



# Better than the real thing

The days when digital prints were seen as somehow inferior to silver halide are long gone and many top professionals, such as Brian Griffin, now prefer the look and feel of the best inkjet papers, such as Ilford's Galerie Gold Fibre Silk

While digital methods feel, at times, as though they have been with us forever, it's all too easy to forget that it's really only in the last few years that they have become so established. You don't have to be particularly long in the tooth to remember the days when a handful of megapixels was all you could expect from a professional camera and where die-hard photographers were promising allegiance to the death to traditional methods, which would never be usurped by the digital upstart.

Now, of course, the professional world has been largely over run by digital technology, but only because the convenience and cost savings have been matched by a massive surge in quality. The extraordinary thing is that once, not so long ago, the holy grail of digital was to match the performance of its film equivalents, but now we've moved far beyond that, to the point where digital quality is, at times, much better than anything we might have

seen from silver halide in the past.

Nowhere has that change been more clearly seen than in the world of printing. Inkjet methods were once considered inferior to silver halide to the point where the only way to sell a fine art digital print was to label it a Giclee. Now we've reached the point where an internationally renowned photographer of the calibre of Brian Griffin is announcing that he prefers what a top-of-the-range paper such as Ilford's exquisite Galerie Gold Fibre Silk can give him over the bromide paper that once was his stock in trade, and it's clear that a lot of collectors are agreeing with him.

"I love the results that I've been getting on Galerie paper," says Brian, who has exhibited his work widely in Britain and abroad. "The time was when it didn't matter what I thought about bromide paper because that was all there was and there wasn't any alternative. Now there is, and not only does Gold Fibre Silk do my work full justice but I firmly believe that, archivally, it will be a lot more stable than silver halide as well, because it simply isn't full of the chemicals that were used to process bromide."

Many have claimed in recent years that digital prints were now matching the results that were possible using traditional methods, but what is it about Gold Fibre Silk that has convinced Brian it is actually better in terms of the way that it looks and feels? "It's a difficult thing to actually put your finger on," he says. "I think the image has just got

more precision to it. I'm talking about my emotional response to what I'm seeing and handling, and I suppose it's a little like comparing the sound from an LP and from a CD. They are different and I just prefer what I'm getting these days and so, apparently, do my clients in many cases."

## Printing for England

Of course Ilford's Galerie Gold Fibre Silk paper isn't just your average inkjet paper. It's been created by a company with a long heritage in traditional methods and it's been designed to have all the qualities of its silver predecessors while also exhibiting some refinements of its own. For a start the paper has a baryta (barium sulphate) coated layer underneath the ink receiving layer equivalent to the structure of traditional fibre photographic paper base. The media offers enhanced definition, extended tonal range and excellent archival properties, all of which are important to the demanding professional digital photographer and printer. Coated fibre papers have a unique look and feel, which has become a standard among art photographers worldwide over the course of more than a century, and what Gold Fibre Silk has done is to take those benefits and to bring them bang up to date.

Naturally, even the very best papers are nothing without a craftsman to bring the very best out of them. Brian has always worked with highly skilled printers and his association with Mike Crawford

from the Lighthouse Darkroom in north London has been a productive one, with Mike - who is also a highly accomplished traditional printer as well as someone who is expert with digital methods - extracting the most out of the Galerie paper.

"I think it can be quite difficult for someone who doesn't have experience in a traditional darkroom to sometimes really understand how to get the most out of a digital print," says Brian. "It's the same in a way for photographers, with many of the best of them having a film background. Mike really knows what he's doing to the point where, a few years back, when I had a big show and Mike and another lab were doing the prints for me, you could really see that he was getting more out of my work than the people who didn't have his same knowledge of traditional darkroom methods."

Brian, who has been described as 'creating works of art that leave the viewer mesmerised,'

had his most recent one-man show at the England & Co Gallery in London towards the end of last year, and he's currently part of a show at the same gallery which features nine other artists from a range of specialisations, which runs until April 14.

In addition his work is held by British and international collections, including the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Arts Council of Great Britain, the National Portrait Gallery, the Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany, the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Art Museum of Reykjavik, Iceland.

"We've reached the point where there is no issue between digital and traditional prints any more," he says. "Some of my clients still prefer bromide prints and that's very much up to them, but collectors in general have no qualms about investing in digital prints, particularly when the quality is as good as that provided by the Ilford Galerie paper. My prints

are clearly marked as being digitally produced and they still sell: I prefer what I'm getting now and the quality that's being achieved these days is phenomenal."

## Contact:

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**"At times digital quality is better than silver halide"**

**ILFORD**