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« Blog Note | Main | Around the Web on a Tuesday »

Monday, 26 August 2019

TOP's Upcoming Dye Transfer Print Sale—Wait, What, How? Why?!

Written by Ctein

It's not normal to announce a TOP print sale this far in advance, but Mike and I have been planning this one since the beginning of the year. It's time for the big reveal.

Ctein's Thanksgiving Dye Transfer Inventory Print Offer

Starting on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving in the USA) and running for one week, Mike and I will be having a unique and massive dye transfer TOP sale. Every dye transfer print I have remaining in my inventory, regardless of size and rarity, will be on sale for \$650. That's only modestly higher than my "closing the darkroom" sale price five years ago and it's a third to a tenth of my current studio and gallery prices. [And it's very inexpensive for large dye transfers, even twenty years ago. —Mike the Ed.]

We are putting out the word early, because this is going to be different, more complex, and bigger than any previous sale.

Does this mean I've started printing dye transfer again? No, absolutely not. The darkroom is gone forever, and I've sold off all my remaining supplies to other master dye transfer printmakers (of whom there are only a handful left in the world). Even if I changed my mind and acquired supplies, I've sold half of the matrix sets and work prints*. I couldn't print those pictures again even if I did still have a darkroom.

However, not being able to make new prints doesn't mean I don't have prints. In fact, I have a substantial inventory from throughout my career as a fine-art photographer and master dye transfer printmaker. Dye transfer printing, one of the most difficult photographic printing methods in the history of the medium, was sufficiently time-consuming, especially nailing the first print right, that when I did make one that satisfied me I'd make four or five additional prints at the same time. Although still a complex process, those duplicate prints were relatively quick to make (emphasis on "relatively"). Whenever a particular picture got close to selling out, I'd schedule a reprinting session and make a new set of inventory prints.

Consequently, at any given time I would have three prints of a particular photograph in inventory. That was the average then. Now, some of my portfolio photographs are completely sold out. Some, there's only one print remaining. Others, a half dozen.

Altogether, though, there are a lot of prints—and all of them are going up for sale.

Okay, why? In large part because I'm a huge fan of these sales and have been ever since Mike came up with the idea back when he was editor of *Photo Techniques* magazine. The idea of being able to get these rare prints into your home for a fraction of what you would normally have to pay really appeals to me. I like the idea of people owning my work, and the more people the better. I'd rather sell a lot of prints for less money than fewer prints at higher prices.

You may well feel differently, and that wouldn't be nonsensical of you. This is the way I am; feel free to have different mileage.

How it's going to go

All right, then, how is the sale going to work? Differently from previous sales, definitely differently.

To begin with, you can start thinking about what you'd like to buy right now. I've built a webpage that shows everything in my inventory. Space program photographs, volcano photographs, astronomical photographs, subtle colors in nature or garish colors by the human hand—everything.

For another, there will be three different ways you can buy these. The first two will be familiar: you can pay with personal check drawn on US funds or via PayPal.

The third way? You can buy prints on layaway. I do layaways, but it's never before applied to a TOP sale. This time it will. That will help people in a tight budget who may well never have a chance to buy a dye transfer from me again. You can see my layaway terms on my website.

There will be one minor difference. For this sale the layaway period will be 13 months, because then it works out to an even \$50 per print per month. Plus a little extra in the last month to cover shipping and handling.

Limits

Each picture only exists in a limited number of copies, all of which will be noted on the inventory page by the time the sale begins, updated every day of the sale. However, there is no limit to the number of prints you can buy (subject to this availability), regardless of how you're going to pay. If you wanted to buy three prints, you could pay \$1,950 (+S&H) direct or \$150/month for 13 months.

There will be incentives for multiple-print purchases. Buy three prints and you can select any digital print from my website as a free bonus. Buy six prints and you can select two digital prints. Buy a dozen and you get four free digital prints.

Fairness to all

Toughest question: what happens if more people want a particular photograph than I have prints of? Because that's going to happen. Here's where it gets interesting.

Longtime TOP readers will remember my matrix-set sale, five or so years ago. Here's the link if you want to refresh your memory. We had a similar although smaller problem then. Typically there was one matrix set for a particular photograph. Instead a first-come first-served I asked people to list up to three alternatives to their preferred choices. No one was obligated to—it was not a demand. I took all the orders and optimized the selections to give as many people as possible one of their choices. It was a pretty hairy analysis, but 98% of our buyers got what they requested.

I'm going to do something similar with this sale. Not quite the same, because that's infeasible with a sale of this magnitude. My plan to cut this up into manageable pieces is to ask buyers to list several alternatives they'd be happy with (assuming there are any: again, no one is obliged to do this). Each day I will optimize among the orders I got for that day, confirm the orders with the prospective buyers and arrange for payment. I'll also update the webpage showing the offerings in real time, so fewer people will be frustrated by ordering something that's already unavailable (fingers crossed for luck).

I won't be giving any preference to the time of ordering within a single day, but I'll complete one day's optimization and allocate those prints before going onto the next day's orders. Hence, there is a daily aspect of first-come first-served, and ordering on an earlier day will improve your chances of getting what you want.

Uncharted waters

Well, there you have it—that's my plan so far. I may have to alter it on the fly as we get closer to the sale. Everything could sell out in the first 24 hours. It might happen—the 160 prints I offered in the "closing the darkroom" sale sold out in a matter of hours [six hours and two minutes to be precise —Mike the Ed. again].

Will it? We'll see. I've never done a sale quite like this before. TOP has never done a sale quite like this before. I think I've planned it out well, but we will be in uncharted waters. It will be an adventure.

It's going to be glorious.

Ctein

*If you want one of those, check out the How to Order Prints page and the Matrix and Work Print Sets page.

(To see all the comments, click on the "Comments" link below.)

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Posted on Monday, 26 August 2019 at 08:36 AM in Ctein, Print Offers | Permalink

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Comments

>>It's going to be glorious <<

Qapla'.

Posted by: Steve Renwick | Monday, 26 August 2019 at 10:40 AM

It would be even more glorious if you restarted your weekly column on TOP.

Posted by: Jim Freeman | Monday, 26 August 2019 at 11:30 AM

Took the liberty of tweeting about this, since I have many Scottish followers and Ctein's scottish prints are beautiful.

Posted by: ScotInBartmund | Monday, 26 August 2019 at 12:56 PM

Dear ScotinD,

Thank you very much! We want to promote this well beyond the confines of TOP, and Mike will be preparing a press release. We'll be specifically asking for advice and recommendations from readers as we get closer to the sale, but we are quite happy for any outside publicity now.

pax / Ctein

Posted by: Ctein | Tuesday, 27 August 2019 at 12:54 AM

Dear Jim,

At the present time, all my spare time and energy is going into preparing for the sale. You cannot imagine how much work is involved in spotting and properly finishing up a dye transfer print. (I'm planning to write about just what is involved in preparing a finished dye transfer print during the sale.) By the time the sale starts, I expect I will have put in close to a thousand hours of preparation time.

In addition, fulfillment will not be a trivial matter. Between processing orders, bookkeeping, actual packaging and shipping, and hauling down to the post office, I'm figuring half an hour per order. That's going to be a lot more hours, hundreds hopefully (or hopelessly, depending on how you want to look at it).

Who knows what's going to be happening next year? Not I. I could well be working on a new novel (there's one out with the publishers right now). That drains my writing energy.

If anyone is totally jonesing for my deathless prose, I send out a monthly newsletter which (most months) includes a new column by me. If anyone is interested in getting it, send me an email saying, "Please send me your Occasional Newsletter."

Some months it is a struggle for me to even get that one column done. This coming one, I'm going to "cheat" and run more or less the same column your reading here, because most of my subscribers don't read TOP. That, I fear, is about as "glorious" as I can manage for now.

- pax \ Ctein
[Please excuse any word-salad. Dragon Dictate in training!]
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-- Ctein's Online Gallery. <http://ctein.com>.
-- Digital Restorations. <http://photo-repair.com>.
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Posted by: Ctein | Tuesday, 27 August 2019 at 01:05 AM

Welcome back, Ctein!

Posted by: Manuel | Tuesday, 27 August 2019 at 04:41 PM

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• WWW
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CATEGORIES

Around the Web (226)
Baker's Dozen (50)
Blog Notes (571)
Bon Mots (10)
Book of the Week (15)
Books (522)
Camera Reviews (138)
Cameras, new (785)
Cameras, old (256)
Carl Weese (23)
Collecting (53)
Computers (93)
Ctein (371)
Digital Techniques (73)
Eamon Hickey (2)
Editing and Portfolios (76)
Exhibits (84)
Film and Darkroom (133)
Followups (157)
From the Archives (38)
Geoff Wittig (2)
Gordon Lewis (15)
Interviews (7)
Jim Hughes (31)
John Camp (8)
John Kennerdell (17)
Ken Tanaka (11)
Kirk Tuck (8)
Legal and social issues (113)
Lenses (316)
Mini-Portfolios (5)
Morning Coffee (32)
Music Notes (106)
News and Occasions (478)
Obituaries (82)
Off-topic posts (498)
Open Mike (343)
Oren Grad (1)
Past Blasts (23)
Peter Turnley (66)
Photo equipment (346)
Photo industry (171)
Photo-tech (223)
Photographers, current (240)
Photographers, historical (165)
Photographic aesthetics (222)
Photography businesses (27)
Photojournalism (85)
Polls (16)
Print Offers (262)
Printers and Printing (169)
Quote o' the Day (95)
Random Excellence (247)
Random Snaps (125)
Reader Prints (7)
Recommended Cameras (14)
Reflections (199)
Reruns (24)
Roger Overall (2)
Sarge (1)
Satire Alert! (25)
Shooting Skills and Camera Handling (7)
Shooting techniques (158)
Software (75)
Sunday Support Group (73)
TOP contests (6)
TOP's Own Books (10)
Visual Culture (271)
Websites and links (141)
Weekend Exercises (5)
Workshops (19)
Your Turn (9)

ARCHIVES

March 2024
February 2024
January 2024
December 2023
November 2023
October 2023
September 2023
August 2023
July 2023
June 2023

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