



BROOKS JENSEN ARTS

Artist's Statement on Technology and Editions

Transparency in artmaking is, I believe, important. This is especially true in a technology-based pursuit like photography — and doubly true when one offers one's work for sale. The following information — would it be too strong to refer to it as my *credo*? — is presented in the spirit of full transparency. In addition to my philosophy about technology in relation to my prints, it's important that any buyers/collectors know my thoughts on editioning, numbering and the nomenclature I use in my prints and folios.



About Technology

None of us like to eat crow, but we should also be smarter in these days of rapidly changing technology than to ever say, "Never!"

For thirty-five years now, I've been a strong advocate of the virtues of gelatin silver photographic prints. Until 2005, all of my prints have always been fiberbase gelatin silver, archivally processed and toned in a traditional wet-darkroom. Even as the publisher of the *LensWork Special Editions* and *LensWork Folios* I've used language like "No inkjet compromises!" and "Nothing can replace the depth, tonality or presence of fiberbase silver photographic paper." We used such language to clarify that the *LensWork Special Editions* were not the "inferior inkjet prints" we feared people might assume they were. Our mistake was thinking that the inkjet technology of late 1990s was not going to evolve. Boy were we wrong!

About a year ago [this was written in 2005], we started to receive submissions for *LensWork* from technology-savvy readers that were prints from the latest inkjet printers. Unlike the early inkjet technologies, we were astonished by the quality of these latest generation images. Printed on gorgeous, tactile matte paper, these images had a wonderful sense of presence and a palpable texture that can only be approached by the art papers of fine platinum/palladium printing or photogravures. We were also amazed at the wonderful sense of continuous tone these printers can create with their incredibly detailed picoliter drops of pigmented ink. Habit made us skeptical, but in the face of the undeniable evidence our curiosity was piqued.

Last fall I purchased an Epson 4000 printer and started, like so many photographers, experimenting to see what this tool could create. Those of you who are familiar with

this creative path already know what I was just beginning to learn. Those of you who have not yet explored these new tools are in for a surprise. Even though I'd seen what others had done, I was still surprised when we began printing images with which we were familiar.

As a test, we started with Maureen's image, (as in Maureen Gallagher, my wife and co-editor of *LensWork*) titled *Suspended*, which we had previously offered as part of the *LensWork Special Editions* collection in both gelatin silver and photogravure. We printed this image on the Epson 4000 using Hahnemuhle PhotoRag paper and compared this print to three previous versions — her original gelatin silver photograph, our *LensWork Special Editions* 425-line screen gelatin silver version, and the *LensWork* photogravure from Russ Dodd. Each of these are lovely versions of this image and each has its virtues. We showed these four prints to several dozen people both in and out of photography to see which they liked best. There was no contest. In side-by-side comparisons the Epson print was everyone's favorite — *everyone*. The Epson print was more three dimensional, more tactile, had visually deeper blacks, and felt more *alive* — and not by just a bit. It was better by leaps and bounds. I cannot tell you, what a shock this was to both of us traditional wet darkroom advocates.

Let me be specific and precise. The four media are definitely not the same — each has its own aesthetic *feel*. The paper bases are different. "Black" in one media is not the same as "black" in another — at least as measured with a densitometer. But, direct comparisons are silly — as silly as comparing oil paints to watercolors, or microbrews to soft drinks. Silver prints and platinum prints are different and look different. The same can be said of glossy gelatin silver papers compared to the textured, matte paper of inkjet prints. Each medium has its unique virtues. It is futile, for example, to try to make a photogravure look like a silver

print just as much as it is futile to make a silver print look like a platinum, etc. It is far better to consider the virtues of each medium in its own right.

But where simple tonal comparisons are unfair, what can be compared is the emotional content and the indefinable feel and quality of an image. We were proud of the gelatin silver and photogravure special editions of *Suspended*. They are fine prints. But, this image from the Epson 4000 gave me goosebumps — a reaction to a mechanical print which I had not expected.

What *had* I expected? I thought, just maybe, I might see an inkjet version of this image that might not be too bad — a humble expectation if ever there was one. I certainly did not expect to see the best version of this image I had ever seen! Needless to say, we were encouraged. I've continued to experiment with other images to see what can be created with this printer. I've learned a lot.

First, my enthusiasm is tempered; inkjet prints are not the end-all and be-all of photography — not by any means. Some images just look best in gelatin silver. Some images look best in platinum/palladium. Some images look best as pigment-on-paper inkjet prints. I suppose this is no different than certain tunes that are best on a clarinet and other tunes that are best on a hard-driven guitar or a church pipe organ.

Nonetheless, I am a convert — at least for my personal work. I am now offering inkjet images — the correct terminology is actually “pigment-on-paper.” I refuse to call these giclée — a term I've always thought was meant to disguise rather than to elucidate. *Gelatin silver* and *platinum/palladium* prints are so designated because they indicate precisely the nature of the imaging chemistry and/or substrate. Neither of these are defined as their mechanical means of production — “projection prints” or “contact prints” although these would both be technically accurate terms that are occasionally used as supplemental descriptions. Similarly, “inkjet” is an accurate term describing the mechanics of delivery used, but pigment-on-paper describes the *material* — chemistry and substrate — and is a better equivalent for comparison to “gelatin silver” or “platinum/palladium” prints.

Second, now more than ever, it is the eye and skill of the artist that is most important. All of us who have made traditional wet darkroom images have known that some images worked best at a certain scale, others seem appropriate for all sizes. Some images are best warm-tone, others best selenium-toned, and still others seem equally comfortable in any tone. These are individual and aesthetic decisions and, to some degree, the measure of the artist is the sensitivity with which they handle these decisions. This is more

true now than even, now that we have so many choices in the production of images.

Some of my prints are warm-tone, some neutral-tone, some cool-tone, and I even have some that are split-tone. Some are a little larger, some smaller. Some have text, some do not. My standard paper is Hahnemühle Photo Rag (308 gm/m²), or its close cousin, Hahnemühle Photo Rag Bright White. I do occasionally choose a different paper where it make a better print. Each image requires its own judgments. I find this an exciting time to be a photographer when we suddenly have so many aesthetic choices at our disposal, so many means to bring our creative vision to molecular reality.

About Longevity —————

For two reasons— both aesthetics *and* longevity — my pigment-on-paper images use (as I've done in the wet darkroom all these years) only those materials that create superb imagery with the best available state-of-the-art archival materials and procedures. How long is archival? No one can say for sure, but all sources seemed indicate that today's pigment-on-paper images are sufficiently archival to be enjoyed without deterioration for your lifetime — at least. Tests by Wilhelm Imaging Research have shown Epson Ultrachrome prints to have an anticipated life of a few dozen years in open, unprotected display, more typically a hundred years or so when framed under glass and longer when framed under UV protection glass or acrylic, to over 300 years in dark storage. A lot depends on the paper used and the conditions under which a print is stored, handled, or exhibited. Is this long enough? For museums, historians, or investors, maybe not. For lovers of photography who want images to be a part of their everyday life, probably so. Careful handling, proper presentation, and protection from UV light sources (direct sun, for example) will help. I suppose we'll know the true and indisputable longevity for these prints in a few hundred years, but I can see no reason whatsoever to avoid enjoying these prints in the next seventy-five to a hundred years based on the fear that my great, great, great, great, great, great, grandchildren might find them somewhat diminished. I know by then that I will be somewhat diminished, so who am I to criticize?

But, quite honestly, I am less concerned about 100+ years from now than I am about now and the more immediate future and enjoyment of my artwork. My philosophy has always been that my prints are meant to be enjoyed in everyday life and that collectible, investment-type artwork is a separate class of commerce. I always produce my prints to be as archival as possible — and maybe someday they will be collectible or even good investments! — but their primary purpose is to satisfy *today*. I hope years from now

people still enjoy them and I know that years from now they will still be capable of that because of the care I use in making them today.

I can unequivocally say from my own experience that Epson Ultrachrome prints are stable, waterproof, and, when properly printed, exhibit no color shift as the light source changes — a troublesome effect known as *metamerism* or *metachromatism* that plagued early ink prints. As this budding technology evolves and improves, so will my procedures. Nonetheless, I am fully confident that even today's state-of-the-art is sufficiently evolved to provide all of us with assurance that today's pigment-on-paper prints will be enjoyed for a long time to come.

Setting archival technicalities aside, there is another way to look at this issue. If I were a musician, I would hope that people play my records or CDs so much that they wear them out rather than keep them protected for long-term investments in a dark, temperature controlled vault for future use. I feel the same way about my photographs. If they are “worn out” by constant use and enjoyment and they enrich your life during their life, I will be completely satisfied that they have served their purpose. I hope to make art for *you*, not your banker, not your investment counselor, not even your great grand children — their generation will have their own artists to enjoy! If you are looking for investment quality, long-life artwork that will resist the deterioration of elements, time, and use, try sculpture— preferably in titanium or other inert earth materials. Perhaps any work on paper is not your best first choice.

About Commerce —————

I have been, for a long time now, an advocate of the philosophy we use in the LensWork Special Editions, that is to say Fine Art Photography at Real People Prices™. I believe this even more strongly in my personal work. It is a simple and fundamental idea that photography is the most democratic art and should be — *deserves* to be— affordable enough that everyone can own images and treasure them as a part of their everyday life and experience. I applaud the expensive and collectible artwork found in typical art galleries and in no way exclude photography from this category. I do, however, still believe there is a place for affordable images in the everyday lives of all of us who love images. Because of my experience as the publisher of the *LensWork Special Editions*, I am even more dedicated to “real people prices” than ever before. Since 1998, LensWork has sold over 20,000 gelatin silver prints about half of which were less than \$50. My philosophy about bringing photography to a new level of affordability is not a theory; LensWork has defined a new marketing paradigm which we are pleased that others have chosen to follow.

I carry this philosophy even farther with my personal work. I create artwork because I love to. I sell artwork so I can make room for more I am now creating. I am discouraged at the thought that some people would love a work of art — particularly an easily reproduced piece like photography — but would be separated from it because of a barrier of price. I price my work so everyone can buy as much as they are motivated to enjoy. If you are interested, here are my original two articles about pricing that led me to the ideas we used in the *LensWork Special Editions*.

About Editions and Numbering —————

Many photographers artificially limit the number of prints they will produce from a given negative, offer numbered editions, offer limited editions of a given size of print, destroy their negatives, and many other silly games whose objective is to convince you to buy their artwork and pay more for it. I don't. I won't. Either you like and want to buy my work, or you shouldn't. I make it available; I make it affordable; I then let the chips fall where they may. I have written about this at length in an article published in *LensWork* and available on my website.

While it is true that photography is not limited to a finite number of prints from any given negative or digital file, I, however, am. Like all of us, I have a limited amount of both time and energy. In that sense, all artwork is limited simply because the artmaker is. Such is life.

While I don't limit my prints, I do know that a clear and precise provenance is important to some people and may have historical importance long after I am gone. All of my individual prints now specify the date of their production, the source (negative or digital file), the precise number of copies I made that day, and which is the number of this print. Folios are dated with the edition and printing information and numbered sequentially.

A typical *First Edition, First Printing* will be three to five copies, sometimes as few as two, on rare occasions as many as thirty.

Time marches, we change, our creative vision does, too. It is not uncommon for me to see new ways to interpret an old image. I am not opposed to improving an image when I see a need to. Each time I fuss with the digital file, usually to change it a bit to more closely match my creative vision, I call this a new “edition.” It's a different interpretation of the raw data, so to speak — a new “performance” in Ansel Adams-speak. Sometimes that might be a little tonal adjustment, sometimes a contrast change, sometimes a dodge here or a burn there, sometimes I'll crop something or digitally remove a bothersome spot, occasionally I go all the

way back to the negative and re-scan or back to the original in-camera file and start over. In one way or another, the new “edition” is a new artistic rendition of the image.

Contrary to the contemporary zeitgeist, therefore, the later editions are the ones I would generally consider the more mature interpretation of the image. There is a stampede these days toward “vintage prints,” the rarity and value of which are supposed to be paramount. I respectfully disagree with this herd mentality. As an artist grows in maturity and sophistication, as their vision about an image ages with wisdom and insight, their later renditions are likely to be improvements. Probably. I tend to think my latest edition is the best one and my “vintage print” as simply that — an *older* one, but not necessarily a *better* one.

Having said that, additional editions may also be a result technology improvements.

The designation “Third Edition, Second Printing” on an individual print would mean that this is the third time I’ve worked this image from a creative (or technological) point of view and the second time I’ve printed a batch of prints from this third rendition. The print # is simply a count of how many prints I’ve made from that digital file *on that day*. Print number, therefore, indicate how many were actually produced. (I’ve always cringed at the “limited edition” designation “4/250” supposedly indicating that this is the fourth of 250 prints, when we all know that in 99.99% of such photographs there were not 250 actually made. Again, see my article *What Size is the Edition?*)

Since I don’t place an arbitrary limit on my prints, for purposes of provenance the only way to tell how many prints I’ve made in total would be to add up the number of prints made from all editions and all printings — something that unfortunately could only be done by examining my printing records.

Folios are numbered somewhat differently. The colophon page of each folio includes, like my individual prints, information about the edition and printing date. For folios,

however, the # indicates the number of that folio regardless of edition. Folio #57 would indicate that I’ve have produced 56 folios before this one, but these may be different editions or printings. Again, since I do not print in limited editions, the only way to tell how many folios have been created in total (for example, after #57) would be to examine my printing records.

I produce and sell my prints and folios on a first-come, first served basis. Orders are filled in Edition/# order. Obviously, editions are not reprinted except where identified as a later printing.

I also reserve the right to withdraw from sale any image or folio at any time.

A Final Word about Passion —————

Finally, some photographers are wholly and exclusively dedicated to gelatin silver materials and I applaud them. Others, myself included, find ourselves comfortable using the new technologies. When all the discussions of technology and media are exhausted, what remains is our passion about images and how they so powerfully connect each of us with life and each other. The debates over photographic media will likely continue as long as photography evolves. Both in my personal work and as the Editor of *LensWork* I have always had a philosophy of siding with *passionate imagery* rather than passion about technology. Whether in gelatin silver, platinum/palladium, photogravure, or now pigment-on-paper, my hope is that the artifacts I create are as compelling as the images are.

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