

Alternative Photographic Process

featuring the work of Pat Bacon, John Coffey,
Romy Hosford, Jenn Libby and Ian Sherlock

February 25–March 31, 2017

From the Director

The idea of this exhibition came from wanting to show a different side of photography from what we have typically shown. More than an exhibition of photos of places, people, and things (those are included, of course) but also a show about how these photographic images are physically made. By hand.

This exhibition is an exploration of handmade photography, the various kinds of images featured fall under the “Alternative Process” heading (hence the very utilitarian title of this show!) and most harken back to a day before digital technology. The five artists featured in this exhibition represent various directions that can be taken when delving into an antique or vintage process. Some of them stay as true to history as possible, while others bring the process so far into the 21st century that the outcome is almost something different all together.

—Bradley Butler, gallery director and curator

Processes

WET PLATE COLLODION

The wet plate collodion process produces a negative image on a transparent glass support. This process requires the photographic material to be coated, sensitized, exposed and developed within the span of about fifteen minutes, necessitating a portable darkroom for use in the field or to be done in a studio. Collodion plates have the finest grain of any silver based film and can be enlarged to make very big prints without loss of detail. A wide variety of paper prints can be made from the collodion negative.

TINTYPE

Tintypes are a collodion process made by creating a direct positive on a thin sheet of metal coated with a dark lacquer or enamel and used as the support for the photographic emulsion. Each print is a unique original. Tintypes were introduced in the 1850s and in many ways, replaced the ambrotype by being easier to care for and less fragile.

AMBROTYPE

The ambrotype is a positive photograph on glass and is a variation of the wet plate collodion process. Like a print on paper, it is viewed by reflected light. Each print is a unique original. The ambrotype was introduced in the 1850s. During the 1860s it was superseded by the tintype, a similar photograph on thin black-lacquered iron, hard to distinguish from an ambrotype if under glass.

CYANOTYPE

Cyanotype is a photographic printing process that produces a cyan-blue print. Engineers used the process well into the 20th century as a simple and low-cost process to produce copies of drawings, referred to as blueprints. The process uses two chemicals: ammonium iron(III) citrate and potassium ferricyanide. A negative is laid over top of the photosensitive paper and exposed to light.

PHOTOGRAVURE

Photogravure is an intaglio printmaking or photo-mechanical process whereby a copper plate is coated with a light-sensitive gelatin which had been exposed to a film positive, and then etched, resulting in a high quality intaglio print (intaglio: the image is incised into a surface and the incised line or sunken area holds the ink—it is the direct opposite of a relief print) that can reproduce the detail and continuous tones of a photograph. This same process can be done today with the use of a photopolymer plate instead of copper.

PINHOLE

A pinhole camera is a simple camera without a lens but with a tiny aperture, a pinhole—effectively a light-proof box with a small hole in one side. Light from a scene passes through the aperture and projects an inverted image on the opposite side of the box. The image is exposed onto a photosensitive paper and a paper negative is produced.

SALTPRINT

The salt print was the dominant paper-based photographic process for producing positive prints during the period from 1839 through approximately 1860. A photosensitive surface is made by wetting a sheet of paper in a salt solution and coating one side with silver nitrate. A negative is then laid over top of the paper and exposed to light. The result is a positive photographic print on the paper. Toners can be added to the process to produce a variation in the color of the print, the can include: platinum, palladium, gold/borax, and gold/thiocarbamide.

Artist Statements

JOHN COFFER

John Coffe was born in West Virginia, he was reared in Las Vegas, became a Florida surfer/underwater photographer/studio portrait photographer. He left his sports car, condo, and modern lifestyle behind, got a horse and wagon in Lancaster County, PA and became America's last horse drawn itinerant Tintype portrait photographer. John began this life changing, if not world changing, journey in 1978. After seven years on the road, 36 states, and more than 11,000 miles meandering about the country from coast to coast, John put down roots in Yates County, New York in 1985.

Even before he rolled onto his 50 acre homestead, 3 ½ miles south of Dundee, NY with his horse and oxen drawn traveling caravan, John was teaching wet-plate photography to individuals and giving demos at prestigious institutions. Eventually, by the 90's John became the first to teach wet-plate collodion photography in the field workshops. In 2000 he produced the first complete modern manual on making wet-plate collodion totypes, ambrotypes, and glass negatives, along with albumen printmaking. With this manual came a 3 ½ hour DVD set. This was the first ever wet-plate instructional video. Few have done as much for the resurgence and preservation of wet-plate collodion photography as John. Wet plate's astounding revival around the world would never have taken place without him. Many hundreds have passed through John's "Camp Tintype" workshops. He has often been referred to as the teacher of the teachers of the teachers. His story and his Tintypes have been featured in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Village Voice*, *Forbes*, and *Aperture*. Also, his work and advancements in the technical skills of the craft can be found in the now numerous antiquarian avant-garde alternative photography books and manuals.

John has more than just a superficial connection with what he photographs. He's often not just a taker of pictures, but a maker in the fullest sense. When it's a cow, it may be one of his many cows, like "Baldy", born and raised on his farmstead and providing milk for the dinner table. The corral she stands in is a split rail "stake and rider" style fence, made from rails John split out from trees pulled in from his woods by his oxen teams or horses. If it's a still life of an interestingly sculpted cord wood pile destined for providing heat for his cabin and cooking his food, the process started with him first cutting and splitting the wood and stacking it precisely. The exposure time for these plates may have been only a few seconds in the camera with the finished image being seen in less than fifteen minutes, as is the nature of the wet plate process, but the whole creation may have taken years and far more work and know how than just lugging a big wooden brass lens camera around and pouring some collodion and other exotic chemicals.

As traditional as John may be in many ways, he has always been in the fore front of innovation. He is not averse to combining old technology with new technology to create something new and extraordinary. He was the first to ever produce an actual Tintype Movie. John is represented by Gerald Peters Gallery in New York.

PAT BACON

My work is the product of my environment. I am most often surrounded by a small town's agricultural landscape. The annual cycle of sowing, harvest and decay is always in my vision. I do not make work seeking a nostalgic or romantic response, but one of a gritty, visceral nature.

The printmaking process of photogravure allows me to take images (for this exhibition from my phone) and work with them in a very physical way. I burn the images into a metal plate leaving crevasses. I then spread heavy oil-based inks over the entire plate followed by wiping the ink off in various amounts and locations. This process creates plate tones, dark lines and textures. It is a very tactile, physical process. The plate is then run through a printing press on rag paper. I am not interested in creating editions—I strive to create a unique response from the plate each time I repeat the process.

ROMY HOSFORD

My work can be described as storytelling through object, material and historical contexts; often dealing with perception, definition and expectation. In addition, I investigate the concept of memory, personal and cultural, remembering and forgetting. The work in this exhibition explores metaphor, femininity, identity, anxiety and memory with the historic process as collaborator.

JENN LIBBY

I am an artist focused on the matter of memory. I take bits and pieces—found and original objects and images of popular and consumer culture—and I abstract them. I transform them, like memories, into new objects, with new realities apart from their original materials. I am fascinated and horrified by the proliferation of these images and objects of American culture. My work is a contemplation of this inordinate clutter which surrounds us, and is consumed by us. My work is an attempt to organize and make sense of this clutter, an attempt to find beauty and worth in discarded objects and bits of pop culture.

My wet-plate collodion photograms of toys, bones, and glass, translate the mundane into something engaging, memories more beautiful than their realities. My installations further embody this impulse to (re)collect and organize. My interest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century media relates to my interest in memory. How do the recording technologies and how we use them impact how and what we remember. I use the nineteenth-century wet-plate collodion photo process to make images on glass and metal because of their beauty, versatility, and physicality. As one of the earliest photographic methods, its longer exposure times and sensitivity to blue light renders the world in a very different way than how we perceive it.

IAN SHERLOCK

On Looking Up documents a series of clouds, as they passed over the sun, within a 16 minute period. This seemingly mundane event—the passing of clouds—is often overlooked, but is as pure a form of poetry within itself as one could strive to create. Within this short window of observation, I attempted to understand and document the intricacies and unfathomable beauty of what is merely the passing of time, while simultaneously attempting to understand the medium I chose to illustrate this event of passing with: the sun.

On Looking Up consists of 16 images, each representing one minute of time passing within the constraints. The images were made on paper negatives, using a 4x5 pinhole camera, so that the image would be inverted and exist as a one-of-a-kind object. They were then digitally scanned, enlarged and printed via inkjet.

Untitled 1 and *Untitled 10* bookend the multimedia series titled “Dearheart,” which consists of 10 images in total, and includes a sound piece. “Dearheart” represents my personal fantasies of escapism, and an understanding of societies universal fascination with this idea as well. More specifically, I’m interested in the evidence of this notion that has manifested physically in the landscape itself, formed in the wake of our movements in the endeavor to be transported, and to escape. The land has similar desires as well when it comes to escape, solitude, and the act of hiding. I believe my knowledge of this creates a stronger relationship between myself and the spaces I occupy. The process of making these images was an attempt at understanding this relationship and hoping to translate it to others the best I can.



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