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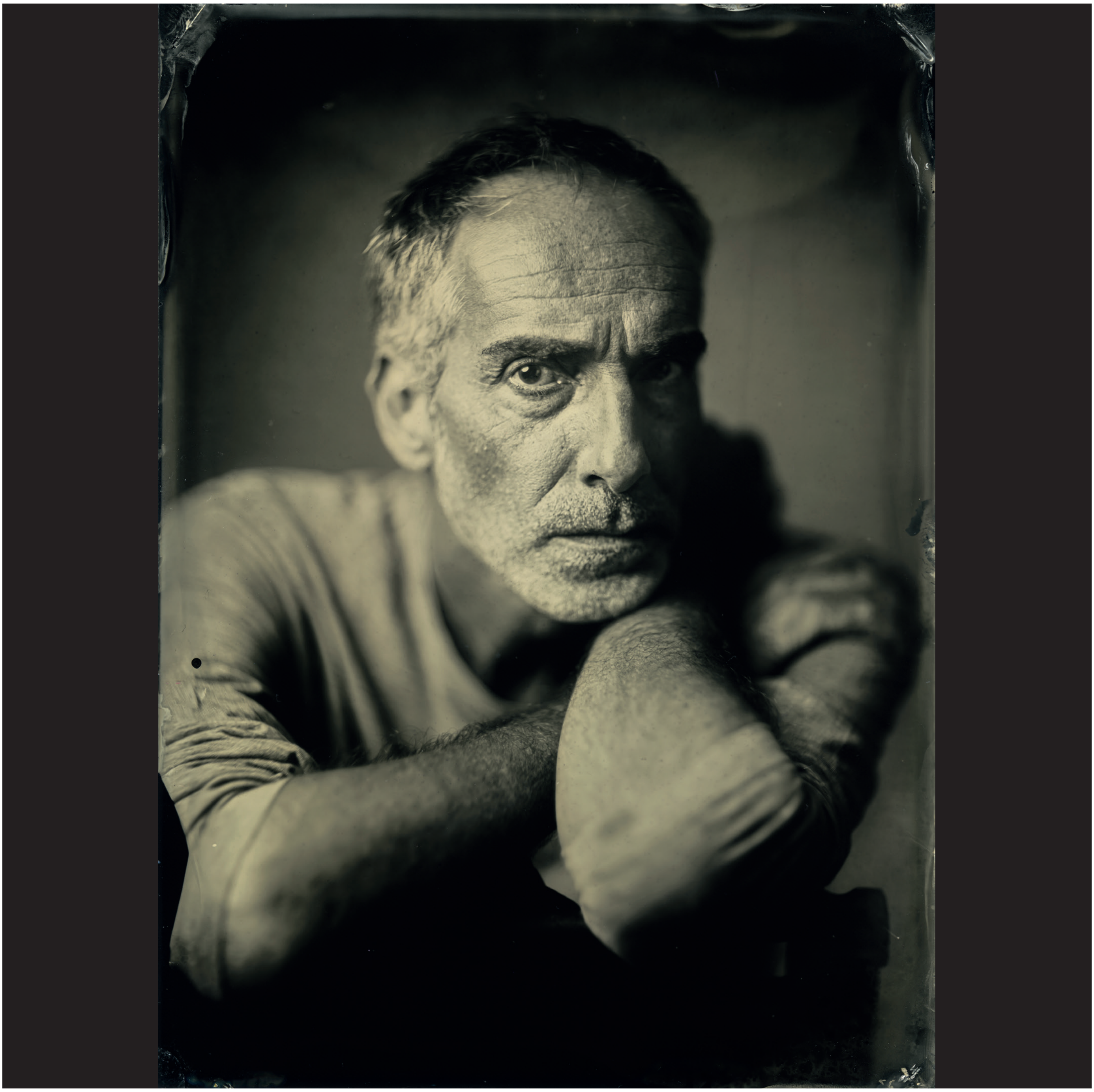
SilvergrainClassics

The entire world of analog photography



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Worlds Within Reach

By Bruce Barnbaum

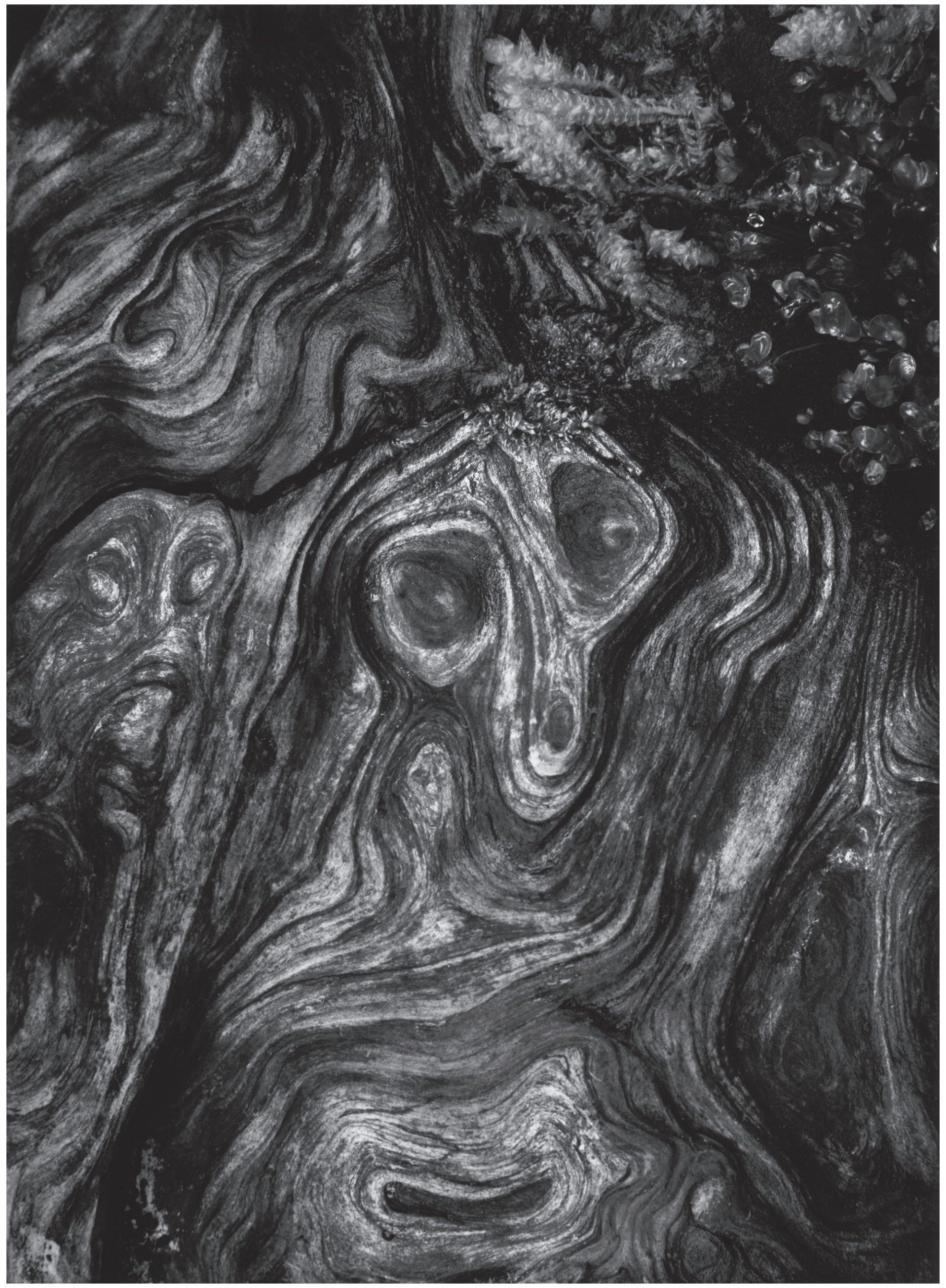
When I go out to photograph in nature, whether it's in my own wonderful home location with its magnificent conifer forests set between jagged mountain peaks of the North Cascade Mountains in Washington State, or anywhere else in the world, I tend to search for the overall "feel" of the place. I want to find, and then convey to others, the essence of the area where I'm photographing.

Although that is one of the prime motivations for my photography, there is a secondary motivation that goes along with it, and sometime competes with it. It's the desire to look for and find the little things—the details— that make up so much of the feel of the area, yet by themselves give the viewer no information about the general surroundings. These are the things that you can reach out and touch, the things that sometimes force you to get down on your knees to see, and they can prove to be so compelling that the overall picture becomes secondary. Often, those "little things" that tell you nothing about the place can prove to be the most fascinating of all images for both the photographer and the viewers.

So, ask yourself, in your own travels, do you try to impart a sense of where you are via your photographs? The answer to that question is generally, "Most of the time." And, of course, that's a sensible answer. But let me pose a very different thought for your creative consideration (the very thought I've been working towards in the opening paragraphs): consider removing all thoughts or references to where you are, and simply look for interesting visuals within the area. In other words, consider taking the "place" or the "name" out of the photograph. In the process, you may find that searching for the little things turns up visual surprises that you had previously overlooked while trying to get a sense of place into your imagery.

I have found over the years that details within the bigger picture often yield my most compelling images. Initially, that surprised me. But after encountering it often enough the lesson began to sink in, and I started actively looking for those details that are visually rich but tell viewers little or nothing about the place.

So, please allow me to continue by simply showing examples and explaining them, which I feel make the point better than further theoretic writing about it.



#1. Ghosts and Masks. Photographed 100 meters from my home, this remarkable piece of wood (it may have been from a maple tree, but I do not know) reminded me of "The Scream," the world-renowned painting by Edvard Muench. It was photographed using a Mamiya 645 camera with extension tubes, covering an area of wood no more than 12 centimeters on the long side, yet the shapes within that small area constituted a world in itself. It says nothing about its surroundings, but that was unimportant to me. The important thing is what it may mean to the viewer.

This is one of a series of photographs I produced in 1998 that I titled "Darkness and Despair," expressing my feelings about the impending loss in an environmental battle lasting nearly a decade, in which we won every court battle, but lost to the politicians, who reversed the legal decisions. All photographs for the series were derived from the same small log, less than 2 meters long, and no more than 8 cm wide.

Stuart Duff, UK

When it comes to creating the kind of spectacular flower shots that leave viewers at a loss for words, East Sussex-based Stuart Duff is categorical: order boxes and boxes of them and find that one gem in perfect bloom. Shooting mostly with a Deardorff 8x10, the award-winning commercial photographer explains how deceptively simple these images can be. “They often look like beautiful blooms until you put them against a white backdrop and in front of your large-format camera, which has a habit of revealing all of life’s imperfections,” he quips. “But it’s a fine balancing act. You don’t want them too perfect either, as that just won’t look real.” A perfect case in point: Duff’s vibrant, pink-hued “Gerbera”, which boasts a single, unmistakably bent petal.

For the past three decades, Duff has scrupulously conjured up scores of jaw-dropping still lifes for clients such as Harrods, Courvoisier Brandy and British Airways, in addition to prize-winning commissions for publications such as *Vogue, GQ* and *Harpers Bazaar.* He’s the kind of committed, patient pro who will cut fresh fruit, let the pieces decompose for days, watch as flies invite themselves into his massive warehouse to hover around and wait for a dead one to land in position and complete the tableau, thus creating a perfect match in both shape and size with the tiny fruit seeds already strewn about (see: “Fruit and Fly” 2001).

Now in his late fifties and largely dedicated to the pursuit of personal projects, the Scotland-born photographer is a formidable storyteller who’ll recount in colorful detail the making-of stories behind much of his work. He’s recently taken to sharing many of these on a Facebook group for analog enthusiasts. When reached by phone at his coastal home in St. Leonards-on-Sea, Duff recalled his precocious artistic awakening and early acknowledgment that drawing wouldn’t be his calling card. “I was great at chemistry though; it was one of the few As I got in school! So once I realized I had an eye for composition, I began considering photography, as my chemistry knowledge would also give me confidence in the darkroom.”

For his 17th birthday, Duff was given a Nikon FM camera body and 50mm lens, at which point he’d set out at dawn to “take pictures of cabbages in fields.” After studying photography in Lancashire, he soon decamped to London, where he served as freelance assistant to some of that era’s most esteemed talent, such as Lord Snowdon, Lester Bookbinder and Doris Kloster. “I worked for loads of photographers, which was great,” he remembers. “I was doing interiors, cars, fashion, still life, portraits, everything. That was a great eye-opener into the different genres.”

By the time he founded his own studio in 1991, he was no longer awe-struck by the illusory glamour of fashion shoots. “Once you’ve been on a dozen, you realize they’re more or less the same, with lots of waiting around for hair and makeup,” he sums up. Duff rather found his calling in still lifes. “With anything I photograph, I’ll start by picking it up, holding it under a light and moving it around. That’s when things start jumping out at me. I get a real feel for what that thing is. From there, it’s about bringing out the very best of that thing in your final picture.”

Radicchio and Lettuce Leaf

Gerbera

The Rolleiflex: How Gear Might Actually Improve Your Photography

By Christopher Schmidtke

Photography is, in its essence, a technical art form– the most obvious example of this being the reliance on an apparatus which has three basic settings that control the flow of light. On the other hand, many great photographers have been quoted as saying, in one form or another, that the photographer makes the picture, not the camera. That's certainly a valid way to look at photography and saves us from expecting wonderful gear to automatically make wonderful photos.

But while the choice of camera might not guarantee the quality of the photo, it can indeed influence the way the photographer feels when he or she is out shooting. While most photographic equipment was and is utilitarian by design, and form often follows function, there are a few cameras that stand out and are a bit more than simple tools for creating images, cameras that have a certain charm. The camera in this article is one that is very dear to my heart – the twin lens reflex camera that is the Rolleiflex.

The design of the camera came into existence in the late 1920s and is thus nearing its 100th birthday. That alone is reason to be amazed! These venerable cameras use a film, namely 120 roll film, that is still in production today which can also be used in numerous other, newer cameras. Talk about longevity! I do realize that the Rolleiflex is by no means the oldest or most exotic camera, nevertheless I find it incredible that in our day and age of "planned obsolescence," it is a product from a different era that defies this trend and continues to work, and work well. Looking at it now, sitting across my desk, I have the feeling that it may well outlive me.

I have a Rolleiflex 3,5E from the 1960s and have owned this camera for about 5 years now. While this model is not the most expensive or sought-after one by any means, I have come to love it nonetheless – with all its quirks and annoyances. And there are a few, let me tell you… but more on that later. I still remember the day I went to the store and picked it up. Yes, I actually went into a brick-and-mortar-store, chatted with the owner and chose my Rolleiflex. Why am I telling you all this, you might ask?

While I firmly believe that you cannot necessarily buy happiness, and at the end of the day a camera is only a tool, some do impact you more than others. It might be the sophisticated design or the intricate little details or the history of it that makes you appreciate its creators, or simply the results it produces.

I have talked about GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome) in previous articles, and the feeling that you absolutely have to buy a certain piece of equipment or life cannot go on. If we analyze the feeling behind this phenomenon, we might come to the conclusion that the desire for new equipment usually comes at a time when we don't feel inspired and have no clear vision of where our photographic journey will take us. We try to fill this void with more and more "stuff" in the hope that a new camera will show us the way. After a while we might realize that this solution is only temporary, and we go back to square one. Sometimes we even choose equipment that is not really suited to the kind of photography we are pursuing, driven towards a piece of equipment that is thought to be desirable or all the rage in the photography world at the moment. But looking objectively at the facts, we might come to the realization that the downsides actually outweigh the benefits.

So, let us now take an objective look at my beloved Rolleiflex and lay out the clear hard facts. It is a twin lens reflex camera like the Yashica Mat 124G or the Minolta Autocord. It has two lenses, a viewing lens and a taking lens and both are fixed to the camera body. The camera does not have a magazine like some Hasselblads or Mamiyas. Most Rolleiflexes don't have a working light meter and don't even think about autofocus. These are some of the key features of the system and I have to admit that they don't scream convenience and flexibility, at least not by today's standards.

On the other hand, the Rolleiflex comes with some other pretty nice features. The waist level viewfinder can be bright, contrasty, and an overall joy to focus on – at least once you've upgraded to a newer model, as I have. The camera shoots in 6x6 which gives you 12 exposures on 120 film. There is no mirror-slap, which lets you shoot with this camera at times you normally couldn't. Plus, it is super quiet. I also have a Leica and they are famed for being extremely quiet, but the Rolleiflex is simply in another league.

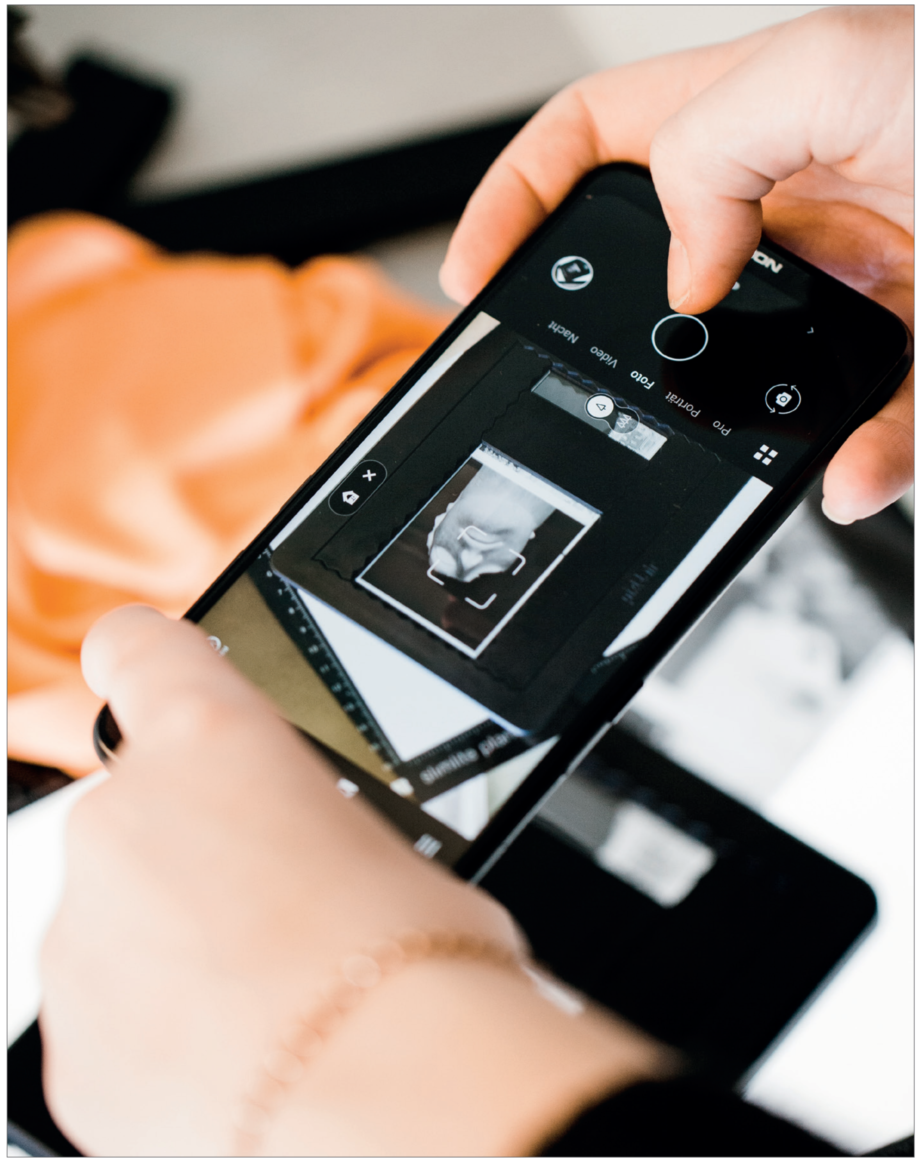
The company behind the Rolleiflex, Franke & Heidecke, used different kinds of lenses with the varying models over the years, from Zeiss' Planar design to Schneider Kreuznach's Xenotar design. My experience is limited to models with Planar and Tessar lenses, but I can say that both of them deliver stunning results. The negatives are extremely sharp, contrasty, and have an overall pleasing look to them. The great image quality, depending on the type of film used, offers flexibility as it lets you crop into the negatives quite a bit and still leaves you with an image that is more than usable. The Rolleiflex is also quite small and well-built considering it is a medium format camera. This makes it an ideal travel-camera for those who want to travel light, but still want great image quality.

The Final Frontier? Digitizing Film at Home, or: Film Now – pixl-latr!

By Ludwig Hagelstein

While shooting film in all formats and developing it at home is a straightforward endeavor with fairly small hurdles to overcome, both printing in the darkroom and digitizing – especially in large(r) formats – can be a daunting task with an immense potential for frustration. With the recent popularization of more accessible "camera scanning" workflows, supercharged by conversion software developments like Negative Lab Pro that provide pleasant and easy negative conversions even for color negative film, the need for equipment to support these hybrid workflows has never been greater.

In recent months the high-end and mid-tier markets have seen quite a few new products geared towards film digitization using a digital camera and macro lens combination, like the Negative Supply carriers or the Skier Copy Box system. The entry-level segment, which would provide a low-cost, easy-to-handle, all-in-one option for digitizing film in various formats has been much more sparsely populated– until now. With the impending release of the pixl-latr rig, this gap is finally about to close.



Envisioned by 35mmc's Hamish Gill, and fully funded on Kickstarter in less than three hours, pixl-latr is an injection-molded plastic multiformat film carrier with a built-in acrylic diffuser for all types of light sources like laptop screens, lightpads, or even the sun itself, doing away with the need for a dedicated light source in its most basic application. Thanks to its modular design, the carrier can be customized to fit various film formats from 135 up to 4x5 in a matter of seconds, just by relocating the film gates and locking them back into place.

Anna Niskanen, Finland

By Christopher Osborne

Finnish photographer, printmaker, and artist Anna Niskanen has been exploring the natural environment, and the definition of "home." This started as a reflection on her feelings on returning to Finland after a year in the United States when she was seventeen. Now, at thirty, her work considers the landscape through a bold abstraction of the elements of the landscape, filtered through alternative processes.

Much of her work is made using the cyanotype process from the 1840s. Anna's enthusiasm for the process is based in part on its forgiving nature, forgiving both in terms of exposure and in terms of being able to scale up the work — her largest pieces reach 25m (over 80 feet) in length! "Making them is risky, but nice," she explains with a laugh. Many of the larger works are assembled from individual sheets of paper, and she only sees the final product when it is hung in a gallery. Her studio just isn't big enough for a trial assembly. She explains that she loves the textural dimension that the natural curve of each pane of paper gives to the finished piece.

Anna is working in Australia during the European winter, making smaller works exploring the antipodean flora and fauna. "It's beautiful. You just can't have enough cyanotypes of plants and flowers in the world," she enthuses, "and I love the tactile feeling of alternative processes." But unlike the original cyanotypes made by Anna Atkins in England in the 1840s, Anna's work is based on digitally manipulated photographs rather than photograms, a process that she describes as "constructing a photograph."

In a sense, Anna's workflow reverses the current trend of digitizing film photos. Despite owning analog cameras "in almost every format," she finds herself using either a DSLR or her phone. Many of her images are assembled or constructed in Photoshop by combining elements from a number of photographs in order to make the final piece. In part, this workflow came about as she sought to avoid a competitive pressure to make strong imagery.

Anna discovered alternative processes while on an exchange program in Canada and it was in Vancouver that she started making prints using the cyanotype plus gum bichromate and photopolymer processes. She explains, "I enjoy making the work with my hands far more than the taking of the photograph."

She is not afraid to experiment with different media. "Dive" was printed on a roll of silk and explores the wave form. "Large shell" combines cyanotype overlaid with oil paints. "Eyes" uses the gum bichromate paper; however, instead of using paints in the process, Anna has started to use ground rock to provide the color pigment in the image. She feels that this makes images in which the place is incorporated into the photograph.

When questioned about the future, she laughs. "I am in a delicious state of exploring new mediums and ideas," she explains. "I am in a constant state of creation."

In September 2020, Anna will hold her largest solo show to date. It will be at Porvoo Kunsthalle, Porvoo, Finland.

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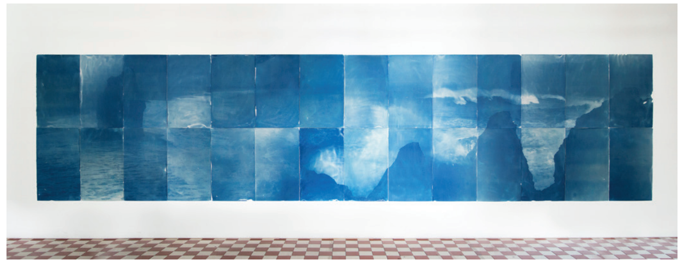

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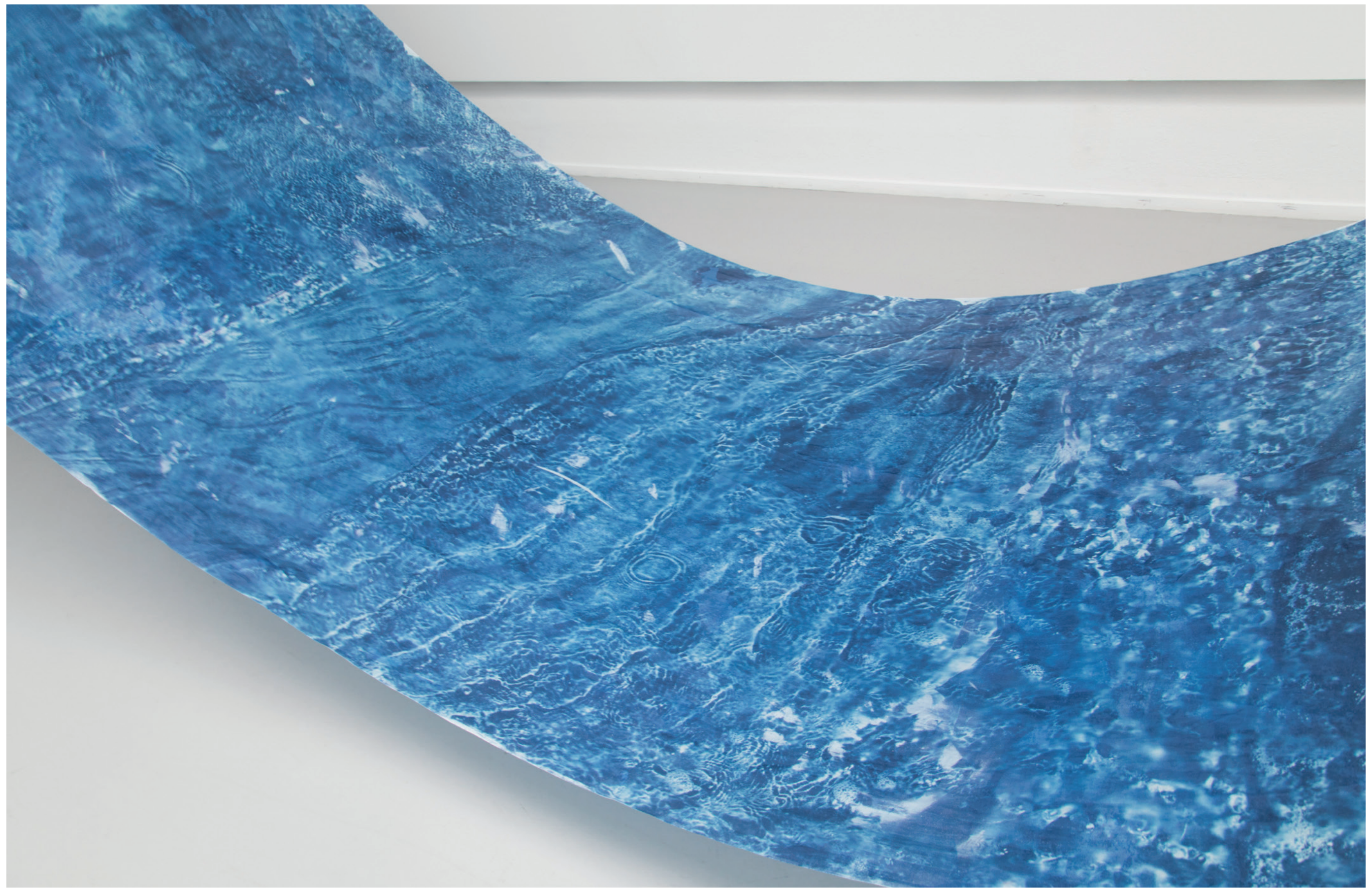

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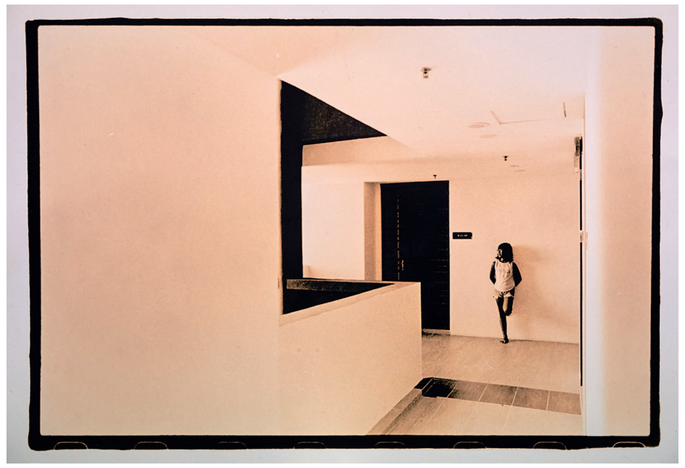
analoge

Photography and art are creative activities than can and perhaps should be shared in a community. It can be entertaining, inspiring, and even provocative in a constructive sense. It can bring people who share a vision together, as with the Lomographic Society which announced its 10 golden Lomography rules in 1992.

I recently had an interesting exchange with a German analog photographic "Loge," or lodge. In the first half of the 18th century, Masonic lodges emerged throughout Europe and later in the USA. The first German lodge was founded in 1737 in Hamburg. In France, members of Masonic lodges were among the great catalysts of the time, including Voltaire, a key member of the Enlightenment, and Danton and Robespierre, leading figures of the French Revolution. The slogan of the revolution, "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood," corresponded to the ideals of the Freemasons. And it was Freemasons like La Fayette and George Washington who played a crucial role in the founding of the United States. They all saw themselves as advocates of freedom and tolerance. With this historical context in mind, I found the following conversation with the modern counterpart of the lodge to be very interesting.

blue mountain view, 2018. Marko Zivkovic

Dark Times - Lith, 2019, A. Hanke



girl in hallway, 2019. Marko Zivkovic

Marwan El Mozayen: What is the anaLoge?

anaLoge: The anaLoge is a fellowship of individuals who share their passion for images. The fellows are called stars.

MEM: Why stars?

anaLoge: Like the stars in the sky, each star of the anaLoge has an individual sparkle, and together they shine brighter.

MEM: Who is participating?

anaLoge: Stars are mostly, but not necessarily, photographers. All those who enjoy creating images, like painters, exhibition designers, even sculptresses and sculptors might be fellow stars of the anaLoge.

MEM: How can one become a star?

anaLoge: A suggestion for a new star is followed by the agreement of all stars existing at that time. Personality and expertise are of major importance.

MEM: No other rules or structures?

anaLoge: No.

MEM: That sounds a bit quaint.

anaLoge: Yes, it is quaint, and even discreet in the most positive sense. The anaLoge welcomes values like the "4 Rs": Reliability, Respect, Responsibility and Reputation.

MEM: Does the anaLoge act locally or globally?

anaLoge: Right now, we are spreading our wings over Europe. But there are amazing folks all around the planet. The anaLoge is looking forward to discovering them.

MEM: Can you give an example of how the anaLoge functions?

anaLoge: Let's imagine a star is on a holiday trip. She, an 8x10-inch artist, accidentally comes across a rangefinder Nikon SP from 1957. Since that format is obviously not her cup of tea, she would usually not think anything of it. But she is aware that one of her fellow stars would give an arm and a leg for that iconic beast. So, the mint SP finds its way to a delighted new owner.