Finding an image you love is a wonderful place to start—but it isn't the only thing to consider when you're buying art for the first time. The print quality, paper or canvas, edition size, artist credit, shipping, and return policy all affect what you're bringing home. Those details can help you decide whether a piece suits your space, your budget, and the way you want to support the artist.

Online, it's easy to get swept up in a beautiful photograph of artwork on a wall. Before you buy, take a closer look at what's behind the image. This guide covers the questions worth asking, from materials and sizing to collectible editions and a certificate of authenticity art buyers can use to document a print's details.

Start With the Artist and the Seller

Before you compare frames or measurements, find out who made the work and who is selling it. A trustworthy listing should identify the artist by name and give you a way to learn more about their practice. Look for a short biography, other works, or a link to the artist's website or social media. You don't need a long résumé to buy art, but clear attribution is a basic sign of care.

If you're shopping through a marketplace, check how it works. Does it sell work directly from artists, or does it act as a retailer? Is the marketplace clear about its relationship with the people who make the art? A Black-owned art marketplace can be a meaningful place to discover Black artists and invest in their work. As with any retailer, read the product details and policies rather than assuming every marketplace handles sales, payments, or fulfillment the same way.

Look for clear artist credit

The artist's name should be easy to find—not buried in fine print or replaced by a vague description such as "local artist." Check that the name on the product page matches the name on the edition information or certificate, if one is provided. If the piece is a collaboration, a reproduction, or based on an older work, the listing should make that clear too.

Artist credit is more than a courtesy. It allows buyers to identify and follow the artist, and it gives the work context. When a listing doesn't say who made the piece, ask the seller before ordering. A seller who can answer straightforward questions about attribution is better positioned to help if you later need support with the order.

Understand How Your Purchase Supports the Artist

Buying directly from an artist is one way to support their practice, but direct sales aren't the only ethical route. Galleries and marketplaces may provide useful services such as printing, marketing, payment processing, and customer support. What matters is whether the sales arrangement is transparent and whether the artist is credited and compensated as agreed.

Look for information about how the marketplace works with artists. Some explain their commission or payment model; others may not publish exact figures. If you're unsure, ask how the artist benefits from the sale. Don't assume that a low price means the artist is receiving fair pay—or that a higher price automatically means they are. When an artist or seller explains the process clearly, you can make a more informed choice.



For prints, also check whether the artist authorizes the edition and whether the print is being sold as an official reproduction. A reputable listing should distinguish the artist's authorized print from a poster, an open-edition reproduction, or an image licensed from another source. That distinction matters to the artist and to you as a buyer.

Know What "Limited Edition" Means

A limited-edition print is produced in a defined quantity. The edition size might be listed as, for example, 25 or 100 prints. Each print may also have an individual number, such as 7/25, meaning it is the seventh print in an edition of 25. Some artists offer prints in several sizes or on different materials; ask whether those versions count as separate editions and how they are documented.

"Limited edition" can signal that the artist has capped the number of prints, but the phrase alone doesn't tell you everything about rarity, value, or future resale. Editions vary in size, printing method, and documentation. Buy a print because you enjoy living with it, not because you expect it to appreciate. If the edition details matter to you, look for them in writing before paying.

Open editions can be a good choice, too

An open-edition print has no fixed maximum quantity. It may be an accessible way to own work you love, and it can still be beautifully made. The main difference is that the print is not scarce by virtue of a predetermined edition size. Neither format is automatically better: choose based on your budget, preferences, and the information the seller provides.

Ask for a Certificate of Authenticity

A certificate of authenticity art buyers receive may document the artist, title, medium, print process, edition size, and the specific number of the print. It may be a paper certificate, a signed card, or a digital record. For a limited edition, it can help connect the print you own to the edition described in the listing.

A certificate is useful, but it isn't a guarantee of quality or value on its own. A document is only as reliable as the information it contains and the person or business issuing it. Check that its details agree with the product page

and any markings on the print. If the listing says “signed and numbered,” confirm whether the print is signed by hand, signed in the plate, or sold with a separate signature or certificate.

For an affordable print, the seller may not include a formal certificate. That doesn’t necessarily make the work a poor choice. What matters is that the seller accurately describes what you’re buying and gives you enough documentation to keep a record of the purchase. Save the receipt, product description, and any edition information.

Compare Materials and Sizing

Materials and sizing have a big impact on how a piece looks, how long it can last, and what it will cost to display. A listing should say whether you’re buying a paper print, canvas, framed work, or a digital file. If it uses shorthand such as “fine art print,” look for more specifics about the paper, ink, and printing method.

For a paper print, check the paper type and weight if the seller provides them. Cotton rag and other fine-art papers are common in quality printmaking, but paper names alone don’t tell the whole story. Ask whether the paper is acid-free or archival, and whether it has a matte, satin, or glossy surface. A matte finish may reduce glare; a glossy surface can make colors feel more vivid but may show reflections and fingerprints more readily.

Next, check the print dimensions. Measurements usually refer to the paper or image area, and the listing should say which. A print described as 16 by 20 inches may have a white border that changes the visible image size. If it’s framed, confirm the outside dimensions too. This saves you from discovering that your “small” artwork doesn’t fit the spot you had in mind—or that the frame costs nearly as much as the print.



Listing detail What to check Why it matters Print dimensions Image size, paper size, and border Helps you choose a frame and plan the wall placement Material Paper, canvas, or another surface Affects the appearance, handling, and framing options Framing Whether a frame or mat is included Clarifies the delivered size and total cost Edition details Open or limited edition, numbering, and signature Sets expectations about the print and its documentation

What Museum-Grade Giclée and Archival Materials Mean

“Giclée” is a commonly used term for high-quality inkjet printing. It often refers to prints made with fine ink droplets and a broad range of colors, but the word by itself isn’t a complete quality standard. Two giclée prints can

differ in paper, ink, printer, and production care. Ask what materials are used rather than relying on the label alone.

When a seller describes a print as museum-grade or archival, look for specifics. Archival-quality paper and inks are intended to resist deterioration under suitable conditions, but no print is indestructible. Sunlight, humidity, smoke, heat, and poor framing can all affect its life. "Museum-grade" is a useful description only when it's backed by information about the actual materials and process.

For a print you hope to enjoy for many years, consider acid-free paper, high-quality pigment inks, and a frame with UV-protective glazing. Hang the work away from direct sunlight and damp areas. These steps won't prevent all fading or damage, but they can help protect your purchase.

Read the Return Policy Before You Order

The return policy is one of the least exciting details on a product page—and one of the most important. Art can look different in person than it *black woman wall art* does on a screen. Colors may vary by monitor, and a print's scale can be hard to judge from styled room photographs. Before purchasing, find out whether returns or exchanges are accepted, how many days you have, and whether the artwork must be unopened or in its original packaging.

Pay particular attention to custom and made-to-order items. Some sellers don't accept returns on personalized, custom-sized, or framed work unless it arrives damaged or doesn't match the listing. Check who pays return shipping and whether any restocking fee applies. If you need the art by a certain date, look for production and shipping estimates too; a print made after purchase may take longer than an item already in stock.

Questions to answer before checkout

- Is the work eligible for a return, exchange, or refund?
- What is the return window, and when does it begin?
- Who pays return shipping, and how should the work be repacked?
- What should I do if the package arrives damaged?
- Is the listed delivery date an estimate or a guarantee?

Save a copy of the product page and policy when you order. If something is unclear, ask the seller in writing before checkout. A concise answer now can prevent a frustrating surprise later.

Think About Presentation and Total Cost

The price on the product page may not be the full cost of owning the art. Add the frame, mat, shipping, taxes, and any import or delivery fees. If the artwork is unframed, check whether it's a standard size. A standard size is usually easier and less expensive to frame than an unusual one.

Think about where the piece will go. A large, bold print can anchor a room, while a smaller work may feel more at home on a shelf or in a gallery wall. If you're unsure about scale, mark the dimensions on the wall with painter's tape or cut a paper template. This simple step can make online sizing feel much less abstract.

Also inspect the product photographs. Look for a straight-on image that shows the full work, close-ups that reveal surface details, and a room image that gives a sense of scale. Room styling can be helpful, but it may use a different frame or print size than the one for sale. Read the listing carefully to confirm what is included.

A First-Art-Buying Checklist

1. Confirm the artist's name and how the seller identifies the work.
2. Read whether the print is open edition or limited edition, and verify any numbering or signature claims.
3. Review the medium, paper or canvas, printing method, and archival details.
4. Check both the image dimensions and the full paper or framed dimensions.
5. Ask whether a certificate of authenticity or other edition documentation is included.
6. Understand how the marketplace works with artists and how the sale supports them.
7. Read the return policy, shipping timeline, and damage procedure.
8. Calculate the total cost, including framing and delivery.

Buy the Work You'll Be Glad to Live With

Your first art purchase doesn't need to be a major investment or a perfect decision. It should be a piece you're excited to see on your wall, backed by clear information about what you're buying. Ask practical questions, look beyond promotional language, and choose a seller who treats the artist and the buyer with care.

When the image, materials and sizing, artist credit, documentation, and return policy all make sense to you, you can buy with more confidence. Whether you choose an affordable open edition or a collectible print from a Black-owned art marketplace, the best first piece is one that feels right in your home—and whose story you're happy to support.