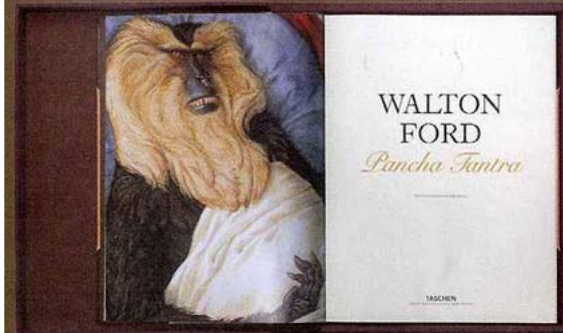


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Publisher – Taschen

Title – Walton Ford: Pancha Tantra

What – From the big art book specialist comes this monograph of a wildlife painter, available as a Collectors Edition of 1500 copies, priced £750, and a limited Art Edition of 100 individually numbered and signed copies, complete with an original print created by Ford specially for the book. Measuring 37.5cm x 50cm and priced at £4000, this edition is bound in calf leather with gold embossing and packaged in a calf leather clamshell case.

They say – 'The art can really be appreciated at this scale,' says designer Andy Disl. 'Handling a much bigger space is a challenge, but it gives you an opportunity to zoom in and show a lot of Ford's details, which tell more of the story.'

Best design feature – The book has 12 horizontal fold-outs and four vertical fold-outs, to create an even bigger canvas.

Previous Taschen editions – Sumo, by Helmut Newton (which came with its own stand); Greatest of All Time – Muhammad Ali.

Books

Heavy duty

Michael Johnson questions the virtues of large, limited edition books and asks whether they're just money-making schemes, while **Fiona Sibley** reviews some to hit the shelves before Christmas

By Michael Johnson

YOU probably have a copy of Phaidon's Art Book on your shelves. Somehow, the publisher managed to cram 500 pages of great art into a book and then sell it for £20.

Recently, publishers seem to have discovered a new twist on this – big books, but in limited editions. Less 'print a million, sell 'em cheap', more 'print as few as we can, as big as we can and charge as much as possible'.

Only a few years ago, Taschen, keen to show it wasn't just a budget purveyor of soft porn, produced Helmut Newton's Sumo, which was so heavy it needed a Philippe Starck-designed table just to hold it. The coffee table book became the coffee table itself (but watch you don't spill your cappuccino). A quick check on Abebooks.com reveals copies starting at \$12 000 (£6000).

Even art books with print runs of a few thousand copies now command significant prices. Damien Hirst's 1997 collaboration with Jonathan Barnbrook 'I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere...' will set you back about \$3500 (£1750) for a signed copy (this is for a book that started at £70). Little wonder that Barnbrook himself wishes he had more than two copies.

The variation on the big-equals-beautiful theme is the availability of differently priced editions. You can buy 'basic' editions for £1000, rising to £6000 for the signed edition with a lock of the artist's hair Sellotaped to the endpapers. Ok, I'm joking, but only a little.

These are books destined to say as much about their owners as the books themselves (you'll need a big apartment to show them off, after all). But if you're considering investing, check the numbers first. There were 10 000 copies of Sumo printed – that's not very 'limited' is it? Sure, they sold for £6000 each, but you'd be lucky to make a profit when you resell it.

If you're interested in books as investments, there are other, much smarter ways to do it. A full set of D&AD Annuals is rumoured to be worth £30 000. A copy of Mise en Page – the first ever book on graphic design, from 1931 – is worth more than \$4000 (£2000).

But, if you're looking for a serious front room talking point, maybe these are for you, or maybe they make the perfect present? Just don't assume that 'big' equals 'collectable'.

Michael Johnson is creative director of Johnson Banks

ONE TO WATCH OUT FOR

John Stephenson at Rocket Gallery, London, specialises in producing limited edition, high-value books for collectors featuring photography by the likes of Martin Parr. Next to be published is a limited edition monograph by the Danish photographer Keld Helmer-Petersen



1 Three spreads from New York, published by Gloria

2 Floor-standing display case for New York

3 Spread from Walton Ford's Pancha Tantra, published by Taschen

4 Presentation box for Ford's Pancha Tantra

5 Cover and spread from Magnum Magnum, published by Thames & Hudson

6 Paul Graham's A Shimmer of Possibility, published by Steidl