

CHAPTER XI

BROMOIL AND TRANSFER IN COLOURS

ALMOST all exhibited bromoils and transfers are carried out in a brown-black ink, although smaller numbers of pictures appear in pure black and in warm brown. There is no question that this choice of colour is wise, as monochrome prints in more pronounced colours are liable to become wearisome after a time. This drawback of pronounced colour, however, disappears entirely if the print is frankly a coloured one, and not a monochrome. Bromoil inks are available in a variety of colours other than the neutral shades suitable for monochrome pigmenting, and therefore there is no need to embark on the preparation of special inks if colour work is to be tried. Although these inks are full and rich in colour, it is generally not possible to secure anything like the brilliance of oil paint upon canvas in a bromoil, because of the comparatively thin film of the coloured ink which is applied.

This consideration necessitates a frank realisation of the limitations of colour bromoil before any attempt is made to investigate the capabilities of the process. If coloured transfers are to be made the disadvantage of the transparency of the colours is not so pronounced on the pure paper base, but, on the other hand, the difficulties of anything like a fully-coloured print, combined with those inherent to transfer, will give pause to all but the most enthusiastic. Nevertheless, this is a line of work which might well be pushed much further than has already been done.

Generally speaking, the working up in full colour of a bromoil print leads to a result reminiscent of a transparent wash water colour, and not unlike a tinted bromide print (tinting being done with oil colours). The technique to be adopted in the pigmenting will not vary a great deal

from that of monochrome pigmenting, but it will be almost a necessity to have clean brushes available (these need not be very large) for most of the colours to be applied. In the interests of ease of pigmenting the inks should be used fairly thin, in a well swollen matrix, and blending of two colours on the matrix will then not be found too difficult. In fact, it is quite easy by not pushing the mixing operation too far, to secure effects of broken colour, which are much more luminous than flat tints of an even colour.

It is not possible to go into the whole question of colour here, but a word of warning may perhaps be given that nothing but a garish and crude result can be obtained by using pure colour, such as reds, greens, and blues, without the modification of browns, greys, and even of black itself. It, therefore, seems best to start working with say a deep warm brown, and to bring up the image, not too strongly, in this colour. The local colours may then be worked over the monochrome inking, just in the same way as was done by the painters of the classical schools. Finally, a good deal may be done by inserting points of emphasis in pure black, and by darkening the tone values of whole areas by judicious application of the same neutral tint. The Drem pure black pigment should be specially valuable for this, as it is capable of standing very considerable softening without becoming brown, or otherwise losing its purity of colour. With many other black inks, the colour becomes brownish on thinning with medium.

Instead of attempting to ink up the picture in an approximation to the full natural colour, it is much easier and, indeed, more suited to the capabilities of the process, to aim at only a conventional colour scheme, such as is frequently seen in coloured etchings and wood-cuts. In these processes the different colours have to be applied almost as stencils, and consequently very little refinement is possible in the way of coloured details, but generalised colour areas form quite a pleasing pictorial motif, and excellent work may be done on this plan. In this method of working a basic image in pure black on a white (preferably not cream) paper is a good starting point, although for pictures in a light key, and with no heavy tones, the image may be in grey or in some other neutral tint, suited

to the final scheme in mind. After the base of the print has been inked in, in a light key, the other contrasting tints are applied in areas. A bright colour may finally be used in a restricted amount here and there, but great care should be taken that the result does not become jumpy. Some suitable combinations of colours which can be used together effectively are: black, neutral grey, light red; ditto with the addition of yellow ochre; black, green grey, Indian red; black, sepia, Indian red; blue, green and orange, etc., etc. The adoption of a scheme of quasi-stencilled colour areas fits in well, of course, with the eventual transfer of the image. In this case it will probably be quite a good plan to transfer each separate colour separately, thus building up the final colour effect on the transfer paper.

A difficulty in the introduction of the bright colours such as yellows, oranges, bright greens and so on, in the bromoil inking is that these colours naturally appear at their most intense values in the highest lights. Now these are just the parts of the matrix which are most swollen and, therefore, repel the ink most. The only way of overcoming this difficulty will be to use a very thin ink, which will not show the full brilliance of colour, or else to paint in any such passages with the brush on the dried bromoil or transfer.

As distinct from the arbitrary colouring of a monochrome, it is possible to use the bromoil process in conjunction with separation negatives taken with the usual trichrome filters. Trichrome inks are available on the lists of several makers, so that the three matrices made from the separation negatives may be inked up and transferred one after the other on to the base. Whether the trichrome inks in any way correspond to the absorption spectra of the commercial filters is open to doubt, but in any case there should be no difficulty in modifying the tints a little in the light of experience, so as to produce a more even balance of colour. Some quite successful work has been done in this way, and from the point of view of introducing the necessary æsthetic corrections to the material tints, there is much to be said in favour of the process. Whether anyone possessed of the necessary

colour knowledge would not in most cases prefer to paint in oils, or to make colour wood-lino-cuts is a subject open to debate, but it is no doubt possible to produce prints with a style characteristic of the process, and certainly with an approximate fidelity to natural colour, and thus there will probably always be a few who will embark on the difficulties of colour transfer.

CONCLUSION

The aim and object of this book has been from the start to provide, not a single and unalterable working method in these fascinating processes of picture making by photographic means, but rather to illustrate and to a certain extent to catalogue, the numerous variations in procedure which can be practised according to the personal whim of the worker. It is hoped that a definite point of view has been indicated throughout—that point of view which regards the technique of pigmenting as a means for the conversion of sketches on a photographic basis into finished pictures, still on a groundwork of photography, but with the infusion of the personality of the worker.

The amateur interested in all photographic processes because they are photographic processes, will, it is thought, find the present volume a true guide to the acquirement of the ability to make a perfect reproduction of his original bromide print in bromoil pigment, but the book is meant to appeal also to those approaching the subject from two other points of view, both represented in the ranks of photographers to-day:

- (a) Those who at present work the normal photographic processes successfully, but feel limited by the somewhat mechanical nature of the only controlling devices available; and
- (b) Those whose main object is to record on paper the sights that give them pleasure, and who have neither the time, nor possibly the ability, to draw or paint, but who, nevertheless, have something to say in graphic form which they find it irksome to leave unsaid.

Both of these types of mind will find in the pigment processes methods which will answer their purpose,

although each will approach the work from an entirely different angle, and will produce prints of a rather different type; the first, photographs freed from the trammels of shading and dodging; and the second, pictures which will be saved by the lens from the crudities of draughtsmanship which would characterise their free-hand efforts.

In some respects more is attainable in the realm of æsthetic achievement, particularly by the transfer processes, than by any other photographic means. If photography is to assume the rank among the other monochrome graphic media which the quality of the best work produced by its aid merits, it is essential that public appreciation should be developed free from the inhibitions of tradition and bias. Nothing is more essential to this end than that the prints shall be strictly on a comparable basis with other monochrome prints. The gelatine coating of ordinary silver paper is a great obstacle to the enjoyment of the tonal qualities of a photographic picture by those accustomed only to appraising non-photographic work. This objection, however, immediately disappears in the case of a transferred print, which the connoisseur is at once able to compare and contrast with etching, mezzotint or other monochrome artwork.

Another most important aspect of the pigmented print is that the brushwork necessary in its production at once gives the artist a means of imparting a characteristic technical quality to his work. The blurred outlines of Sir. D. Y. Cameron's etchings, the vigorous brushwork of Franz Hals or Augustus John, the thickly piled pigment of Van Gogh, can all find their counterpart in the pigment quality of the masters of bromoil. The vigour and vitality of Vogelsang and the soft delicacy of W. J. Roberts are typical examples of extremes of pigment quality. The introduction of this technique factor into the summation of æsthetic qualities which goes to make up the art value of the finished bromoil is an advantage above all others in the formation of a personal style of work.

While, therefore, the aspiring photographic artist will find added power in his hands by employing the pigment processes, the general art-loving public will find a readier

means of appraising the value of his work than if it were carried out in a medium, such as the direct silver print, in which textures depend on the manufacturer rather than the artist, and to which the standards of comparison common to other graphic prints do not apply without considerable modification. The ultimate result cannot but be a general improvement of the art status of photography.