

Black and white emulsion transferred to scrapbooking paper ("Sun Dress") made by Basicgrey, LLC. I wanted the effect of wallpaper on the wall.

# Jellyfishphoto.es: Emulsion Transfers from Digital Images

Wendy Erickson

*Devotees of the Polaroid emulsion lift process will remember the fun (?) of lifting off a Polaroid emulsion by soaking it in hot water, removing the emulsion, floating it in a tray of cool water, and attempting to get it successfully stuck to a piece of paper beneath it in the tray, all the while trying to stretch it out with fingers or a paintbrush. Results were as flat or wrinkled as desired. Photographers*

*were limited by the size of the instant film, and practice made perfect.*

Now there is a new way to lift emulsions off digital inkjet transparencies, and though the technique used is reminiscent of Polaroid emulsion lifts, there are some excellent advantages:



Emulsion transferred to scrapbooking paper made by American Crafts.

- Transfer sizes are now larger (A4, 11.69×8.27" or A3, 11.69×16.54").
- High res digital camera or scanner files are used instead of small Polaroid prints.
- Dpi, color, contrast, etc. are user controllable before prints are made.
- The image is made with pigment inks, technically, they should have excellent light stability.

The transfer product is called Jellyfishphoto.es, and is offered as a printing service from the company with the same name located in Bilbao, Spain. Upload your photographs to them and they will mail you back completed printed transparencies ready for transfer.

This is a handmade product that (like other handmade products) may vary in quality. The sheets I tried out worked well.

#### **How It Works**

Jellyfishphoto.es may share some similarities in handling to the Polaroid emulsion transfer method—it's clever name comes from the 'jellyfish' appearance the emulsion takes on in the tray—but it relies on pigmented digital inkjet ink to create the color or black and white image.

The ink is printed onto a receiving layer and that in turn is adhered to a transparent polyester base with a water-soluble adhesive. The digital transparency is soaked in cool water for approximately two minutes. When it is softened, the emulsion aka the 'jellyfish' is



Emulsion transferred to Weston Diploma Parchment. Note the slight spread of ink on to the paper in the corners. In areas where there is a heavier ink load, residual ink may transfer on the substrate. Advice: the less handling, the better.

gently lifted and re-applied to the substrate of your choice. Besides the final substrate, such as fine art paper, all you need is a tray, cool water and a table to work on.

Thirty years ago, I exposed lith film negatives in the darkroom and processed them in Dektol to get a continuous tone positive. I layered the processed film over a lighter hand-colored version of the same photograph, and add bits of paper, glitter, feathers and other stuff to “color” the image. This sandwich of materials was matted and framed.

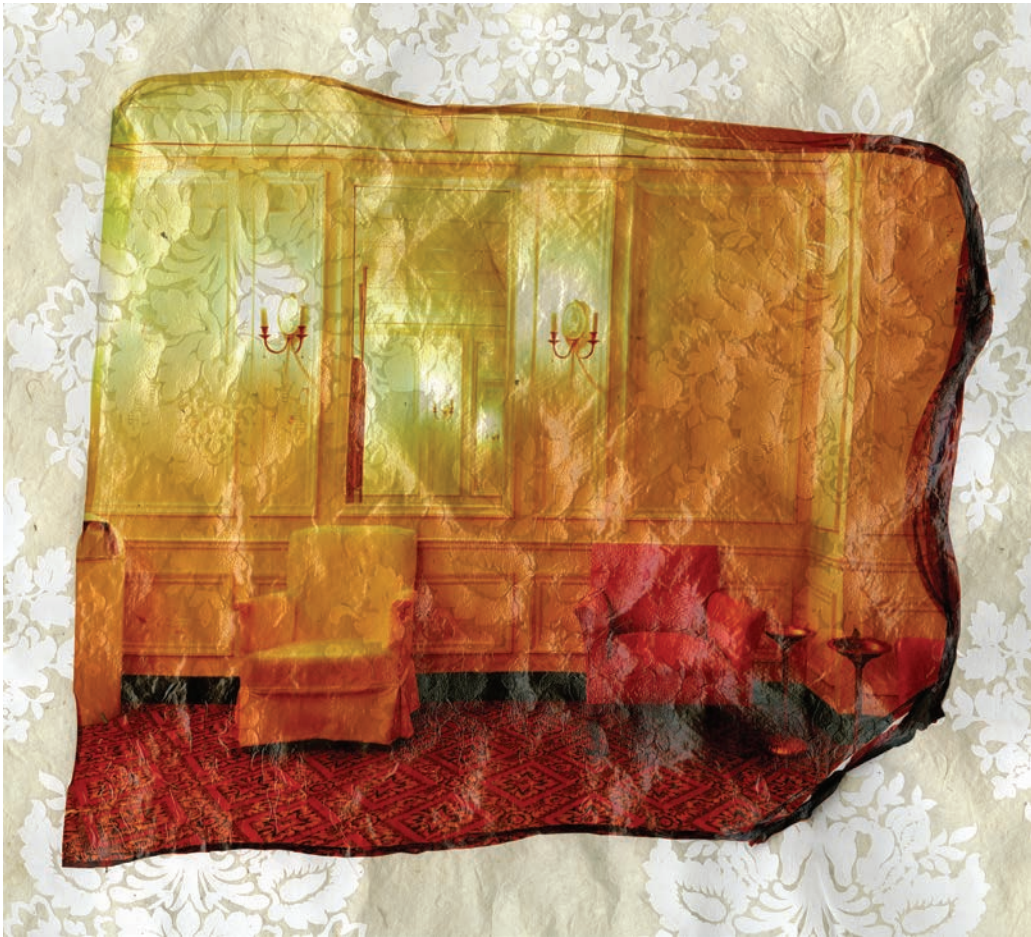
When I heard about Jellyfishphoto.es’ digital inkjet emulsion transfers the memory of those lith film composites came back to me, and I thought I could try a similar technique with this product, laying the emulsion over fine art and decorative paper for a unique look.

**NOTE:** If you have ever made Polaroid emulsion lifts, this process may appeal to you. But this technique is not for the faint of heart—you must have patience to separate and re-apply the emulsion to a substrate! Practice makes perfect. Set aside some quality time to make your transfers. There are a number of excellent “how to” videos on the Jellyfishphoto.es website, and on YouTube.

#### **Ordering the Digital Transfer Prints**

Prepare your digital files as you normally would for printing. Upload the files to the jellyfishphoto.es website. At the time of writing this article, prices range from less than \$7.00 for an A4 size sheet to less than \$20 for an A3 sheet.

There are discounts for larger orders. You will receive your images printed on the transfer paper, in about a week to ten days depending on where you are located.



All Images © Wendy Erickson

This Savoire-Faire, Lama Li Venetian Mask paper is beautiful, and its slight texture allowed the emulsion to easily adhere.

### File Specifications

- A4 JPG format, at 300 dpi and no larger than 20x27.5 cm (7.8x10.7")
- A3 JPG format at 300 dpi and no larger than 27.5x40 cm (10.7x15.6")

As of this writing, Jellyfishphoto.es is only providing the service of making the transfer material to use in your studio. I scanned some older 6x7 Fuji Reala color negative photographs I made years ago in the Paramount Theatre in Asbury Park, NJ. I tried a selection of various uncoated fine art papers such as Stonehenge White, 250gsm, Weston Diploma Parchment, Canson Bristol, Savoire-Faire Lama Li decorative paper (made in Nepal), a white pulp wavy-lined paper, (beautiful, but not well-suited for the transfer process), fabric and a few scrapbooking papers. I also tried aluminum foil and an aluminum printing plate—the metals did not work—the emulsion peeled off—if

you want to use a metal I suggest trying a non-water soluble spray coating first.

### How To Transfer

Step 1. Soak the selected paper with the transparency floating above it in cool water for at least two minutes.

Step 2. Gently “lift” the emulsion that contains the printed photograph from the transparent sheet. This is a delicate operation, rock the tray back and forth as needed, and gently push back the emulsion from the edges without tearing it.

Step 3. Remove the transparent sheet. It is helpful to have an assistant help with this (like I did) especially to step in and remove the clear transparency from the tray after the emulsion is lifted from it.

Step 4. Rock the tray to spread out the emulsion and position the paper underneath it (while still in the



Lifting the emulsion from the transparency material, in a tray of cool water.



The emulsion, floating above the paper, after being removed from the transparency.



Showing the lifted emulsion on Stonehenge 250 gsm printmaking paper.

Images page 31 © Tony Morella

water) to flow the emulsion onto the paper. This takes practice. I got most of the image where I wanted it on the paper, then lifted out the wet print/emulsion combo (holding the top with both thumbs) and placed it on the back of a darkroom tray. You could use any smooth flat surface. I splashed water on the emulsion to continue moving it around. Do not let it dry out, and take care not to tear it.

Step 5. Let the final print air-dry flat, blot carefully and gently with paper towels to soak up excess water if needed.

## Tips

Denser areas of ink may require more time to remove the emulsion. Soak longer and cool down the water if needed. Do not use hot water.

The emulsion transfer dries with a semi-matte finish on most substrates. I noticed a glossier finish when adhering it to textured surfaces and fabric. You can spray or brush it with a semi-matte or matte varnish. Always test first to make sure the varnish does not dissolve your image.

The product performs as described and the color rendition is accurate. Don't be afraid to experiment with slightly textured papers, I used a few with almost a glitter-like surface, but although they looked good, they unfortunately didn't scan or photograph well to show here. Remember, you are making original art with digital emulsion transfers and each piece is a one of a kind. If you are looking for that emulsion transfer look with the ease of digital photography, go for it!



*Wendy Erickson is a photographer, writer and teacher. Her photographs and writings have been widely exhibited, and published in numerous books and articles. Wendy teaches photography at the University level and as Editor, is putting the technique back into photo technique Magazine.*

## Resources

Jellyfishphoto.es-jellyfishphoto.es; Weston Diploma parchment-bostickandsullivan.com; Savoire-Faire, Lama Li Venetian Mask paper-savoirefaire.com or dickblick.com; Stonehenge printmaking paper-most local and online art supply stores; Scrapbooking paper-basicgrey.com, americancrafts.com, and various local or online crafts stores