



Point-Blank Comments on the Epson 9800 for Giclee

**Interview with Gary Kerr,
Fine Art Impressions
on his experiences using the Epson 9800**



Gary Kerr with an Epson 9800



Close-up of the Epson Stylus PRO 9800

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1. Since you already have an Epson 9600 and Epson 10000, what made you desire an Epson 9800?

I bought the 9800 for speed increase with UltraChrome ink-set, the 3rd light black was a bonus. I would also cite the dual waste tanks is a plus for volume/production shops -- less downtime. Plus if one waste tank fills faster than the other (and, it will), you can just switch them and balance off the waste levels -- sort of the equivalent of tire rotation on cars (but not mine, asymmetrical tires).

The 9800 also reduces metamerism significantly, which is a big problem for the first generation of pigment (10K) and second-generation pigment (UltraChrome). This third generation ink commonly know as "K3" inks are a completely new formulation, so further benefits are a more durable print due to the pigment ink encapsulation, and a slightly wider color gamut all with reduced metamerism thrown in. Best of all the K3 ink doesn't cost anymore than UltraChrome for the 9600 -- what's not to like.



Epson Stylus PRO 9800 at Fine Art Impressions

The head is an amazing advancement too. A 1" wide droplet path not unlike the original 10K. Speed and reliability seem high. I will point out however, that auto cutting rag papers such as the Hahnemuhle line will lead to the dreaded head clogging due to the rag particles being left behind from auto cutting. All Epson had to do was flush the area with an airstream to reduce this huge drawback. But it's no wonder they didn't; clogged heads need lots of ink going down the drain.

2. Do you have any idea why it took so long to get yours? Defects? Glitch in manufacturing process? Poor management?

Mine came in when promised, but I know my dealer DTG has a 400 unit back order.

3. Now that you have it, are you glad you waited?

Worth the wait for sure, I've got a second one coming for early '06.

4. What would you recommend to a person who already has an Epson 7600, or Epson 9600? Should they upgrade to an Epson 7800 or Epson 9800? Some people write us already and say, "Not enough new features in the 7800 or 9800; I will just stick with my 7600 or 9600 until something more new comes out."

Pay for print shops have to upgrade to stay competitive, it's not an option. Self-printers are not as concerned about productivity so it is not an imperative -- unless metamerism is a real culprit for their particular color palette, or if trying to do B&W on the UltraChrome, then it is a must.

5. What about if you have an Epson 10600? Should you switch to an Epson 9800?

Great question, it comes down to ink preferences; 10600 is a pure pigment with some higher permanence ratings, whereas the 9800 has a wider color gamut with slightly reduced permanence on some media.

It's a good trade off for most. Speed is similar, but the 10K Is still a better build-quality 9600/9800 machines. The 10K offers true pay-for-print providers an advantage with its larger 500ml ink carts, something we've seen Epson move away from in their last two wide format releases. Epson wants end-users, not pay-for-print providers. That's really obvious in their marketing messages: Epson wants individual photographs and individual artists to print themselves, at home or wherever, on their own.

6. What are the benefits of the Epson 9800?

See my first comments above.

7. What are the downsides in the Epson 9800?

It's hard to get one. Still requires experience to get the most out of it via a dedicated RIP. Still only 44" in a world that is pushing wider and wider. 48" would have been a big improvement, but I know the media supply chain is ready with 48" media.

8. Is there still a fogging issue with some papers when put under glass?

This is unknown to me as I use the Matte black ink set, not the gloss (photo) ink set. The three black channels must be the same set; matte or photo. Therefore, I have not tested any photo inks yet. Although, my next 9800 will feature the photo ink-set so I have both in-house.

9. What about large areas of solid colors? Is there banding?

Banding is not an issue at all. Assuming proper head alignment and head cleaning. Incidentally, Epson has devised an auto-nozzle cleaning/detection system in the 9800, but I already "caught it" asking me to perform a nozzle cleaning cycle when it wasn't actually necessary. I simply over-rode the request and did a Nozzle check which confirmed my suspicion; no cleaning necessary. Probably won't happen every time as the heads do need cleaning cycles. But it's the kind of thing that experience teaches you using these machines.



Color Management and ICC color profiles on the Epson 9800

10. What about gloss differential or bronzing?

Those things are gone.

11. Can you print on glossy paper? What about scratch resistance?

Only with photo black inks which I don't have here, but will in January '06

12. What about the Mimaki JV22 with 8 different colors? Either the ErgoSoft solution, or the 8-col- or Symphonic Inks solution (Scott Saltman)?

I'm not sure whose 8-ink set it uses, but I don't think there is a great following there. Perhaps if matching spot colors from Pantone's PMS system is a priority, but it's not in fine art repro. If anyone would know it would be Jon Doe who knows the Mimaki really well; they don't use HiFi inks as far as I know.

Editor's note: We are checking out the Mimaki JV22-160. There are two completely different 8-color solutions available: ErgoSoft software and the inks they support; and Scott Saltman's inks and the software that supports those inks.

We are also checking out the Roland 12-color d'Vinci, to see if the extra colors and extra colors are worth the extra cost: see below. We anticipate it will take most of 2006 to get enough feedback and experience on the 8-color Mimaki and 12-color Roland to answer these questions: and obviously we will need access to both. FLAAR at BGSU has experience since we have an 11-color ColorSpan DisplayMaker Mach 12 and a 12-color ColorSpan DisplayMaker XII already.

13. What about the Roland d'Vinci with 12 colors, from ErgoSoft?

Peter Supry and I talk regularly. I have to speculate it hasn't been widely adopted, possibly due to cost versus performance.

Editor's note: we understand about a dozen d'Vinci units have been sold, so until we can obtain one ourselves, find out its potential, and if it's potential is superior, then we can get the message out. Otherwise, there is no message because the demand has not been triggered, nor really even the interest.

14. What about black and white printing on the Epson 9800? Or do you use B&W inks in one of your other printers?

B&W on the 9800 is the best print quality thus far out of an Epson with OEM ink, however, that doesn't mean it's better than Jon Cone's K7 (seven dilutions of carbon pigment) ink set which I use through my 9600. Those prints exhibit zero metamerism, whereas the Epson still uses some color inks to achieve the density. Interesting side bar on this issue; Jeff Schewe, whom I have great respect for in digital color, just wrote an article about digital B&W in Digital PhotoPro magazine and he stated that Epson is using the 3 blacks plus some full strength magenta, Cyan, and some Yellow, but no light versions of Cyan or magenta.

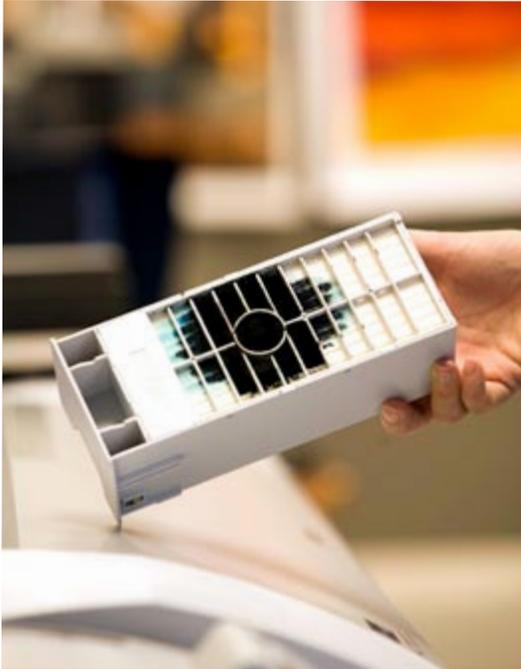
I read just the opposite in Epson's own reference material; they claim their "Advanced B&W" uses three blacks plus three light inks; Light Cyan, Light Magenta, and Yellow. Hence the explanation (K+LK+LLK + Y+LC+LM) from Epson. I wonder who is right on this issue of light inks versus full strength in the Epson native driver? I'll bet Epson and it makes no sense to use full strength color inks to get a monochromatic image.

Having access to process inks in black-and-white printing, enables the user to shift the neutral point to emulate traditional wet lab toned-prints; hence the relative designation of "warm" "neutral" and "cool" from Epson. Jon Cone's strategy for achieving toning is via the color of the substrate – and it works beautifully, but without the drawback of metamerism inherent in process inks.



Epson cyan ink cartridge for Epson 9800

I have both printing systems in my shop with fourteen different papers custom profiled, so there's nowhere to run and nowhere to hide on this subject.



One of the two waste ink receptacles

I applaud Epson for listening to its users on the issues of monochromatic digital printmaking, but my hat is off to Jon Cone for pushing the digital B&W into the realm of respect that only traditional silver-gelatin prints have enjoyed.

Incidentally, please see my home page (www.fineartgiclee.com) for my explanation about dedicated B&W printing. I have registered my own brand name to describe my printing with Jon Cone's K7 carbon ink set; I call it CarbonTone™ Monochromatic Pigment Printmaking. And I have to say, that my brand strategy, CarbonTone™, better describes the beauty of carbon-based pigment printing compared to terms like "K3", "K7" etc, my federal trademark is pending, but let's let the market decide

15. When people on the Internet praise the Epson 7800 or 9800, what is it they are not telling people, things that you now know about this printer?

The machines are designed from the ground up to waste ink and media all day long. It's a false economy for Epson to do this as it is trading profit for good will -- not a good business strategy. Epson will get kicked off the hill by another who will tout their efficient use of consumables one day -- just my opinion here.

You still need a RIP to get jobs out -- not as important for the self-printer.

Other items that should be addressed is the ability to auto-cut thicker substrates such as canvas, backflushing the data buffer when I job goes beyond available media, and larger ink cartridges. The 10K uses 500ml and it's just better than dealing with 220ml, there's just too much waste and in-efficiency throwing out these empty cartridges after consuming 220ml of ink.

Lastly is speed; it's our industry's greatest challenge to compete with other printmaking processes. I constantly have to explain that lithographers yields a print on press every one-and-half seconds compared to our process that takes 30 minutes. Even if paper and ink were free, we couldn't compete with that. Luckily for now, we don't have to. But productivity should be on Epson's mind regarding throughput.

Concluding comments by the editor

The comments on the Epson 9800 by Gary Kerr are very useful, since he has an experience and simultaneously critical eye that is ahead of the competition.

Gary Kerr is also one of the top photographers of giclee in the US; indeed he is often called to Europe to photograph oil, watercolor and other artwork to produce as giclee. Gary Kerr uses a BetterLight large format camera system.



Gary Kerr, Fine Art Impressions, www.FineArtGiclee.com

For artists who prefer an entry-level cost for giclee, he can offer images shot with his Canon EOS camera as an alternative.

The value of these comments is that he is not a shill for any ink or any printer manufacturer.

You would never get a comment like his on the media and ink wastage in a trade magazine. No trade magazine would dare publish that.

No "Success Story" would admit the weak points of a product.

So this interview is what you should expect from a university institute and a professor that has made the effort to find a truthful site-visit case study situation.

Why do we report the facts? Because we are curious about what printer we should feature for our own giclee production. FLAAR itself produces giclee; the FLAAR+BGSU lab does photography for artists all across the USA; they send in their paintings to be digitized at our university (with our 80-megapixel Cruse giclee camera system). This is how we learn about a product in a real-life situation. If we were just professors and lab assistants wearing white lab coats, this would be a dull idealistic situation. We prefer to interact with actual artists, real paintings, and produce giclee that an artist actually has to sell and make a profit from.

So we are curious whether an 8-color Mimaki JV22-160 or a 12-color Roland/ErgoSoft d'Vinci would be better than an Epson 9800. This report is the first step. The second step is to obtain the Mimaki, and then the Roland, and put all three to the jury test.

As an aside, we would actually recommend you consider sending your paintings and photography to Gary Kerr, since he provides an efficient, professional service. Although our university is glad to have business scanning artwork, our system is portable only within Latin America (we use BetterLight in Latin America and a Cruse system in Ohio). If you need a person for Europe, Canada, or the US, the system of Gary Kerr is portable (and he is available to travel to your studio). The system we use at the university is a Cruse, an 80-megapixel colossus. The system we use in Guatemala is BetterLight, comparable to that used by Kerr. Indeed I believe we also use the same tripod (Gitzo) and tripod head (Manfrotto).

As an example of his high level of professionalism, prints that Gary Kerr studios made with CarbonTone for the Andy Warhol images sold in Miami (24x36" prints framed) for \$4,400!

His company is Fine Art Impressions. Their website is www.FineArtGiclee.com. He exhibits each year at the Atlanta Art & Decor Expo.



Fine Art Impressions, Kerr's company

General Comments on Epson

Slowness continues to be a headache for production houses that use piezo printheads but individual artists and photographers simply let the printer chug away in the background. One painter said, I paraphrase from memory: "I only paint about one painting a month. If the Epson can finish the print of my current painting before I am ready with the second painting, that is all the speed I need."

Slowness elsewhere within the world of Epson has caused a dramatic upheaval in Epson America's ranks and management. I would guess that part of this was due to the delivery debacle of the Epson 9800, plus the backlash from the clearly premature announcement of the products in May 2005. One of the stalwarts of the Epson booth at virtually every trade show in the USA, reportedly no longer works there. We also understand that a higher-level manager was removed too.

Both these individuals were professionals and we regret their momentary demise. We are sure they will return at another company and continue to do a good job at a new home. Maybe if I had an MBA I would understand why good people get fired.

Another major change is that reportedly over 100 Epson dealers had their dealership cancelled. This is internal politics and we are not interested to figure out for what reasons. But all together it shows a company in moderate internal turmoil, caused in part by premature announcement in May of printers that are still in short supply NINE MONTHS later. We also get the impression that the profit margins are not exactly as large as desired: the printers are priced so low they are almost given away (naturally, this is to get you to buy the overpriced ink; same as with all other manufacturers).

But despite all this, Epson “owns” the giclee, fine art photo, and proofing markets. They are now laying siege to the technical printing, packaging proofing, and other markets. Special models, 4400, 7400, and 9400 are being test-marketed in most of the world except for America. These are similar to the 4800, 7800, and 9800 except the 4-series have dual CMYK to get around the lack of speed in the multi-color models. But getting rid of the multiple blacks and all the nice color seems to be regressing. They should do what HP does and Canon is about to do, put dual sets of printheads in so you can have all the color, and dual-speed at the same time.

So far, all during 2004 and 2005, Epson coasted on the luck that HP introduced no successor to its HP 5000-5500 family. All the better quality HP products, such as 8750 and HP 30, 90, and 130, were in the desktop range and for photos only: not suitable for canvas or watercolor paper).

Epson has, so far, not had much competition from Canon. Canon feels that banner ads and selling through their copier channels or camera channels will sell their printers adequately. Since Canon has developed excellent technology, it is unfortunate their marketing strategy has jumped from their copier channels to the new emphasis on their camera channel. A wide format printer is not a copier and is not a camera either. This is why FLAAR has separate websites for each, and, when we put cameras together with printers it works, because we come from a workflow solution. To us a camera is not a camera, it is an instrument to produce an image for a wide format printer. Half a million readers on our printer websites, a quarter of a million on our scanner websites, and another quarter million people, mostly photographers, on our digital photography website like our workflow model.

As soon as possible we hope to have a full-scale site-visit case study of the Epson 9800 at Gary Kerr’s atelier. This will naturally require that FLAAR make a trip there to visit.

We also anticipate having an Epson 9800 arrive in the FLAAR facilities at Bowling Green State University so we can do an in-house evaluation.

The full-length Kerr site-visit and all FLAAR evaluations will be posted on the giclee and photo series areas of www.wide-format-printers.net as soon as they are available.

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Epson 5500, HP 10ps, and HP 3000 Evaluation


Wide Format Printing for Fine Art Giclee


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Ink and Media for Fine Art Giclee

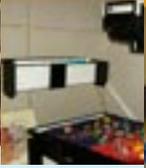

Giclee on Canvas and Watercolor Paper


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Medium Format Quality


Repro Station Copy Station


Digitizing Artwork


What Camera to Use

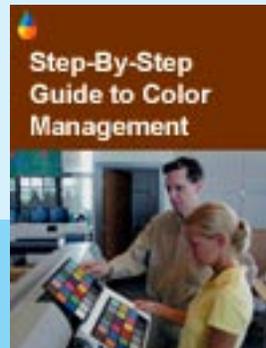
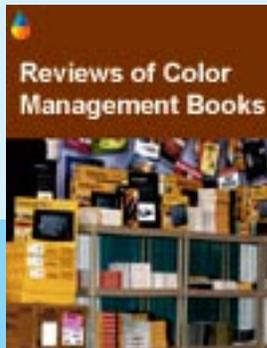

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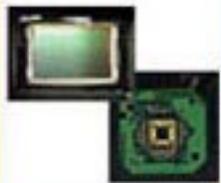
Practice &
Critique



Pros and Cons of
Digital and Film
Photography



CCD and CMOS
Image Sensors



History and
Timeline of Digital
Photography



Composition The Key
to Prizewinning
Photography



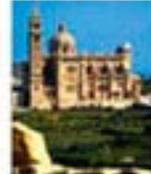
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with 35mm SLR
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Worthwhile
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Digital Cameras at
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Pros and Cons of Digital vs Film Photography (Medium and Large Format)



Digital Backs for Medium Format Cameras



Cameras to hold Medium Format Digital Backs



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Lighting Modifiers for Portrait Photography



Lighting for Profitable Portrait Photography



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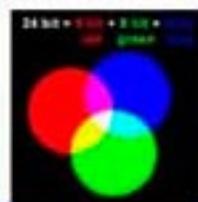
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Color Management for Digital Photography



Bit Depth and Dynamic Range



Workflow Summary for Medium and Large Format Digital Photography



Glossary of Digital Photography Terms



History of Panorama Photography: Circa 1840-1980



Photography of Art: Sculptures, Artifacts & other 3-Dimensional Works of Art



Taking Photographs with a Reprographic Copy Stand



History of Rollout Photography



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Gray Balance for Professional Digital Photography



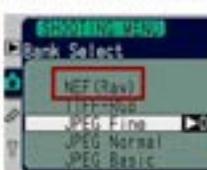
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