a numbered hologram to the back of the photograph and this number is transferred to a certificate of authenticity, signed by the printer, which is offered as guaranty to the buyer.

Authenticity of your purchase.

You must be certain that the photographer you buy from will honour his or her limited edition. To facilitate trust in the Fingerprint Collection, the sale of each and every photograph is captured in a computer index that is open to public inspection. Furthermore, Koos and Martin also embosses the print with their initials, which adds to the authenticity of the photograph.

Framing. Avoid framing your print under matt glass as this detracts from the visual depth of the image and can add a colour cast. Rather use clear glass. Although it is expensive to fit reflection free glass it is well worth it, as you can appreciate your photograph from every angle. "A frame should be there just to hold the photograph, not to ordain it," says Martin. "A photograph should stand out on its own." The Fingerprint Collection recommends simple white or black frames depending on the colour of their patrons' walls. Martin also suggests that you place a small spacer behind the frame to protect your image from moisture in the wall.

Knowledge of your interior designer.

If you are employing an interior designer, make sure that this person specifically works with photography and are knowledgeable of the standards prints must comply with to be of archival quality. A list of accredited designers can be obtained at www.sagid.co.za.

Once you are satisfied that your purchase will last your lifetime, finally ensure that the photograph is never exposed to direct sunlight and that it is displayed under suitable lighting. "Under tungsten light the image will appear orange and under sodium lamps it may look green," says Koos. Photographs are colour corrected under white light and should be displayed the same way. Rather use daylight corrected lighting to ensure your art is viewed the way the artist intended it to be.

Why go to these lengths? What is it that makes photography special?

"I think it has a lot to do with its connection to reality," explains Martin. "Photography is not a merely an imitation of life, it is real and because of this it has a contemporary feel that a younger audience seems to relate to a lot easier. It has become the art form of preference."

Visit www.fingerprintcollection.com to learn more.