

Limited Interest in Limited Editions

Written by Libby Holloway

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I am one of millions of Americans who watched the Royal Wedding. It was the “wedding of the century” and I enjoyed every second of it; though I admit to not being very engaged in the whole process until I flipped on CNN at 6:00 am (as I usually do) and saw Kate Middleton standing at the door of the cathedral waiting to walk down the aisle. I was hooked.

Maybe the main reason I was making sourpuss faces at every mention of the wedding before the actual ceremony is the mementoes being sold to commemorate the event. I don’t really mind the huge gobs of low quality cups and t-shirts which are honestly sold as trinkets. What makes me cringe are the “limited edition,” high quality, works of art tripe that I see being touted. Now, that sounds pretty ugly coming from me because I’m usually “so nice”. I have a term for this type of item – “dusty dodahs,” which does sound more like my mild mannered style of derision. This term includes just about anything that has to do with the “Something or Other” Mint, designer plates, stuffed animals, bobble heads, etc. You get the picture. I’m not against the items per se, and definitely not the people who love and collect them. I am vehemently against the sales pitches that lead people to believe these items will become highly valuable immediately upon purchase. I say “Dodah!”

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“Limited Edition” can be a very meaningful term. There are limited editions of small numbers of 15 to even 500 that can become valuable. These may be antique or new and anything from wall art to dolls. The idea that 500,000 of something made for display will become valuable any time soon is the one that bothers me. Many advertisers fail to mention what the run, or number made, is. Also, be aware that some limited editions have the right to be re-struck or remade in another run if the item proves popular. It takes a lot of very naughty children to destroy enough of the item to make single issues valuable. Don't even get me started on certificates of authenticity issued by the manufacturer.

About this time last year I wrote an article which featured a collector who created a display of blue and white Royal Copenhagen plates that was stunning against her yellow dining room walls. I'm not reversing my opinion that objects such as these make beautiful collections. I am just trying to let you all down easily before you ask a dealer or appraiser to give you an exciting number for an item of this type. Her large collection does include a few plates that have value higher than the list price but most could be found on eBay for less than half of what the original price was.

The subjects of limited editions are often most popular at the time the edition is planned. Sometimes the subject continues to be popular for a long time and sometimes not. Princess Diana themed pieces were popular at the time of her wedding, waned, revived during her divorce and death, then waned again. There has been a small increase in interest due to William's wedding, but I predict that won't be long lived. Some types of editions seem never to go out of style. Audubon bird prints have been popular since the first folio was presented. The images are still reproduced as calendar pages and home decor type prints. The early engravings continue to rise in value though a computer generated calendar page framed for the guest bathroom may be only as valuable as the framing. Often decorative prints of subjects such as French botanicals are reprinted over and over, including the corner where an edition number is. This means that there may be 5,000 of number 3/250. If you choose to collect true limited editions, buy from a trusted dealer or spend a little time educating yourself on what to look for in the true editions as intended by the artist.

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By the way, as soon as the much-awaited kiss between William and Kate was over, I heard journalists begin to mention the Queen's Jubilee next year. Wonder if that Queen Elizabeth teddy bear of mine will be worth something now?

Libby Holloway is a Certified Appraiser of antiques and residential contents. She is a member of the International Society of Appraisers where she is currently serving as Secretary of the Board of Directors. She is also a partner at Antiques and Such. Libby can be contacted at www.LibbyHollowayAppraisals.com

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