

## **Producing Top Quality Greetings Cards or Prints from Your Own Artwork:** by Sheila Hogge.

Producing top quality greetings cards from your own watercolour artwork has distinct benefits. You will delight the recipients with a beautiful card and more often than not, they will please you by hanging the framed card or may ask for a larger print.

Furthermore, you can keep a quality copy for yourself when you no longer possess the original.

'Quality' is the key word. Each card does not come cheap in either materials or time. But, if your work, even as a card, is going to be hung it needs to look good and be long-lasting. Therefore, using quality inks on good acid free paper is essential.

In my experience, the time and expense is well worth it. Also, cards are affordable examples of your work and lead to orders for larger prints, that are quick to reproduce after the initial work.

### **The Equipment.**

#### **The Computer and Software.**

Whatever you have is fine, most important is knowing how to use it!

I use Adobe Photoshop 7, but 'Elements', as well as other programmes, provide all one needs.

#### **Your printer.**

Know the *actual size* your printer will print. Check the instructions for the heaviest weight paper it can take and use this or the closest weight.

#### **Inks.**

Choose 'archival' inks that are guaranteed to last at least 25 years.

Epson and Canon are now producing archival inks to use with their printers and independent manufacturers are increasing the range available.

#### **Your scanner.**

The better the scan, the better the print. Scan at an appropriate resolution for the output. 300 d.p.i. (dots per inch) is fine, especially as the work will be reduced in size - unless you paint miniatures.

Altering the direction of the scan, that is, turning your work around by 180°, can give a better result and may also change the colour balance to advantage.

Texture of rough paper may show up more in one direction than the other. I prefer not to see too much at this stage and choose the paper for the final card (or print) to provide the desired texture.

Works larger than the scanner will need joining. This is not difficult but accurate parallel alignment of the original on the scanner is advantageous, then sections can be joined perfectly without requiring minor rotation. Plenty of overlap helps.

To avoid scanning and joining scans, photographs of your work can be put on compact disc and these images used as a starting point.

### **Paper.**

There are several well known brands of ink jet papers for artistic printing. 'Sample' packs are a way to see the range available. However, do not forget quality watercolour papers.

Different papers will suit different subjects, so be prepared to take time and experiment! As a general rule, the larger the card, the thicker the paper required.

The cards illustrated were printed on a variety of 100% cotton ink jet and watercolour papers, ranging in weight from 285 to 310 gsm. ( 130 lb to 140 lb.)

### **Card Size.**

The proportions of the original work must obviously be considered, but so must available envelope sizes. A snug fit is preferable so check availability.

A4 size paper folded in half (giving A5), or to give a taller format (fitting envelope 22 cm x 11 cm - for A4 folded twice), are both attractive and useful proportions.

When a large number of identical cards are required, like at Christmas, producing two cards per A4 sheet (or four on A3) is more economical and fit size C6 envelopes. This does not preclude larger versions for those special recipients!

Aim for a vertical fold to avoid the possible sag of paper folded horizontally when on display. Particularly important if using lighter weight papers.

### **What To Do with the Scan.**

These guidelines will get you started. But your own experimentation with adjustments will be essential.

Start by cropping your scanned image. Sharpen, if required, but avoid over sharpening. (In Photoshop - *Filter* in the menu - *Sharpen* > *Unsharp Mask*.)

Try between *Amount 100 - 150%*, *Radius 0.7 - 1.5* and *Threshold 2 - 10.*)

Adjust colour, contrast and brightness using 'Curves or Levels'. ('Image' in the menu, -'Adjust' > 'Curves'.) Infinite variation is possible. Lighter or darker overall. Darker darks and lighter lights can usefully increase the contrast.

*Channel: RGB (Red, Green, Blue)* will adjust the whole image at once. Individual colours can be selected for finer and particular colour adjustment. This can be time consuming and involve a lot of trial and error, but persistence will be rewarded. Save adjustments at various stages noting your actions to refer back to.

There will probably be differences in colour between the on screen and printed image.

'Test prints' of just a section of the image, save time, paper and ink. Choose a section with a good colour and contrast range.

Print at a resolution of 300 pixels per inch on a 'Photo Quality Ink Jet Paper' setting, using the paper chosen for the final card or print.

Once satisfied with the test results make a final check by printing the whole image. Wait a minimum of 30 minutes for the ink to dry totally before comparing print and

paper leaving the deckle edge at the top is very attractive but ensure any watermark, if included, occurs on the card back.

To size the image, select 'Image' > 'Image Size'; then in 'Canvas size' add that size to the left hand side for the back. Save this as a separate file.

Reopen the scanned image, size to 3 - 4 cm high, depending on the card size. Using the 'Move Tool' drag, drop and position the small thumbnail image on the reverse of the card that is open in the other window. Type underneath this the title, original size, medium and your name including a copyright symbol - ©. Using a colour taken from the work is very attractive.

As the final check for positioning on the paper, print it out on ordinary paper. When all is correct, go for the final card print out.

To make folding easier, score along the inside of the fold line with a rounded metal edge, such as the back of a scissor blade. Fold against a rule placed along the score line. A rotary cutter makes any trimming easier, though a sharp knife and metal rule will do the job.

Printing your greeting on a separate sheet of paper to



original. Back up the final saved image on disc.

### **Printing a Card.**

Many printers do not print edge to edge, but that unprinted area gives a nice border. Include this when sizing to maximise the use of the paper. If using watercolour

carefully glue inside adds a further touch of elegance.

I prefer cards to have a white border, wider at the bottom for that final personal touch - my signature.