The Printed Image – Article #4

In the last article we discussed the wide choice of paper that is available to the discerning photographer and also briefly touched upon paper/printer profiles. This article is all about using paper profiles to get the best results, specifically "soft proofing". In short, we are now getting to the exciting stuff!

There is a huge difference between the "taking" and the "making" of an image. This is where your creative imagination and expression comes to the fore. The extent you wish to go in the "making" of an image and how far you wish to play with reality and the literal truth, so to speak, is largely down to your own creative desires. The only real constraint is if you wish to enter into a "natural history" or "travel" category of a formal competition, salon or exhibition when it becomes imperative that the rules disallowing "fiddling and diddling" must be strictly observed. Your reputation is at stake here so if you are considering entry some of these make sure you read the rules...twice!

In the "making" of your image during post capture process it is inevitable that you have in your mind's eye a vision of what the image says to you and how you wish such to be perceived by others. It therefore becomes inescapable that your choice of paper is a key element in the final printing process and how you wish the image to be seen by others. The wrong choice of paper can destroy this vision as can that of a poorly printed image.

To get the best out of your work and that of a print which perfectly satisfies your ultimate goal and vision, time, experimentation, knowledge and such like all become vitally important. Regrettably, as with most thing's, all this comes at a price. Producing your own prints isn't cheap but it can be enormously satisfying. To help contain costs knowing how to "soft-proof" an image before committing to a final print is valuable knowledge, particularly if you wish to use third party papers such as Permajet, Fotospeed and the like with your Epson or Canon printer.

> *Soft-proofing is the capability to preview onscreen how photos appear when printed, and optimize them for a particular output device. Soft-proofing in the Lightroom or Photoshop lets you evaluate how images appear when printed, and adjust them so that you can reduce surprising tone and color shifts.*

It was my intention to take you step-by-step through the "soft proofing" stage but then I realised that such would take up a lot of space in this article plus there already exists some excellent articles and video's describing this probably better than I ever could anyway. With this in mind I thought that a better alternative would be to direct you to some such articles via the links below. Note that there is a lot of Soft Proofing advice available on the internet, as you will see if you Google the words.

A good general article:

https://www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/soft-proofing.htm

Soft-proofing using Adobe Lightroom

https://www.slrlounge.com/soft-proofing-lightroom-adobe/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HCMP7u6-bk

Soft-proofing using Adobe Photoshop

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njFgYba3lHU

Soft proofing Tip Sheet available here

https://www.glyndewis.com/get-perfect-prints-downloading-soft-proofing-tip-sheet/?v=79cba1185463

There are five very important procedures when attempting to soft proof an image.

The first is that you have downloaded and installed the relevant paper profiles for your specific printer and installed them on your PC. Instructions on how to do this are available when you go to the paper suppliers profile page

Secondly make sure that you use the right ink.

Thirdly have a duplicate image sitting on your screen alongside your original. Use the duplicate as your soft proof copy such that you can compare with your original. Use the soft proof version with photo editing software adjustments to vary the proof copy such that, so far as you are able, it matches your original you see alongside. The hue and saturation, brightness and contrast, levels or curves adjustments, etc are all good to use for this.

Fourth print from the soft proof copy complete with the adjustments you have made, **not the original.**

Lastly save the proof copy cw all the adjustments you have made as a separate file so that if you wish to reprint and exact version again or go back and re-tweak its there available to you and you do not need to start all over.

Top Tip: *In my own work I do all that I can with the original file to bring it to the point where I then wish to make a print. When I am ready to make a print I flatten and resize the image to suit, for example many of my images in a landscape format are ideally sized at 34cm x 23cm at 360dpi. Having resized the image I might then which to add a keyline around it, typically at 3 or 4 pixels. I am then ready to go through the soft-proofing stage and make the actual print. I then save this image as a "print file" alongside that before I did the resizing and such like mentioned above. To distinguish one from the other I add a "_P_" to the file name, plus frequently the paper used. A simple example might be say "Colchester Castle_P_PJet FB Royal". Should there be an occasion whereby I want to go back to the original and make some further adjustments before I flattened the image I can do this, re-flatten, resize and add keyline etc. I can then open up my previous printed version and simply drag the soft proofing adjustements across to the new reworked image and make another print.*

However bear in mind that you will never get a 100% exact match between that which you see on the screen and a print because, as mentioned in an earlier article, that from a screen is a projected light source and a print is a reflected one. You goal is to get the best match you can and some papers, such as a gloss/semi-gloss will get you closer than say a matt paper. The trick is to know in advance how a particular type of image is likely to be rendered on a particular type of paper and this only comes from experience. I am sorry about that but the journey is worth making, so enjoy it.

Well that's it really and I look forward to seeing all your prints next season.

Roy Essery MPAGB