

PRESSINFO

The Truth About Optical Brighteners in Hahnemuhle Paper

June 4, 2006

For immediate release

There has been growing concern recently about the use of Optical Brightening Agents, or OBAs, in digital fine art paper. More and more often we hear the question, "Are your papers OBA free?" The answer is, "We offer options both with and without OBAs." Because of a misunderstanding of OBAs, many people are surprised to hear this response. Please let us explain.

OBAs are white or colorless compounds that work by converting ultraviolet light into visible light, thereby making the paper appear brighter or whiter. They do not change the color of the paper; they only fool the eye into seeing a whiter color. After being exposed to UV rays for a long period of time, OBAs will begin to lose their fluorescent quality, leaving only the natural base color.

There are several methods for adding brighteners to digital media. Some companies use the less expensive method of putting OBAs into the receptive coating. Because it is not known what effect, if any, spent OBAs will have on inks, we add them directly to the paper, ensuring that they never come in direct contact with the inks.

Some of our competitors claim that only OBA-free papers meet the Library of Congress Standard for Archivability. However, this standard refers only to boxes and paper used for storage. A better standard by which to measure photographic paper is the Library of Congress Standard for Paper Permanence, which does allow the inclusion of brighteners. All Hahnemuhle papers meet this standard.

So the claim that OBAs cause paper to yellow or reduce its permanence is simply wrong. Eventually, the perceived color of the paper will revert to the same base color as papers without; but initially, OBAs allow a much brighter base. It is not yet known how long the reversion to natural might take. We do know that it is not an immediate thing; it could take as many as 50 years (even longer if the artist takes measures to protect the image from the effects of UV rays.) But the point to remember is that *the paper will end up the same color as it would have if OBAs were not used.*

Consider that virtually all silver halide papers used in darkroom photography contained OBAs. Artists who wanted a bright white base simply accepted the fact that there would be a slight change over a long period of time. In fact, many photographers and collectors find this "mature" look desirable. At Hahnemühle, we strongly feel that to provide the paper base color and print color where the artist wants it for their lifetime is

better than having it wrong from the beginning.

Another important benefit of adding OBAs to digital papers is batch consistency. By adding OBAs, we can assure that your image remains true without having to reprofile every time you purchase paper from a different batch.

For more than 400 years the Hahnemühle mill has dedicated itself to providing the highest quality paper products. We take great pride in the product that we provide—our reputation depends on it. While we could certainly jump on the anti-OBA bandwagon, we remain steadfast in our commitment to the artist's choice. Ultimately, we do not cater to hype; we cater solely to creativity and quality. We will therefore, continue to provide superior media with and without OBAs.

[Read the Library of Congress Standard for Permanent Paper](#)