Printing on Tissue Paper

Embracing Tissue Paper

Hello again. It's now time to talk about one of the questions I get asked the most, "How do you print on tissue paper."

And my simple answer is, tape the tissue paper completely to a carrier sheet and 'fool' the printer into printing on it.

Tissue paper is just one of many non-traditional papers. If the paper you chose is too thin to run through the printer directly you will also want to follow this process.

But as you might have guessed, things are never as easy as they seem.

Let's break this down into manageable pieces.

Let's first start by talking about printers. There are three different kinds of mainstream printers and they are set apart by their inks—pigment-based inks, dye-based inks, and laser toner.

Laser printers are not advisable for several reasons. Laser printers have a drum unit that fuses toner powder in a heated process and although they can handle simple graphics nicely, complex images and photos can be a challenge. The toner in laser prints contains resin which isn't compatible with encaustic long term. And these inks are not considered archival. The wax will protect the print against the environment but does not protect against UV light and over time fade the image.

And since laser printers use a heat process, and this will melt the tape you are using to adhere the tissue paper to your carrier sheet.

Inkjet printers are either dye or pigment based and spray liquid ink through nozzles onto the paper. Generally, dye-based inks consist of colorant that is fully dissolved in a liquid. These inks are lower in cost, but with the disadvantage that they are water soluble, so a drop of water could ruin a print, images can smudge, and the prints require a longer drying time for the ink to set. Additionally, the prints fade faster and are therefore not considered archival. Pigment-based ink consists of very fine powder of colorant in a liquid carrier and are considered archival because of their improved longevity and fade resistance over dye-based inks.

Know that different papers behave slightly differently when printed and embedded and every printer will handle these papers differently. I'll show you a couple of options, but you'll have to experiment to see what works best for you and your printer.

Keep in mind that you might need to:

- practice and perfect the settings,
- change your carrier option,
- adjust the ink level of the print,
- and/or the adjust the platen gap.

No printer will take tissue easily. It's about adapting and learning how to use your printer. I can only tell you first-hand about the printers that I use.

First you might want to think about the path of the paper. Does it feed from the front and go back and forth before it prints? Is it suction? Or does it grab the paper from the sheet feeder? Does it gently or aggressively pull the paper? All these things will affect how your printer is going to handle printing on tissue paper.

You will need to prepare your paper differently for different printers and will have to experiment. I have two printers that I use to print tissue paper and have to tape the carrier sheet differently depending on the printer.

You then need to choose a carrier sheet for the tissue to be adhered to. I suggest picking a carrier sheet that your printer will easily accept. For my smaller desktop printer, a regular piece of office paper works great. For my photo printers I use the cheapest photo paper I can get for the size of the printer since copy paper usually doesn't come in 13 x 19 or 17 x 22. There is nothing special about the carrier sheet and you'll be throwing it away when you are done.

The first thing you are going to want to do is cut the tissue paper a smidgen less than the size of your carrier sheet as it needs to completely sit on top of this sheet.

When taping it's IMPERATIVE that you cannot lead with tissue paper overlapping the edge of your carrier sheet and it's best to leave about ¼ inch of carrier sheet before you adhere your tissue.

I can't reiterate this enough. It's REALLY, REALLY important that the edge that feeds into the printer is the carrier sheet and not tissue paper. The tissue paper should sit completely on top

of the carrier sheet and shouldn't wrap around the carrier sheet at all—let the carrier sheet be the only thing going through the printer.

I learned this the hard way when I wrapped the tissue around the leading edge of the carrier sheet. The print feeders grabbed the tissue and proceeded to shred the tissue inside the printer. Thank god, my brother is a surgeon as I had to go over to his office to get some surgical tools to get the paper out because it was deeply embedded in the printer there was no other way for me to get it out.

For my desktop Canon Pixma, I have found that I only need to tape the tissue to the top edge of the carrier sheet and if I tape the sides the paper catches in the printer.

For my Epson photo printer, I have found that I need to tape the top and the sides as the print head will catch on the tissue and cause problems if it's not tacked down. That being said, I've heard from students that they need to tape all 4 sides down. So, it will depend on your printer and as I said before you'll need to experiment.

Some students use repositionable spray, double sided tape or a glue stick on their carrier sheet. I would be wary of this practice as tissue paper is thin and you don't want any of the product seeping through the paper resulting in the residue gumming up your paper feeders.

The other issue I have with repositionable sprays unless you know exactly what the product contains, it's not advisable to use with encaustic. You can be assured that some of it will remain on the tissue paper that you are embedding.

Place your leading top edge into the printer and know that this is not a perfect process. Sometimes the printer just does not like the paper and you'll have to prepare another sheet. Make sure to stand by your printer and carefully guide the sheet out if it sounds like the print heads are hitting against the edges of your carrier sheet. Otherwise a jam can happen.

And for some printing tips—there is no ICC code for tissue paper. I simply print using my last settings from the premium presentation matte paper and that works for me.

If you want to help reduce the bleed on the edges of your subject in an image saturated with color, I'd look at dialing down color density setting.

You may find that you have to choose plain paper rather than matte paper for your setting.

Maybe printing in draft mode or printing at 50% saturation works best for you.

To help reduce the smears that happen when the print head drags across the wet tissue, see if you can increase the platen gap on your printer.

Whatever you do, be smart and only use paper that you think that your printer can handle. Each printer is a little bit different. And let me tell you, you absolutely don't want your printer to 'eat up' the paper.

You are now ready to embed your image. I'll see you in the next video.