

My POP Project 2022: Handcolouring Photographs – Judy Thistleton-Martin

Why handcolouring photographs?

- To try and recreate a timeless, handmade, colour quality in my images rather than software generated. Handcolouring re-introduces tactility to the photographic experience.
- I have always been interested in the process of handcolouring photographs since I discovered my own studio baby photo and my parents wedding photo. It enabled me to connect to a part of my family's photographic history through memory.
- As a response to photography today where most images are taken, stored and shared electronically.
- A chance to create original artworks from my original photographic prints – one off creations. I used photos from my photographic "archive" rather than shooting new images.

My experiments handcolouring my photographs included:

- Mediums I'd never used before - Marshall's handcolouring oil paints and coloured pencils, Pan Pastels and alcohol inks.
- Techniques I'd never tried before - blending, using oil and watercolour painting techniques.
- A variety of different photographic paper thicknesses – Canson Infinity Velin Museum Rag 100% cotton, Epson Archival Matte 189grm, Canon Matte Photo Paper 170grms and Lasal Photo Matte 235grms.
- Subjects: Portraits, landscapes, still life, flowers, architecture.
- Size of artworks – A3, A4, 6x4 and some in between!

What were my challenges?

- Lack of experience in painting techniques.
- Choosing and printing mono images that were suitable for handcolouring.
- There are very few traditional, professional colourists still colouring – so inspiration about those techniques was limited, although there are still written instructions available.
- Creating cohesion between each artwork so that they became a connected body of work.

What have I learnt?

- Handcolouring photographs is not as easy as it looks.
- I found the techniques very therapeutic, but challenging at the same time.
- The original Marshall's photocoloring oil paints were only available online from the B&H in the US and the colours were very limited and not what I actually ordered!
- Advice on how to print mono photographs for colouring was conflicting and depended upon the paper, the medium being used and the preferred artistic effect.
- The medium determines the paper that the photographs are printed on – Pastels need thick, textured paper to have "tooth", while alcohol inks need smooth matte paper so that they don't "bleed".
- Once the images are dry the way the colour ends up looking changes slightly.
- Printing on both sides of the paper worked – depending on the tone required.
- The finished artworks had to be protected with different fixative – again depending upon the medium being used.

