A Description Of The Bromoil Process

By Dave Symonds F.R.P.S. E.F.I.A.P.

Very simply, the silver image in a black and white print is replaced by an ink image. The three basic steps are as follows:

1. Make a conventional black and white print on a fiber based bromide paper, (grade 2 or 3) washing and drying in the normal way.
2. Bleach/Tan the print, fix, wash and then dry. The image should almost disappear. This is called the matrix.
3. To print, soak the matrix for a few minutes. Remove all traces of water from both sides of the matrix. Ink-up the print.

Tools:

- Usual darkroom equipment i.e. enlarger, dishes etc.
- Glass Base
- Brushes (Shaving brushes, Pastry brushes, spotting brush etc.).
- Paint Roller, The small type with a foam rubber and sheepskin rollers (as used for decorating).
- Pencil eraser, scalpel
- Ink (1796) Black
- Kitchen towels
- Cotton wool Pads, Cotton wool buds
- Newspaper

Process

1 The print

Kentmere Document Art paper is a good starting point (in the UK), about **8 inches x10 inches is ideal**. Leave a clear margin of about half an inch all around to allow for handling. Try to **start with an image that's not too harsh in contrast**. Aim for details in the shadows with veiled highlights. I have found that most modern developers are OK but **fixers need to be chosen more carefully**. Avoid anything containing hardeners, wash thoroughly. The print can then be dried and stored, or bleach-tan can be undertaken right away.

2 Bleach Tan

Soak the print for 5 minutes and then **place in a solution of 1 part bleach-tan stock solution and 10 parts water at 65 to 70 degrees F**. Constantly rock the dish for a **full 10 minutes**, even though the image may disappear sooner. Depending upon the density of the print and the make of paper, I have found that **the strength of the solution may need increasing**. I have gone up to 1

part stock to 5 parts water on very stubborn prints. Wash the print thoroughly and fix for 4 minutes, wash again and dry.

This is then known as the matrix and can be stored indefinitely, ready for inking.
All credit for this bleach/tan solution must go Britain's premier bromoilist Gilbert R. Hooper FRPS. The solution is known as *Gilberts*. I have tried a number of bleach and tan solutions with varying degrees of success or failure. *Gilberts* however has never let me down to date. It is much simpler to use, as it is a combined bleach/tan solution. A stock solution is made as follows:

3 Inking the Matrix

- **Soak the dried bleach-tanned print, (matrix) in water for about three minutes**. Wipe off all surplus moisture, (both sides – most important). Pieces of kitchen towel are very efficient in this task. **Ink will not adhere if any droplets of water are left**.
- Take a peanut size blob of ink. **Spread the ink onto the glass with a palette knife**. Continue spreading until only a very thin layer is present. **Stipple the ink with the brush and make a second patch of ink on the glass**. Only take ink from this second patch when inking the print. This will ensure that the brush is not overloaded.
- **Stipple the print in a walking action across the paper** dabbing, dragging and lifting.
- **When the image cannot be improved – it will look muddy with a thin layer of ink all over – stop inking*** and wipe all over with a wet cotton wool swab. The cotton wool pads ladies use to remove cosmetics are ideal. This will migrate the ink and clean up the image.
- **Dab off all surplus moisture on both sides as before, and continue inking**, repeat until the inking session is finished.
  Leave to dry then **re-ink if necessary**, again starting by soaking the print and repeating the above process.

  I sometimes re-ink up to four or five times, although a print can be finished in one hit. When inking is complete **leave to dry for a couple of days** and then finish.

  Any white spots can be re-inked or spotted. Dark areas can be lightened with a pencil rubber or scraped with a scalpel to insert highlights.