

Specialist Papers

Permajet Digital Transfer Film
Epson MetallicProof

One of the refreshing things about artists (as against photographers) is a greater willingness to experiment with new media and novel ways of using media. It is not that photographers do not try this stuff, more that they are often a little conservative. One photographic example which springs to mind, however, is the work of Mike Larson who has taken to flinging his precious cameras in the air above an assembled crowd and using the self-timer, along with a motor drive burst, to shoot the group from above (<http://blog.mikelarson.com/labels/camera%20toss.html>). It is an example of doing something that many people would never either think of, or dare to do! Artistic examples are more numerous, going back to Picasso and beyond. Picasso's famous Bull's Head is made from a bicycle saddle and handlebars; he also employed a number of novel materials in his collages, not all of which were particularly robust against the ravages of time (eg newspaper). The current state of his *Guernica* is such that it can never be moved from its home in a special room in the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid; the old boy perhaps never imagined, when he was commissioned to create a wall mural for the Paris International Exposition at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris, that it would one day become a priceless piece of iconic art.

All this leads us to the feature subject – specialist papers. The name is a misnomer as both the feature media are on pure plastic bases!

Epson MetallicProof

This media was developed so that carton and packaging designers could proof their concepts when the intended output was onto a metallised foil or card. However, it has not taken long for the experimentalists to think of ways of using it creatively. We were introduced to this at Focus when shown the work of John Fox of Gem Photography who has a complete wedding album made from MetallicProof. The pages were laminated and then bound in the usual way.

Testing

The media is available in roll form only and was tested on our Epson 4900 with Matt Black Ink. The profile used was that for DisplayTrans Backlight media (SP7900 9900 DTBLM Mk v2.jcc for the record). We are unsure how the profile was made, our own spectro would not look at the test targets, the reflective surface simply confused it! Single readings were possible but even these were compromised as a patch that looked correct by visual assessment was some 20 to 30% too dark as read by the spectro. Overall then no form of analysis could be carried out – it was all down to our eyes.

Visually the prints were a little yellow, the shadows separated down to 30RGB points and the highlights faded away beyond 240 RGB points. On this basis some experimentation would be needed to 'correct' the image for an improved look. It might also be that we were using the profile from a slightly different machine (but as explained we could not make a profile).



The impact of the prints cannot be reproduced on a magazine page or indeed even photographed! The highlights reflect back the surroundings if you focus your eyes beyond the surface, it is after all a mirror finish. As an album media it would make a striking cover or section spacer or perhaps a wall portrait – we are to be convinced that an entire album does not look slightly over the top, but that is a matter of taste.

Technically there are a few issues to watch for. The ink surface is very soft before it dries and remains vulnerable afterwards. One print fell out onto the office carpet while still wet, it was not a pretty sight! Also during printing you have to keep the surroundings clean and dust free and the media covers shut. The vast expanse of plastic generates a large static electricity charge which seems to suck stuff out of the air; operators with dry skin or dandruff will have to be particularly vigilant and stay well away from exposed areas of the media. Once the print has dried, cold lamination is essential, something that you may already have built in to your album workflow. The Hotpress kit seems to do the job OK.

Overall then, MetallicProof offers possibilities for something radically different. As we have said, full albums might be a little OTT but just a cover to an album on your studio coffee table would certainly attract attention. Selling a wall portrait might be an easier proposition.



Permajet Digital transfer Film

Many people consider that the only prints worth investing in are silver halide monochromes, indeed there is some reflection of this in the auction catalogues. Although people have invested thousands in hand-manipulated Polaroids (which they could never have on display) the fact that the manipulating hand was Andy Warhol's might have had an influence on the bidding! For many reasons then, silver halide, and perhaps platinum prints, are more sought after than other forms of photographic media.

Once inkjet printers became good it was not long before darkroom printers started to dabble with creating contact negatives made on inkjet printers; at the time the world was awash with clear overhead projector film, the standard vehicle for making presentations. There are advantages to making digital negatives because the power of Photoshop can be brought to bear at the negative-making stage and then creating multiple, limited edition prints is far simpler than the rather hit-and-miss hand dodging and burning. Also the creative montaging that you can do with Photoshop far exceeds what even the most skilled darkroom worker can manage and this offers a direct route to a wet chemistry output.

A number of manufacturers provide a digital transfer media but we tried the Permajet version. They provide



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good instructions to get you started and essentially the process consists of:

1. Convert to Greyscale (Image>Mode>Greyscale)
2. Ensure image is at the correct size @ 300dpi (Image>Adjustments>Image Size)
3. Invert image to a negative (Image>Adjustments>Invert)
4. Flip image horizontally (Select>All, Edit>Transform>Flip Horizontal)

We made a reasonably good-looking negative at the first attempt and although we can no longer take it right through to wet printing, we measured the maximum transmission density of the negative as 0.5, which was a bit weedy, but should be capable of producing a usable working negative. There is plenty of scope for experimentation. For example we achieved a 'clear negative' Lab luminance of 93% when inverting the image from greyscale but only 85% when inverting from RGB. There are many ways that this can be manipulated. Lambrecht and Woodhouse's book *Way beyond Monochrome* has a good section on refining negatives (and remains the best book we have ever seen on monochrome photography!). In this they discuss the use of curves to influence the transfer function of the negative-positive pair for optimum results – such things will go right over the head of younger readers but were once the stock trade of monochrome printers!

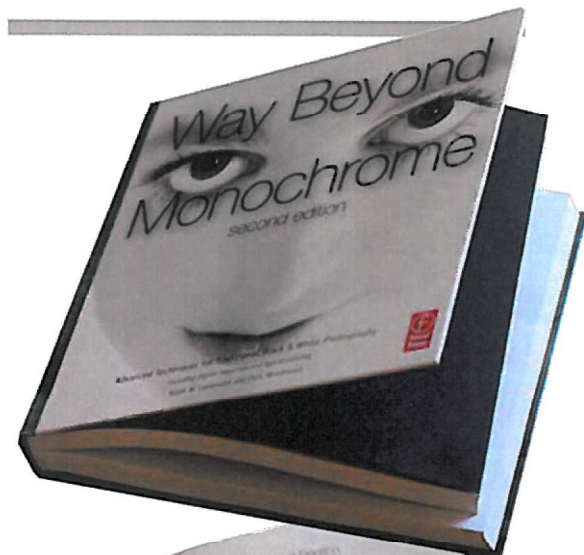
As with MetallicProof, making digital negatives is hardly a mainstream activity but the image makers of previous generations never allowed the relative scarcity of their endeavours to unduly influence their creative drive – think outside the box and work outside the box you never know what might turn up!

STOP PRESS

As we went to press PermaJet announced that they have a new digital negative transfer film with improved performance and properties (it is now a clear base and has enhanced sharpness). More about this when we have tested it!



Permajet have an attractive new issue of their catalogue where you will find Digital Transfer media which is available in both A4 and A3 sizes.



Way Beyond Monochrome was reviewed in June 2011 and remains the best book around on monochrome. The section on digital transfer negatives is very thorough. *Way Beyond Monochrome* 2nd Edition by Ralph W Lambrecht and Chris Woodhouse. ISBN 978-0-240-81625-8. Hard back, 542 pages. Published by Focal Press at £42.99.