

Past Forward - Notes

Past Forward Symposium: Saturday March 9th, 1pm-5pm at ECA.

Alexander Hamilton: *Photograms - A Phenomenological Response To Nature*

Nicola Murray: *From Shoes to Moths via Plant Life and Astronauts*

Karen Stentaford: *The Original Instant: Working with Wetplate Collodion*

Justin Quinnell: *New Light through an Old Hole*

http://www.kennybean500.webspace.virginmedia.com/altphoto/html/art_college.html#symposium_text

(Notes in italics are directly from the #symposiumtext . Any mistakes should be considered to be part of the note taking and not of the speakers.)

Part 1 - Alexander Hamilton

Nature's Laboratory: Photograms - a Phenomenological Response to Nature

The presentation will convey the work carried out at two residencies, one, at Glenfinlas, exploring the site of Ruskin portrait by Millais and the other during a Leverhulme funded yearlong residency at Brantwood in 2009. In both I observe the plants within their natural environment . Locating, observing and recording the plants described by Ruskin were part of my daily ritual, based on Goethean principals. I recorded the plants using a photogram method (cyanotype), capturing the uniqueness of each plant, allowing the plant, to leave a trace or trail of my action. Ideas of nature and chance play a crucial role in this relationship and relate to the way that photograms can be seen as a medium located between science and art. They offer a connection between the plants and concepts of sensory perception in which the role of the artist is to allow the plant to 'reveal itself and to speak for itself'.

Context

The central aim of phenomenology, in the words of founder Edmund Husserl, is "to the things themselves" - how the object would describe itself if it could speak. Goethe's scientific methodology is one early example of a phenomenology of the nature. He sought to open himself to natural phenomena, to listen to what they said and to identify their core aspects and qualities.

Goethe's scientific investigations into optics, animal and plant morphology, geology, and meteorology shared what he called "exact sensorial imagination." Observing carefully, Goethe represented nature faithfully, acknowledging that "every act of seeing is an act of cognizing," and that "we theorize every time we look carefully at the world." Goethe's understanding of himself as poet and scientist depended on his conviction that they sprang from the same impulse.

Brief Bio

Alexander Hamilton grew up in Caithness, Scotland. He studied Drawing and Painting at Edinburgh College of Art, after qualifying, he spent 6 months recording the plants on the uninhabited island of Stroma, creating his first photogram images. This began a 40 year journey exploring connections to plants and landscape. His work was shown throughout Europe with the exhibition 'The Peace Rose and the Pursuit of Perfection'. He also collaborated with a centre for plant research at the University Hohenheim Stuttgart on the use of plants as bio indicators, shown at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in 2002. In 2008 a major showing of his photogram images, Blue Flora Celtica, was presented at the Foksal Gallery Warsaw. From 2002 to 2007 he worked with Richard Ashrovan, on creating a multi-screen moving image installation based on natural landscapes. These works have been exhibited at the Threshold Artspace in Perth, Ruskin Gallery in Cambridge, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and Fabrycka Sztuki in Poland. In 2009 he completed a one year residency programme at Brantwood, responding to Ruskin's ideas on ecology and botany, with funding from The Leverhulme Trust. In 2010 he will complete a new programme of work with the University of Life Sciences, Poznan for the British Council Darwin Now programme.

Making unique cyanotypes, a response to nature.

Plants

Observation methods upon the idea of responding to what I see/feel. Phenomenon. Gaze alone will not work in unraveling the scene.

Photograms reveal trace of the plants, to not think of them as plants.

Act of making a photogram follows intuitive procedures in which the role of the artist is to alter the plant to "reveal itself and speak for itself".

"Innocent eye" just because it is studied does not mean it is understood.

Influences

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe 1749-1832 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goethe>
John Ruskin 1819-1900 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ruskin
Sir John Herschel 1792-1871 1839 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_John_Herschel
Anna Atkins 1799-1871 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Atkins
Fox Talbot 1800-1877 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox_Talbot
August Strindberg 1849-1912 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/August_Strindberg
Stefan Themerson 1910-1998 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stefan_Themerson - Bushman legends.
Eskimo - native languages use the same word for shadow, soul, echo and picture.
Laszlo Moholy Nagy 1895-1946 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A1szl%C3%B3_Moholy-Nagy
Walter Benjamin 1892-1940 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Benjamin - "aura" of work, absence in reproduction.

Connections to

Beuys http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Beuys
Smithson http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Smithson
Schwitters http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Schwitters

Cyanotypes

Unique images not reprints.
Influenced by the idea - let nature speak revealing what is true.
Aura of surface - holding the DNA
Each plant unique - each image unique - one image from each plant.
Held in time and space.

Method

Watercolour paper
Chemicals fresh each time
Water - from a local source - energised for an hour. (Goethe → Steiner - Energy in plants, biodynamic thinking. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Steiner)
Select plants and release the image including water from the plant itself.

Strindberg - Celestography 1894. Chemicals, glass, quasi science. - Capturing the Heavens
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/25300312@NO8/collections/72157629072046712/>

Practice

Art and Ecology 1973-2013

Site specific residencies and exhibitions, public art etc.
<http://www.alexanderhamilton.co.uk/pdfs/artandecology.pdf>

Island of Stroma - biological survey.

Foksal Gallery Poland - cyanotypes. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foksal_Gallery
http://www.alexanderhamilton.co.uk/pdfs/Foksal_Info.pdf

Poznan - observation and science.

Highlands & Islands. Tours -

Robert Dick, Biologist Thurso ~1830 created a fernery near Helmsdale Sunderland which

was destroyed 1860.

Ruskin, Millais portrait at Glen Finlas

[http://www.alexanderhamilton.co.uk/pdfs/Glenfinlas Info.pdf](http://www.alexanderhamilton.co.uk/pdfs/Glenfinlas%20Info.pdf)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millais>

Brantwood - Ruskins house in 1874 overlooking Coniston Water

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brantwood> <http://hamiltonashrowan.blogspot.co.uk/>

Other works: Chromatograms <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chromatogram>

Moon Pictures. Chroma separation. Sap diffraction. The sap changes in snowdrops depending on the phase of the moon. Internal energy of sap pictures. Bluebells - squeeze out the sap, drawn up through paper and treated with silver salts to reveal the image produced.

Conclusion

Unique images not prints.

Influenced by:

- letting nature speak.
- aura of surface - holding the DNA.
- each plant unique.
- one image from each - time and space.

www.alexanderhamilton.co.uk

Part 2 - Nicola Murray

From Shoes to Moths via Plant Life and Astronauts

Nicola Murray will talk about her art practice with particular focus on alternative print processes. Taking the notion of the photographic print in its widest sense Murray will discuss her use of digital technology combined with photopolymer intaglio, cyanotype, anthotype and, most recently, UV sensitive ink in the creation of a broad range of works inspired by her ongoing interest and training in biology.

Murray often works in series. She will look at an eclectic cross-section of her work including cyanotypes that she developed using material from the plant waste bays at the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh as her starting point along with experiments on a city allotment where she attempted to use the surface of various plant leaves as a rudimentary light-sensitive substrate to record images. She will also discuss a suite of prints that originated from a collection of shoes purchased at car-boot sales in Edinburgh and a recent installation at Traquair House, Innerleithen, that provides an alternative interpretation of the word 'photography' when we consider its derivation as 'drawing with light'.

Brief Bio

Before Nicola Murray began her art training she studied Biology at Aberdeen University then worked in the operating theatres and wards of an open-heart surgery unit as a physiological monitoring technician at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. She subsequently studied Drawing and Painting at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art (1988-92), winning a John Kinross Scholarship from the Royal Scottish Academy in her final year, which allowed her to live for a short time in Florence, Italy. Since returning to Scotland in 1993, Murray has received several awards and prizes for her work and exhibited both in the UK and internationally. Her work is held in a number of public and private collections. In July 2005, she was Artist in Residence on board the Yamal, a Russian icebreaker, on two extraordinary voyages between Murmansk and the geographic North Pole. Much of her current activity is lens-based and combines photography, printmaking and digital technologies.

Alternative print processes.

Recent works at Traquair House and as resident artist on a Russian Ice-Breaker.

<http://www.traquair.co.uk/reflective-histories>

<http://www.nicolamurray.com/mainpages/supportpages/Arctic%20page/arcticintro.htm>

Studied biology - analyses life and brings an analytical method to nature.

Blunt instruments

- medical equipment printed using a blind embossing technique.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper_embossing

Anatomy of absence

- cross sections of shoes from car-boot sales.

<http://www.nicolamurray.com/mainpages/supportpages/AofA/anatomy.htm>

Photopolymer intaglio prints, printed life size. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photogravure>

Prints have an x-ray quality. Shoe sawn in half, intrigued by the engineering. A digital picture (2002 model camera) was manipulated to give an inverted negative to use with the photopolymer technique.

The contents of the shoes - grass, sand etc. - were collected in envelopes and used to make photograms. Evidence of distance travelled - like star constellations.

The Bay Blueprints

<http://www.rbge.org.uk/whats-on/event-details/1415>

RBGE offcuts from the bays where the rubbish is collected before composting. Collected once a week for a year. Library of plant parts. Collected together and photoshopped to form digital negatives and then cyanotypes.

Charted out step tests. "Chart Throb" software to make transparencies to modify the image to the sensitivity of the medium for full tonal range.

<http://www.botzilla.com/blog/archives/000544.html>

Series of 12 invented plant forms from each month of the year. Squeued seasons due to glass house trimmings. Botanical repeats, experiments with seamless patterns.

Exhibited in the RBGE Science Building - the library is open to the public and contains examples of Anna Atkins prints etc.

Herbarium used to preserve samples - including some of those from Darwins Voyage of the Beagle. Thoughts of deterioration and fading.

<http://www.alternativephotography.com/wp/>

Fugitive

- ideas of fleeing and disappearance.

<http://www.nicolamurray.com/mainpages/exhibs%202010/EPshow2010.htm>

Binh Danh - from Vietnam, works in the USA. Chlorophyll prints - areas shaded from the sun stay dark. <http://binhdanh.com/>

Prints on leaves - can take weeks, contact print.

Nasturtiums

Dock-leaves

Anthotypes - crushed plants create a photosensitive emulsion, they degrade over time and are unstable. (marigolds)

<http://www.alternativephotography.com/wp/tag/anthotypes>

Anthotype printed poem in collaboration with Gerry Cambridge.
“destination tomorrow” imaged from NASA's archives contact printed onto leaves.

Rachel Sokal <http://www.rachelsokal.com/>

Reflected Histories - Traquair House

Secrecy and concealment.

Moth symbol – loyalty, attracted to light, Sun King etc.

Moth drawings from local species made into stamps using a photopolymer technique in Birmingham. Stamps printed using UV security ink and viewed with security lamps in a pavilion at Traquair house. Moths printed according to frequency found in nature - tape put up as stamped onto walls to enable the scatter to be seen in ordinary light during the installation. Had to adapt a dynamo torch to make a portable black light for the audience to use.

<http://www.nicolamurray.com/>

Part 3 - Karen Stentaford

The Original Instant: Working with Wet Plate Collodion

Much of Karen's work deals with ideas of memory and absence through the examination of the everyday. Her interest and experience in alternative & historic processes include salt printing, van dyke, cyanotype, hand made and plastic cameras, and Polaroid emulsion transfers. She will present on these historic and present techniques, and highlight her more recent expansion into the wet plate collodion process. Discussing recent bodies of work, and sharing documentation of a portable darkroom that allows her to create an original instant, Karen will highlight the wet plate collodion's magical quality that encourages visual curiosity and has the potential to open up the everyday environment to new interpretations.

A list of helpful websites and resources will be supplied.

Brief Bio

Karen is currently based in Sackville NB, Canada where she is the photography technician and lecturer at Mount Allison University. Working formats ranging from 35mm to 8"x10" and a variety of photographic mediums, Karen's photographs explore the experience of seeing through the classification and investigation of change, absence, memory and sense of place. She has exhibited work in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, recipient of numerous artist in residencies, holds an MA (Photography) from the Edinburgh College of Art, BEd from NSCAD & Mount Saint Vincent University, and BFA from Mount Allison University.

Carry cameras everywhere. Modified holga, matchbox film camera, RCMP camera converted from microscope to pinhole.

Uses daily routine to photograph everyday surroundings including her street. Uses small cameras for different perspectives, split frames, playing with scale.

Routines

– human, animal, bird. BBQ burns on the grass.

Holga aesthetics change the lines of architecture – bends, warps.

35mm slide film. Boiled polaroid where the emulsion lifts.

Daylab Jr – put a 35mm slide in and transfer to the polaroid/peel apart film.

Harvesting and Hair Collections

Carrots - organic farmers with weirdly shaped vegetables.

http://stentaford.com/pdf/KarenStentaford_HarvestingImages.pdf

Polaroid emulsion lifts from peel apart on warm coloured paper.

Salt prints - UV contact made negative from ortho film using a holga negative.

Van Dyke prints - UV contact.

Printing out paper - gold toned prints - Fibre Based contact prints.

Absence and memory, collections of hair. Extension of the body that is gone, what is left behind.

<http://www.23sandy.com/photoalchemy/artists/stentaford.html>

Wet plate colloidion

10x8 camera.

Bromchester studio

F295 Symposium

Ambrotype

Positive on glass, viewed with a black background.

Colloidion is a binding agent, originally used in war time to bind bandages to wounds.

Combined with salts, exposed, washed. All has to be done in a short time period due to the chemical reactions which are effected by temperature and humidity.

Tin Type

- Tin Type App on instamatic.

More sensitive to the blue/violet part of the spectrum. Warm tones go very dark or black.

Series from a collection of wool from roadside fences gathered over a 2 year period in bags labeled with the place and date. Imperfections and rawness of wool and the imperfection and rawness of process and the floatiness of chemical backgrounds. Visual curiosity in viewer.

Wimsey.

Portraits of people popping into the studio she is working in. Problems with wet plate. The solar bath evaporates. How to deal with fogging occurring. 15-20 second exposures of people. Light and flash system shorten the process and make higher contrast prints. Original instant - almost like waiting for a polaroid.

Travelling with colloidion. Portable darkroom from an ice fishing tent that supposedly takes 60 seconds to set up (Ha Ha). The minus temperatures make changes to the chemicals.

In the pop up darkroom -

Clean glass plate to ensure no streaks. A blush brush to get dust off the plate.

Pour on the colloidion, it is thicker than water and will pool on the plate. Rock off excess back into the jar.

Wait until it becomes gelatinous.

Put into silver bath (light sensitive part). The longer the bath is in the cold the less sensitive it is.

Take the plate out of the bath and dry off the back.

Put plate in the holder (modified to hold the glass with some clips and a yoghurt pot 'spring').
Take photo. Struggle with the time, wind, freezing conditions.
Develop the plate by pouring on developer rather than using a tray. Stop the developer with water, continue pouring until the water sheets off.
Keep plates wet until fixed or fix on site. Transport wet plates in honey and water to stop it slopping about.
Washing, drying, varnishing.

Northumberland straight – minus 20 and windy, tides of ice.

<http://stentaford.com/>

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/56367328/KStentaford.pdf>

Part 4 - Justin Quinell

New Light through an Old Hole

After a few slides to cover, the 500 million year history of pinhole imaging I show my own work, which varies in duration from using fraction of a second to 6 months, and using a variety of cameras from the Smileycam which can fit in my mouth to a wheelie bin (that doesn't!). The talk will feature several unnerving demonstrations including how to take images entitled 'Being a golf ball' and a 'The power drill portrait'.

Brief Bio

Justin first took up a camera at the age of 11 and years later completed his degree in fine art photography at Derby Lonsdale College. For the past 15 years he has been a freelance photographer and lecturer, but has also been head of photography at South Bristol College, a school teacher, worked in a wood and managed a safari camp in the Maasai Mara in Kenya.

He has been teaching and practicing pinhole photography for over 20 years having taught at all levels from primary to university level and at over thirty universities in the UK. He has done lecture tours of both the US and Australia.

Currently a part time lecturer in photography at University College Falmouth he is was also recently artist in residence at Knowle West Media Centre where he has just completed the Sunrise Project, He is also currently being commissioned to take a series of 4-year duration images for Bristol NHS Trust.

*He has had many exhibitions and publications of his work and his images have appeared in feature films (pinhole consultant for the Rachel Weisz movie *The Brothers Bloom*) and on NASA's website. He has made TV appearances (*The One show, Jonathan Ross show, Blue Peter, Radio 4 Today*) and has had two books published of his work, *Mouthpiece* and *Make your own paper camera*. He lives in his hometown of Bristol with his wife Chrissy and two little kiddies, Louis and Rosa*

He has been the UK publicist for world pinhole day since its inception 12 years ago

Studied at Derby. Made cameras out of coke cans, 110 or 126 cartridges.

Greg Kent – universe started in a tiny pinhole.

<http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/07/25/the-showcase-of-beautiful-pinhole-photography/>

Foreground/Background – the eye does not see the depth that a pinhole camera does, flat and curved planes -

Gum and Worldtrade Center

Cigarette and Piazza San Marco Campanile

Durations of time -

Metallic balloon amoeba.

Tortoise chasing lettuce.

Versailles – behind the curtains in the hall of mirrors.

Camera glued on a boomerang. Dropping cameras off things. Using it as a shuttlecock.

Until the internet there was not a lot of encouragement for not using a flash in contrived

environments rather than the idea of taking.

Convex film planes -

Being grated.

Pub crisps - wheat crunchies.

Beer can camera - 5x7 paper fits.

Workshops and teaching.

Underwater.

Zorki.

Wheelie bins - got on a bus and took it to the Clifton suspension bridge. Taped the paper negative above the bath and sponged developer on. Unreproducible.

Australia - Northern Territories College. Beer can regatta.

Tim Macmillan <http://vimeo.com/6165108>

Anthea Nicholson Rain prints on fax paper. <http://www.auneheadarts.net/site/projects/wif/wif-artists.html>

Use of the invert function on camera phones to get the positive from displayed negatives.

Pinhole video next?

Anamorphic images from tubes - Pringles box takes 8x10 paper. Non subject driven approach - build the camera and then see what picture it takes. 720 degrees.

Mouthpiece.

"If you don't like spiders take two legs off and call it a beetle."

In book design, book designers know best.

Slow Light - 24 hours of the earth turning.

Clifton bridge - camera obscura. Must be positioned higher than a drunk person can reach. Car park car reflections.

Sunrise Project - learning to look at a single chance in a positive way.

Ground zero cameras - Criterion printing out paper.

Pinolta.

Camera obscura. Optical projections - hats.

Cracker pinhole - zone plate. Stereo pinhole.

Lizard photography day. "Master the accident."

Pinhole on power tool.

The Brothers Bloom - "It's not reproduction, it's storytelling."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Brothers_Bloom

<http://www.pinholephotography.org>