



Giclée Prints: The Opportunities for Artists and Photographers

Introduction: Throughout history, the development of new technologies and pigments have offered visual artists exciting opportunities to experiment, innovate and expand their money-making potential.

In our generation, the most beneficial new technique to emerge is undoubtedly giclée printing. It's more than a means of reproducing art or photos. Giclée also offers two distinct routes for maximising public awareness of you plus income from your creative works. They are:

- Self-publishing via online, event and gallery sales
- Licensing of images to Fine Art Giclée Publishers

This document will summarise the challenges and advantages inherent in self-publishing; a second, companion download explores licensing. But let's start with some basic background.

“What is a ‘giclée’ print?”

The word ‘giclée’ is pronounced ‘zhee-clay’ means roughly “to spray” and comes from the French ‘gicleur’, meaning nozzle. In essence, giclée is a computer-controlled fine art print method that applies a microscopic jet-stream spray of specially formulated, long-life inks to ‘substrates’ – i.e. fine art or photo papers and canvas, which should all be custom made for the giclée process, acid-free and micro-porous coated to enhance the longevity of your final print.

Giclée represents the very best quality fine art printing available today; it can capture even tiny lines, individual brushstrokes and an amazingly rich range of colours – including several subtle blacks.



A good giclée print service progresses through all these stages:

- Assessment of the original to spot potential problems or challenges
- Digital scanning – flat bed or photo-scanned image capture
- Mastering – colour balancing, sharpening of details, test prints preparatory to making the final master file
- Final prints and quality checking

“Can I have Restoration without the drama?”

Digital restoration – an optional step following scanning, can perform minor miracles, including repair of bends, tears, unwanted ink or paint spots, lightening or darkening of any area. This allows giclée experts to remove ‘mistakes’ such as ink spots, strip away the subtle discolouration that affects most originals with the passage of time, and produce master files that express exactly what the artist wants to be seen.

Heritage organisations regularly use such methods to restore historic paintings and prints, and digital restoration works just as well for new works. If the giclée service is professional and skilled*, it isn’t unusual for artists to comment that the finished giclée print actually looks “better than the original”.

- N.B. Seek suppliers that have earned membership in the Fine Art Trade Guild by meeting their rigorous quality standards.

“Do I have to visit the giclée print studio in person?”

No. In most cases, you can mail/courier your original artwork (well protected and insured) – or failing that, send a good transparency or a TIFF file from a RAW digital photo on disk. Remote working is the normal way of working with giclée print services, but some do allow and encourage artists to visit so they can watch and understand the entire, painstaking giclée process.

Studios *should* give you a disk containing your masters and will also hold a back-up copy on their computers so you can reorder prints by phone or email.

About Self-Publishing

“Self-publishing” simply means that an artist or photographer produces open (unlimited) or limited editions of giclée prints from his/her originals and handles their sales and distribution independently. Because you reproduce original images with the intention of selling, you become a de facto “publisher”.

“What are the advantages of making digital masters and self-publishing giclée prints?”

- 1) Future-proofing. Scan and master your work, and you have a permanent record, faithful to the original, that won't degrade as transparencies do. A master on disk also allows galleries/potential commissioners to see your past work or use images in retrospective shows.

Also, if your original work is ever stolen, the digital master provides evidence to the police/your insurer. Although your original(s) would be lost, you could still make excellent prints/cards to sell.

- 2) Galleries often prefer to have both originals and giclées (preferably limited editions) so that visitors unable to afford an original can buy a good print. That's important in these times of economic downturn; better to sell a print than nothing at all!
- 3) It's a great way to make many more potential buyers aware of your work. You can only paint – and show – so many originals in your life. But each original can generate hundreds of high quality prints. And the more buyers you have, the more free word-of-mouth promotion will be working for you.
- 4) Canny artists are beginning to realise that issuing and selling fine art giclée prints means that they can retain more of their originals as a “pension fund”. While print sales are spreading the word about their work and making them more popular, the value of their originals continues to increase. Better than money in the bank!
- 5) You get to keep more of the money! In fact, self-publishing means that you, the creator of the images, are in control. You decide the size prints you want and what paper or canvas to use. You choose the print service and oversee the quality of what you get. You decide how many should be in a limited edition. You select what markets to aim for/what galleries to contact. You

choose whether to sell online or not. You set the minimum price you must receive.

- 6) Giclées actually *save you money*, because it's an "on-demand" medium. There's no need for huge print runs, so you'll have no unsold 'stock' getting dog-eared on your shelves, as you would with old fashioned mass-production print methods.

Seek out a print service that has no minimum print order. Once images have been mastered, you can order prints by phone or email as needed. Each sale finances the next batch of prints!

"What are the disadvantages of self-publishing?"

- 1) Everything depends on you. If you are disorganised, e.g. don't keep track of the limited edition numbers issued and who bought each, you'll soon get into a mess. Collectors and buyers expect the reassurance that the prints they buy are authentic. That means you must sign them, you must have a certificate of authenticity for each (your print service should supply these) and you must keep a written record of numbers issued - e.g. 1/250, 2/250 etc. and the buyers' names/addresses up to the end of each edition. The buyers' details also form part of your mailing list for future exhibitions and promotion of new images.
- 2) If you either lack time or the perseverance to run your mini-publishing venture professionally - e.g. if you aren't prepared to do the legwork and make a confident presentation of your work to the Press or retailers, then back off now. A businesslike attitude, careful planning, energy and keeping promises on time every time are all part of successful self-publishing.
- 3) In the "numbers game" of marketing, sales and distribution, you will probably never have the same breadth of contacts or promotional resources as a fine art publisher. So don't expect high sales volumes or a constant income from print sales.

Tips for Successful Self-publishing

- Research fine art giclée services, and wherever possible, go to someone recommended by another artist or known to specialise in working with artists and/or photographers. Avoid going to general printers or digital hot shops etc. who may say they "offer" giclée printing. The focus of such businesses is on fast turnaround and 'button pushing' to standard settings - not on

personal service and taking time to carefully colour balance and sharpen details until they achieve the most faithful possible reproduction of the original.

Establishing a good working relationship with an expert, specialist giclée print service is *crucial* when contemplating self-publishing. These firms are few and far between, but have a wealth of knowledge about what sells and what doesn't, useful contacts and a willingness to help artists and photographers with good advice. This is actually enlightened self-interest on their part, because the more you sell, the more work you'll give them.

- Plan your products. Get samples of paper or canvas from potential suppliers and consider the best way to present your work to your target market. Maybe you should try several approaches. Will you offer mounted prints in acid-free polyester sleeves for display in a browser? Or ready-framed? Good frames enhance perceived value and can boost print selling prices considerably. But don't be tempted to use cheap, mass-produced frames; you degrade and cheapen your images. And if you don't respect your work, why should anyone else?
- Think about size. Normal domestic settings may not have room for A1 or even A2 prints which, once mounted and framed, could take up most of a sitting room wall. But hotels, restaurants and corporate clients will expect big, 'wow-factor' prints to suit their larger venues.
- Be authentic. Remember to offer/attach the certificate of authenticity for all limited edition prints.
- Think carefully about pricing. If you are selling direct – e.g. to consumers or businesses from your own studio or your own e-commerce "shop", you are the retailer, and need to charge the maximum the market will bear, since you must pay for your overheads: website construction and maintenance, packing and postage, insurances, advertising and marketing, attendance of key art events, and the giclée scanning/printing service.

However, if you are selling into the retail trade – a physical or online gallery, say, you need to know what their mark-up will be, and take their advice about the maximum selling prices they are achieving for giclée prints. They may also have quite firm ideas about the optimum edition size you should issue for the end buyers who shop with them.

- Small is beautiful. Don't forget that blank giclée cards on fine art stock offer the same high quality as full-size prints, and show all your desired contact information on the back. Small 'impulse' purchase cards can (and do) spark later contacts, commissions and bigger sales of both prints and originals.

-end-

© J. Roland 2008 for Salt of the Earth Giclée Print Service. For permission to reproduce this document, email: jude.roland@btconnect.com