

EXPERIMENTAL STRATEGIES VIVA

Emily Sullivan

INFLUENCE

Finding creative inspiration has been a struggle during the pandemic. Frequent adventures exploring the local area has helped me come up with ideas but has also made me realise how little I know about where I live.

During my adventures I stumbled across a lot of beautiful scenery I'd never seen with my own eyes. Images don't do most places justice!

This made me realise how often I look at an image of somewhere and only appreciate what is shown in that one image, whether it's 'real' or not.

RESEARCH NATURALISM

ÉMILE ZOLA

‘(in art and literature) a **style** and theory of **representation** based on the **accurate depiction of detail**.’ – Oxford English Dictionary.

The naturalism movement had a **realistic approach** and became a major trend of the 19th century. The naturalism movement led to **realism, impressionism** and modern art.

Writer Zola was highly involved in **leading naturalism** in French literature. His essay ‘*The Experimental Novel*’ justified his own practice and eventually became a **manifesto of naturalism**.

“the return to nature and to man, direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depicting of what is.” –Zola

CLAUDE MONET

JOHN CONSTABLE

Along with other Paris-based artists, Monet **developed impressionism**. Naturalism and impressionism were both movements pioneered in the 19th century that focused on creating a more **realistic artwork**.

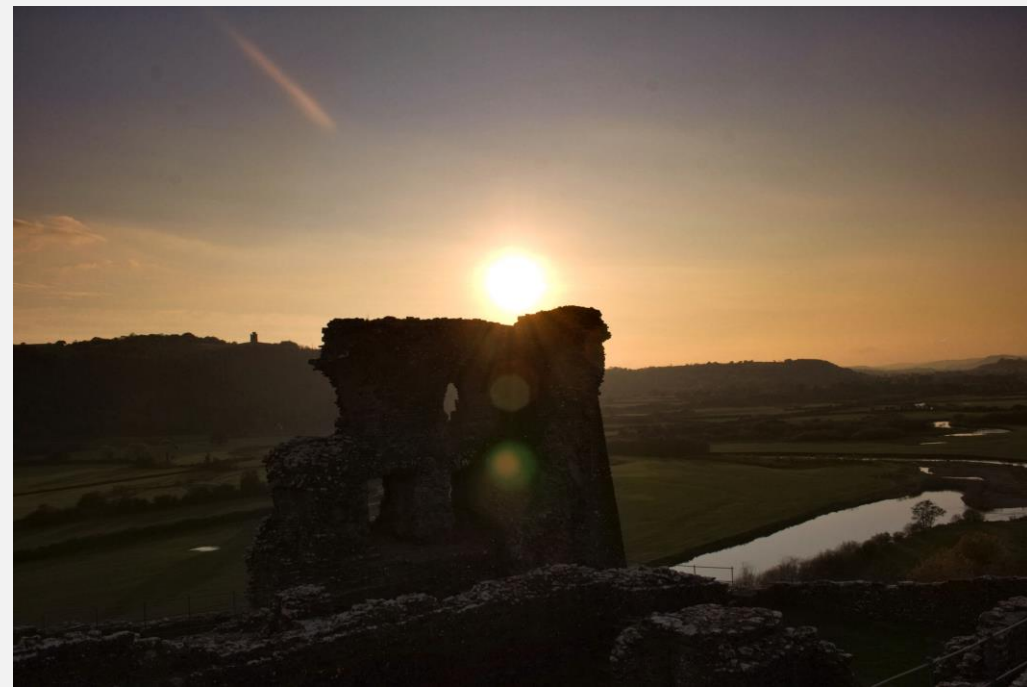
They would **work quickly** amongst their surroundings ‘*en plein air*’ to greater their awareness of the **light, colour and patterns** of their natural scenes

Naturalism art in Britain was first **pioneered** by John Constable who famously said ‘*there is room enough for a natural painture*’.

Constables **study of cloud formations** showed his determination to **represent them accurately**.

EXPERIMENTATION

DIGITAL IMAGES





RESEARCH

DRYSLWYN CASTLE & PAXTON TOWER

Both overlooking the **Towy Valley**, Dryslwyn Castle and Paxton's Tower are best known for their **spectacular views** rather than their history.

Little is known about Dryslwyn Castle. Thought to be founded in the **13th Century** Dryslwyn was an important seat of the ancient south Wales kingdom of **Deheubarth**. Eventually, the castle was torched with evidence showing that all the **major buildings were burnt to the ground**. All that remains are **two prominent sections on the south side**.

Built around **1805** by **Sir William Paxton**, to honour and **commemorate the victories of friend Lord Nelson**. In its **prominent location**, Paxton Tower can be seen for miles and was also used for **banquets**.

An alternative story as to why the tower was built was to make a bitter statement after **Paxton lost an MP election in 1802**. One of his campaign pledges was to build a bridge over the river Towy. It is instead thought, he built Paxton's Tower in its high location to **remind voters of what they could have had**.

EXPERIMENTATION

LITH PRINTING



RESEARCH

GERHARD RICHTER

Throughout his career, Richter has expanded on the potential of **combining old and new media**.

Richter **obscures** areas of the image with squeegees using different paint colours to narrate and represent the increasing flow of visitors. The white layers of paint represent a quiet gallery space while bright colourful layers represent a busier gallery floor with more activity.



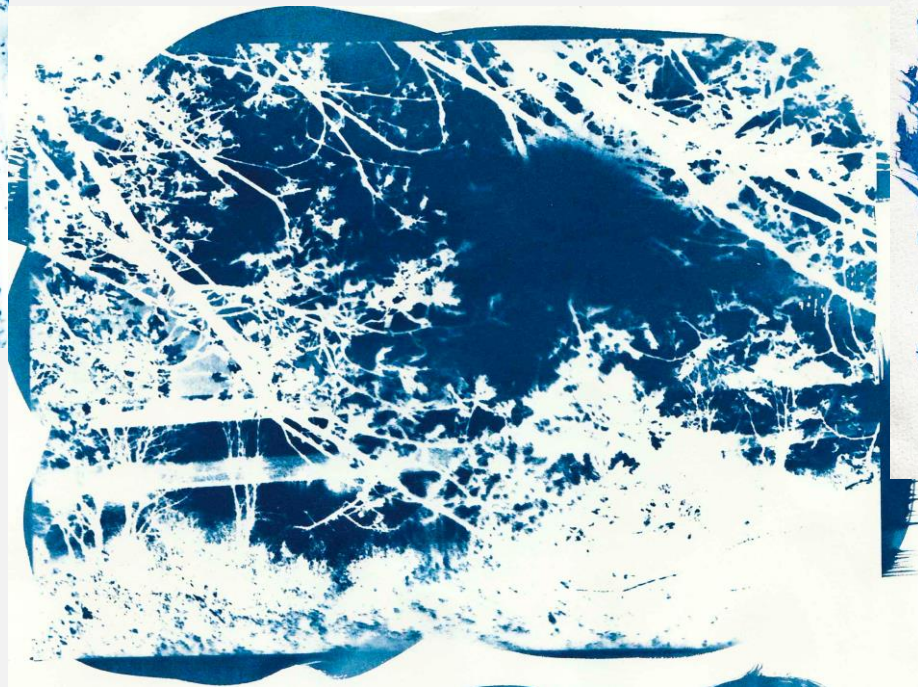
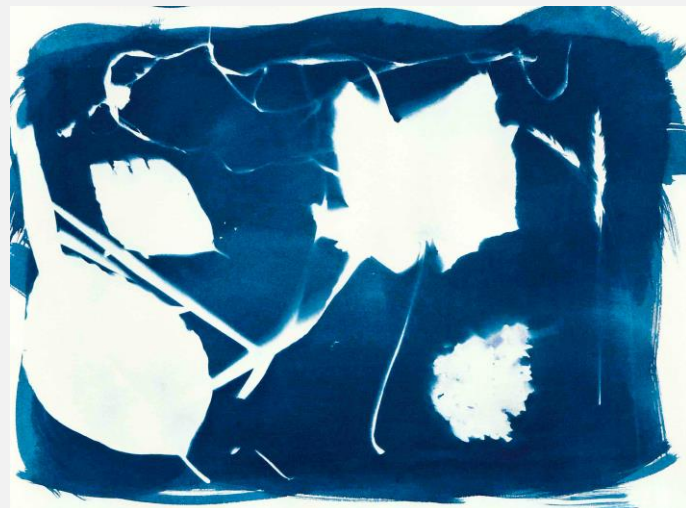
EXPERIMENTATION

MIXED MEDIA



EXPERIMENTATION

CYANOTYPES



RESEARCH

STEPHEN GILL & DAISUKE YOKOTA

Gill's Coexistence is a response to the industrial wasteland of the remains of the steel-making industry.

He is known to **physically integrate the surroundings** of his subjects into the final pieces of work.

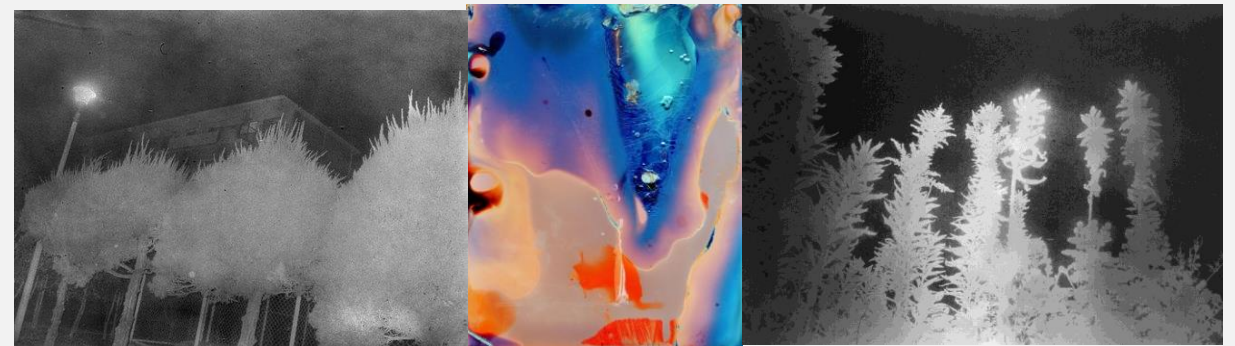
He hired a medical microscope to study and photograph microscopic creatures from a nearby pond and **dunk his camera into the water** before capturing images of people he met.

The result of his work is a mix of **recognisable and unrecognisable**.

Daisuke Yokota's images **links the past and future** of Japanese photography reflecting how **memory is affected by the passage of time**.

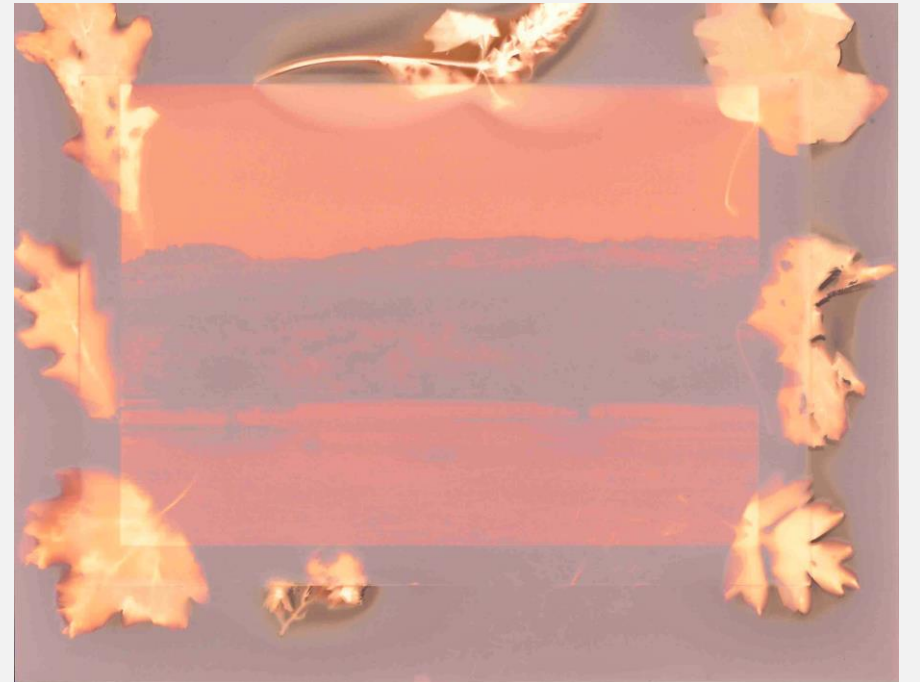
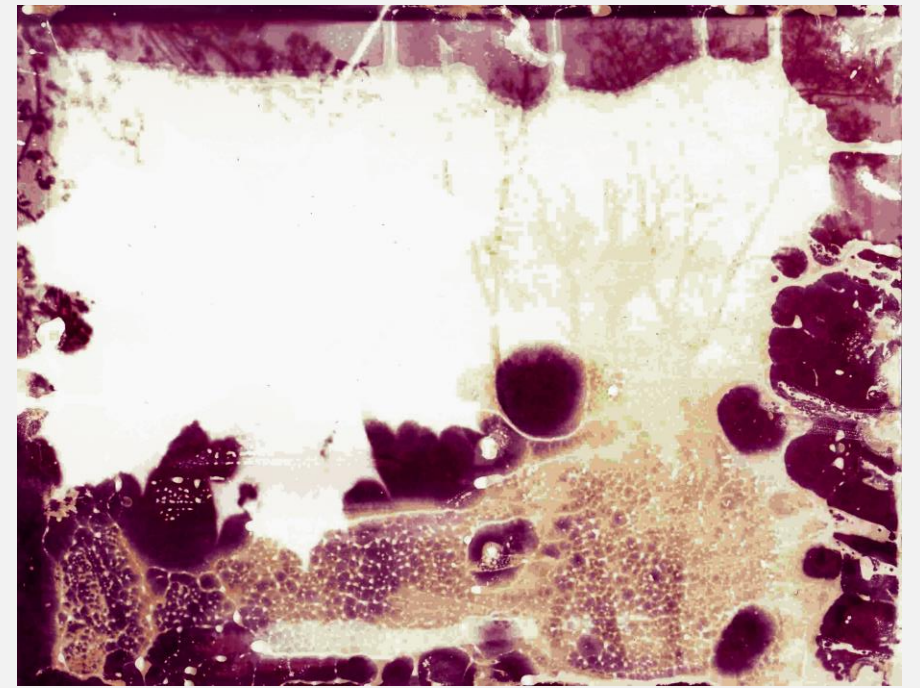
Many of his images **lack detail** and he tends to focus on multiple processing and experimentation for his practice.

Although his images are **unclear and unrecognisable** they possess a strange feeling of **familiarity**.



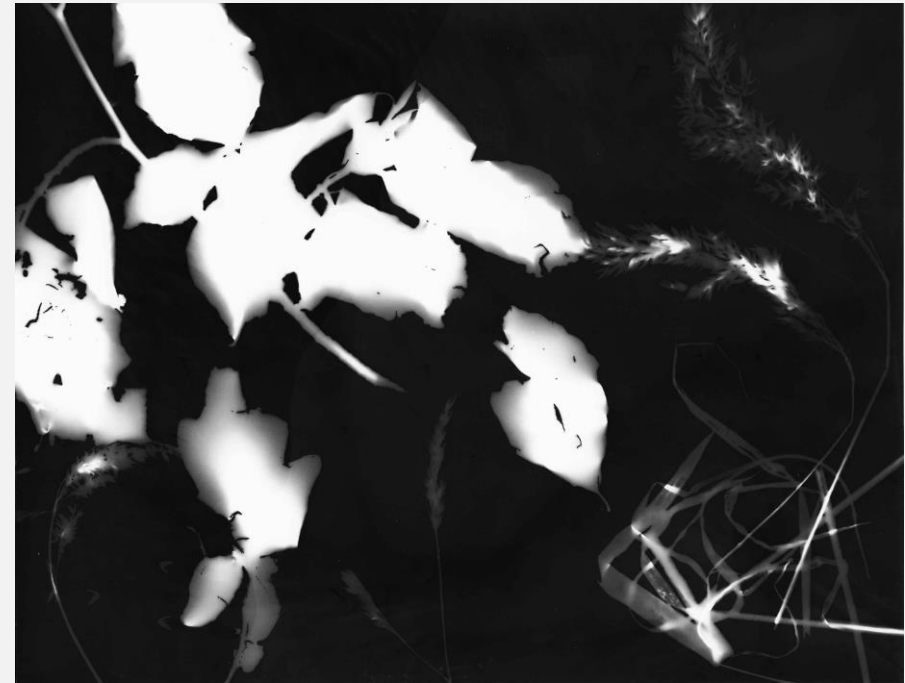
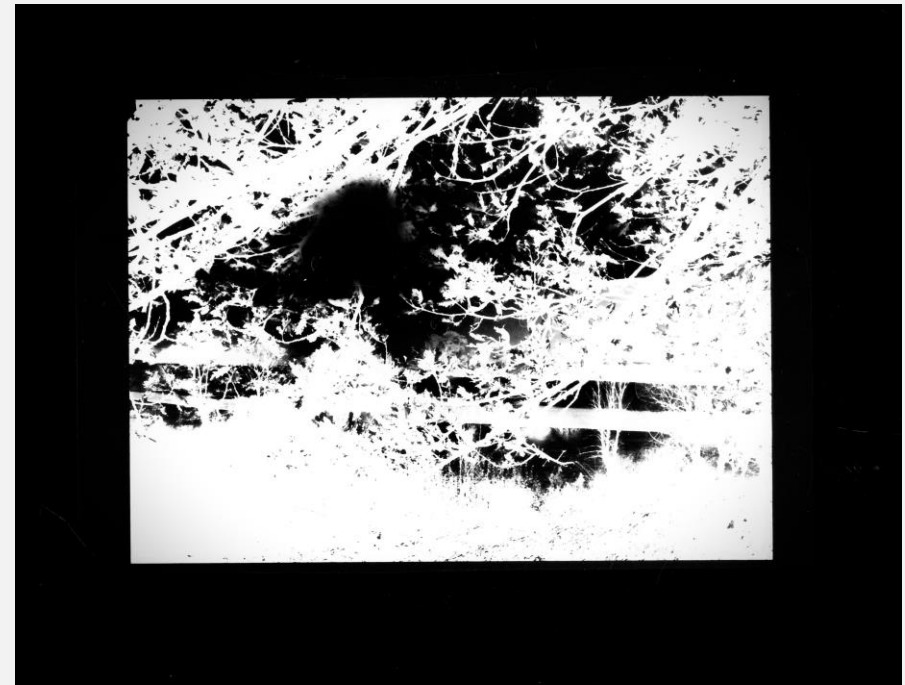
EXPERIMENTATION

LUMEN PRINTING



EXPERIMENTATION

PHOTOGRAMS

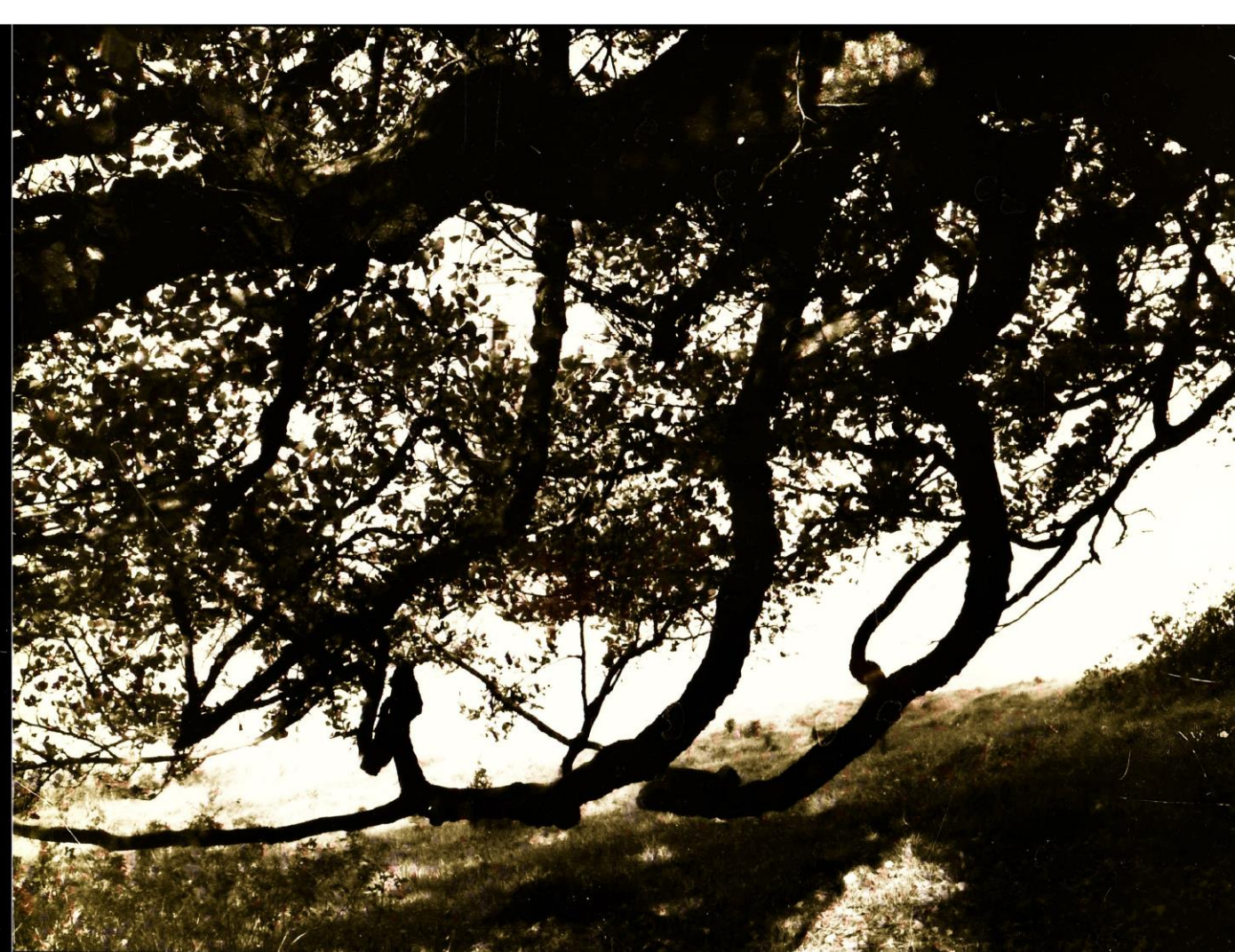




FINAL OUTCOMES







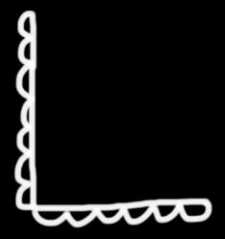




Experimental

Strategies

Portfolio



Naturalism

I began my research by looking into the naturalism movement that occurred during the 19th century (*Tate, 2017*). Before then, the human figure and landscape in art were idealised and followed conventions of classical tradition. The naturalism movement moved towards a more realistic approach and became a major trend of the century and regularly associated with 'plein air' practice; painting scenes from 'out-of-doors'. The naturalism movement led to realism, impressionism and modern art (*Tate, 2017*).

Naturalism art in Britain was first pioneered by John Constable who famously said 'there is room enough for a natural painture' (*Tate, 2017*).

Émile Zola was a leading figure of naturalism in France. In his book 'The Experimental Novel: And Other Essays', he says naturalism "consists simply in the application of the experimental method to the study of nature and of man" (*Zola, 1893:44*).

'Naturalism' was originally used in philosophy and this was the primary meaning of the word for many years. Elaborated by the thinker Holbach, it was a philosophical system that showed us living in a world of perceived phenomena (*Furst & Skrine, 1971:2*).

With many different uses, the term 'naturalism' has long been part of our everyday vocabulary. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is defined as:

(in art and literature) a style and theory of representation based on the accurate depiction of detail.

"his attack on naturalism in TV drama"

the philosophical belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.

"this romanticized attitude to the world did conflict with his avowed naturalism"

(in moral philosophy) the theory that ethical statements can be derived from non-ethical ones.

another term for natural religion.

Emile Zola

Zola was highly involved in leading naturalism in French literature. His essay '*The Experimental Novel*' justified his own practice and eventually became a manifesto of naturalism. He makes clear at the beginning of the essay that he was inspired by and decided to expand upon Claude Bernard's essay '*Introduction à l'Étude de la Médecine Expérimentale*' which showed that medicine had a scientific basis known as the 'experimental method'. Zola extended this to the realm of "*the passionate and intellectual life*". (Mambrol, 2018).

In his essay '*Naturalism on the Stage*', Zola referred to naturalism as, "*the return to nature and to man, direct observation, exact anatomy, the acceptance and depicting of what is.*" (Zola, 1893:114).

He suggests that the writers duty was to represent life as accurately as possible within their writing. By using accurately detailed descriptions in their work, a better, more realistic image can be created in the readers mind.

John Constable

Constable's work highly influenced the landscape genre and the typical image of English countryside. He grew up around the Suffolk countryside and often painted the scenes of Hampstead, Salisbury and Brighton. Constable held an open minded approach whilst he made studies into his surrounding areas. (VAM, 2017)

Constable took composition into consideration while sketching out his scenes. The oil painting pictured (Figure 1) has been discovered to have annotations noted on the back describing the scene as "*cliffs & light off a dark grey sky effect – background – very white and golden light*". (VAM, 2017)

Constables study of cloud formations showed his determination to represent them accurately. He believed that the sky and clouds were the best method of expressing the mood and atmosphere of a landscape. (Kauffmann, 1976)

During the 1820s, Constable's wife became ill and eventually died of tuberculosis in 1828. His wife's illness meant that the family would often travel for her treatment, where Constable would continue with his artwork. Family financial struggles meant that Constable needed to enhance his recognition and consequently decided to submit a series of paintings to the exhibition at the Royal Academy. One of these paintings titled '*The Hay Wain*' (originally '*Landscape: Noon*') (Figure 2) was exhibited in 1821 at the *National Gallery*. (Kauffmann, 1976)

'*The Hay Wain*' depicts a calm scene with a harvest wagon crossing a shallow stream. The painting is based at Willy Lott's cottage where Constable grew up appreciating and sketching the landscapes surrounding him. During the 18th century there was a variety of accurate topographical art or a more expressive romantic landscape. Constable combined these two styles to create naturalistic artworks that still held a romantic spirit. (Kauffmann, 1976)



Figure 1: John Constable, Brighton Beach With Colliers, oil painting, 1824, England



Figure 2: John Constable, Study for "The Hay Wain", around 1821, England

Claude Monet

Along with other Paris-based artists, Monet developed impressionism (Tate, 2017). Naturalism and impressionism were both movements pioneered in the 19th century that focused on creating a more realistic artwork. Impressionists moved out of their studios into the outdoors so they could capture the 'in-moment' effects of the sun on their landscapes. They would work quickly amongst their surroundings 'en plein air' to greater their awareness of the light, colour and patterns of their natural scenes. (Tate, 2017).

Monet created a Japanese-style water garden in the garden of his home in Giverny, Paris that eventually became his 'outside studio'. He would use the water-lilies floating on his pond as a main subject of many of his paintings. *Water-Lilies* (Figure 4) fills the canvas depicting the pond as a world of its own immersed with nature. The light and its changing effects have been recorded within the painting creating a slightly abstract artwork as a result. (Tate, Date Unknown)



Figure 3: Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, oil painting on canvas, after 1916.

Experimentation

DIGITAL IMAGES

Due to coronavirus restrictions I decided to go to two well-known natural beauty spots near where I live, Dryslwyn Castle and Paxton Tower. There, I took inspiration from the composition used in naturalism art and by artists like John Constable and Claude Monet to create some initial digital images.

Of the several images taken at the locations, there were only a few I was slightly happy with, none of them seemed to show any kind of significance to the naturalism movement and the lack of knowledge regarding the locations is clear in the images.

This simple style of image has been photographed here many times by various people using a phone or digital camera. As someone who is local to the area, friends' snaps of their days out at these places are constantly circulating my social media screens. I wanted to incorporate more meaning into my images rather than being just a 'quick snap'.

The images taken provided a starting point for further research. Both overlooking the Towy Valley, Dryslwyn Castle and Paxton Tower are best known for their spectacular views rather than their history. With the lack of information at both locations, I decided to conduct some independent research to familiarise myself with their significance in the local history. More visits to both areas will help me to familiarise with their surroundings and therefore create a much more interesting image.





Dryslwyn Castle

Little is known about Dryslwyn Castle. Thought to be founded in the 13th Century, Dryslwyn was an important seat of the ancient south Wales kingdom of Deheubarth (*Cadw, Date Unknown*).

It was the scene of conflict between Welsh and English forces during 1287. Due to a series of bitter disputes between Rhys ap Maredudd and Robert de Tibot, the new justiciar of west Wales, an army of around 11,000 men were raised in various locations across England and Wales. During the 2nd week of August 1287, they set out to lay siege to Dryslwyn Castle. There is an abundance of information about this siege, but it is known that the castle fell after 3 weeks (*Rees & Caple, 1999*).

Dryslwyn was decommissioned in the early 15th century whilst under English occupation, . Eventually, the castle was torched with evidence showing that all the major buildings were burnt to the ground. All that remains are two prominent sections on the south side (*Rees & Caple, 1999*).

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Paxton Tower

Built around 1805 by Sir William Paxton, to honour and commemorate the victories of friend Lord Nelson, Paxton's Tower proudly overlooks the Towy Valley and impresses its people. Sir William Paxton was the owner of Middleton Hall; where the National Botanic Gardens of Wales are today and is clearly seen from the tower along with miles and miles of beautiful countryside scenery (*National Trust, 2018*).

An alternative story as to why the tower was built was to make a bitter statement after Paxton lost an MP election in 1802. One of his campaign pledges was to build a bridge over the river Towy. It is instead thought, he built Paxton's Tower in its high location to remind voters of what they could have had (*National Trust, 2018*).

In its prominent location, Paxton Tower can be seen for miles and was also used for banquets, although, it doesn't seem to possess a kitchen. Originally the tower held inscriptions in English, Welsh and Latin. These have since faded but read:

"To the invincible Commander, Viscount Nelson, in commemoration of the deeds before the walls of Copenhagen, and on the shores of Spain; of the empire every where maintained by him over the Seas; and of the death which in the fulness of his own glory, though ultimately for his own country and for Europe, conquering, he died; this tower was erected by William Paxton." (*National Trust, 2018*).

Experimentation

LITH PRINTING

Following further research into both Dryslwyn Castle and Paxton Tower, I have discovered that although it is known that they both would have held some kind of significance in local history there is little record of this.

These well known places I have lived near for the majority of my life hold a fading, unclear history with many alternative stories for their existence.

Both buildings have been frozen in time and are slightly eerie with their emptiness in what would have once been high activity locations. It is known Paxton Tower, for example, would have held big banquets for big groups of people.

I decided on experimenting with alternative processes and printing methods hoping that they'll reflect the fading and unclear history that is being uncontrollably lost.

Lith printing tends to give images a slightly sepia look therefore making them look dated. I decided to turn some of my digital images into acetates to convert into lith prints to confuse the past with the present. The unintentional grain on the images contributes towards the outdated look.

By using alternative processes and experimenting with printing methods I will get an unpredictable image that is out of my full control. By using these experimental methods, my images would represent the unknown of both locations and how history will uncontrollably get lost in time and forgotten about for future generations.



Gerhard Richter

"Now there's painting on one side and photography—that is, the picture as such—on the other. Photography has almost no reality; it is almost 100 percent picture. And painting always has reality: you can touch the paint; it has presence; but it always yields a picture. . . . I once took some small photographs and then smeared them with paint. That partly resolved the problem, and it's really good—better than anything I could ever say on the subject."
Gerhard Richter in interview with Jonas Storsve, 1991.
(Obrist, 2009:273)

Throughout his career, Richter has expanded on the potential of combining old and new media. During the 1980s, New York Neo-Conceptual artists were engaging in image reproduction and German Neo-Expressionists were focused on the emotionality of paint, meanwhile, Richter had begun painting over photographs. (Gagosian, 2019)

Richter's collection of 'Overpainted Photographs' consists of photographs that have been complicated by the application of paint in order to merge image reproduction and abstract art (Gagosian, 2019).

Richter's series of images titled '*Museum Visit*' (Figures 4-7) is his largest series of overpainted photographs. He captured the flux of visitors during one day at the Tate Modern in London in the run up to his '*Panorama*' exhibition. He obscures areas of the image with squeegees using different paint colours to narrate and represent the increasing flow of visitors. The white layers of paint represent a quiet gallery space while bright colourful layers represent a busier gallery floor with more activity. (Gagosian, 2019)



Figure 4: Gerhard Richter, MV. 15, Lacquer on colour photograph, 2011

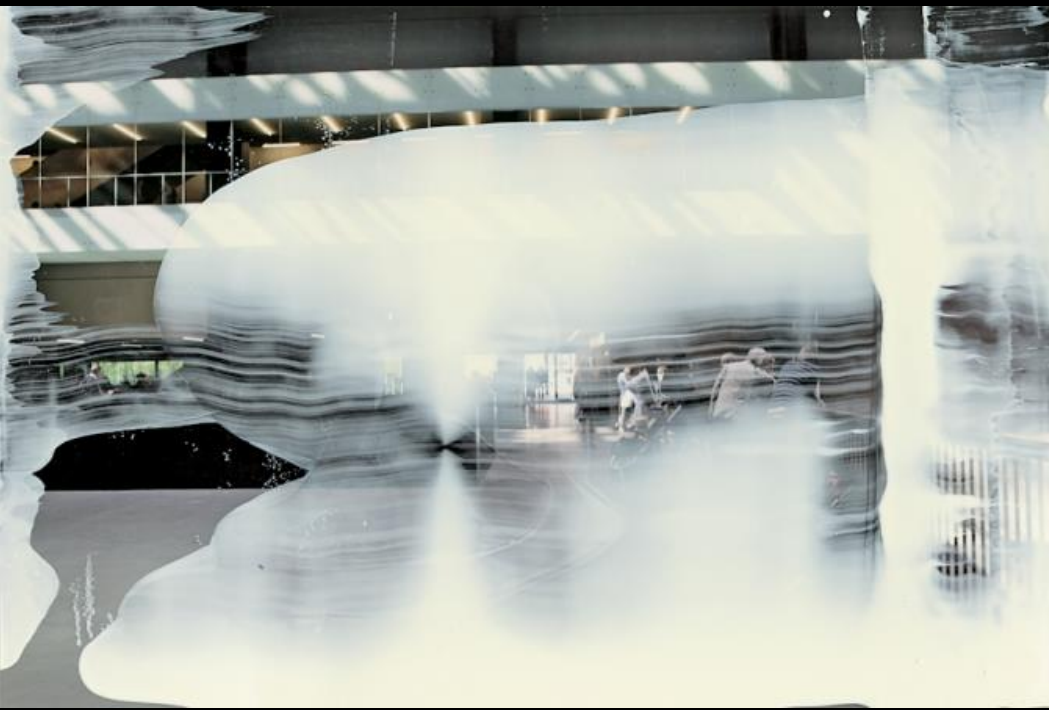


Figure 5: Gerhard Richter, MV. 48, Lacquer on colour photograph, 2011



Figure 6: Gerhard Richter, MV. 87, Lacquer on colour photograph, 2011



Figure 7: Gerhard Richter, MV. 113, Lacquer on colour photograph, 2011

Experimentation

MIXED MEDIA

Inspired by Richter's overpainted photographs, I experimented with a mixed media style image using paint pens to enhance the movement in the image.

Using a long exposure while zooming into the breathtaking views from Paxton Tower created a blurred image with some notable elements to reflect the blurred, vague history of the area. There wasn't anything in this image to draw in the eye, therefore I decided to enhance the 'zoom lines' and create a focal point at the centre of the image.

I quickly realised that this style of image wasn't reflecting what I had hoped and appeared more like doodles rather than enhancements.



Experimentation

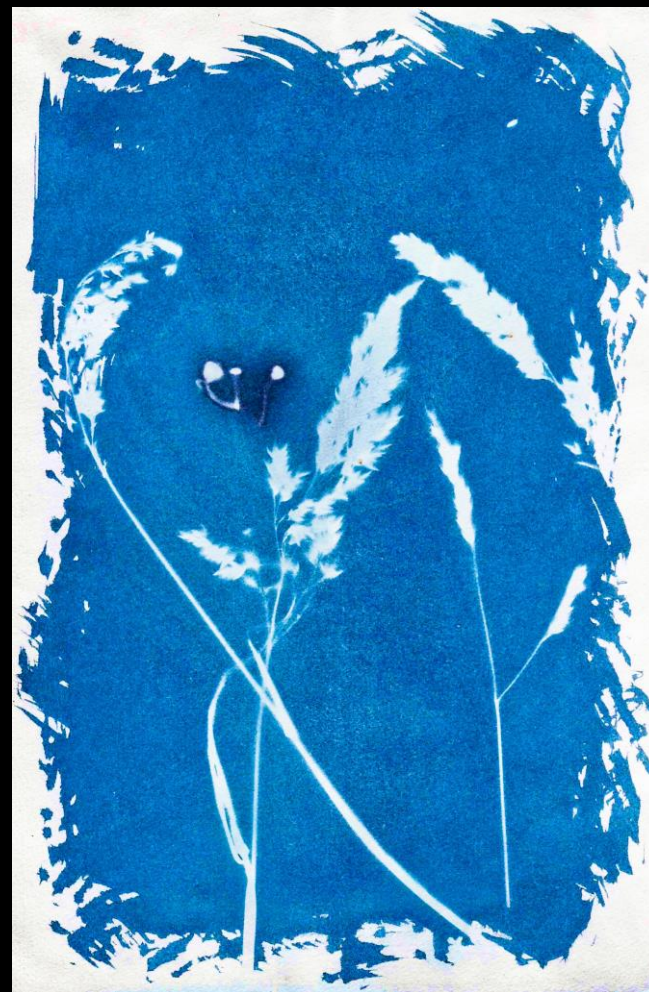
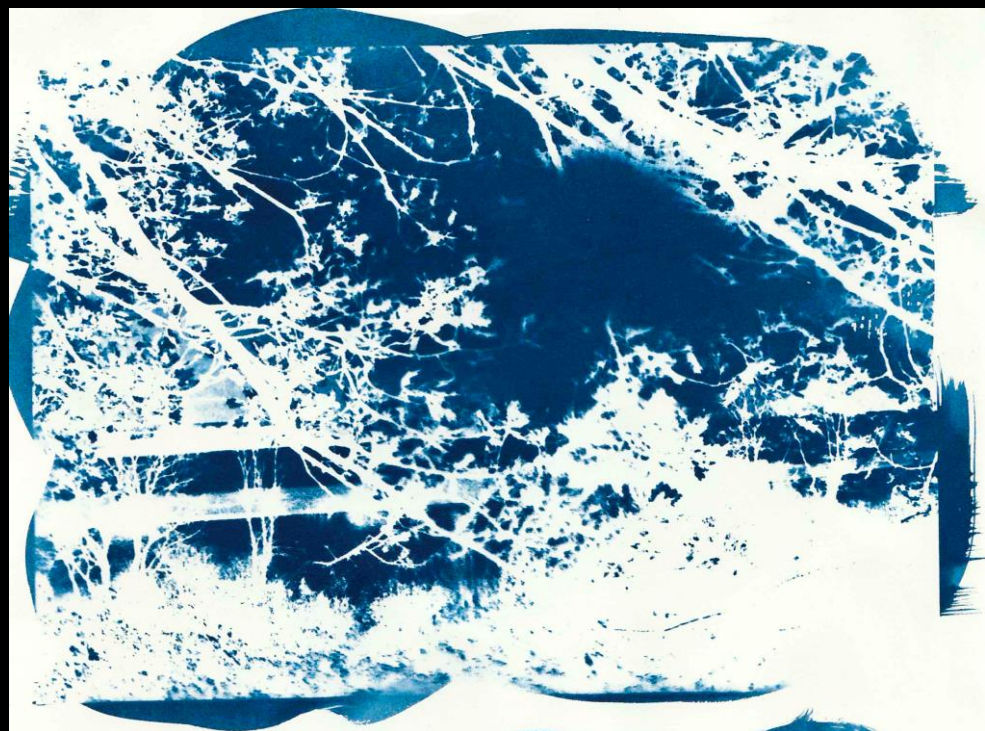
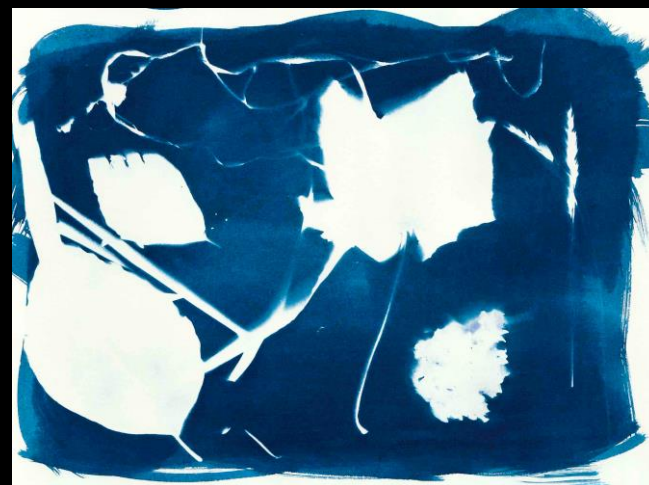
CYANOTYPES

Inspired by the bold colours used in Richter's work, I decided to experiment with cyanotypes because of their bold blue and contrasting white finish.

While painting the mixed chemicals onto the paper I ensured to keep the edges unfinished to create a border around my work. Using a mix of acetates and objects found at both Dryslwyn castle and Paxton tower, I managed to create some successful high contrasting cyanotypes.

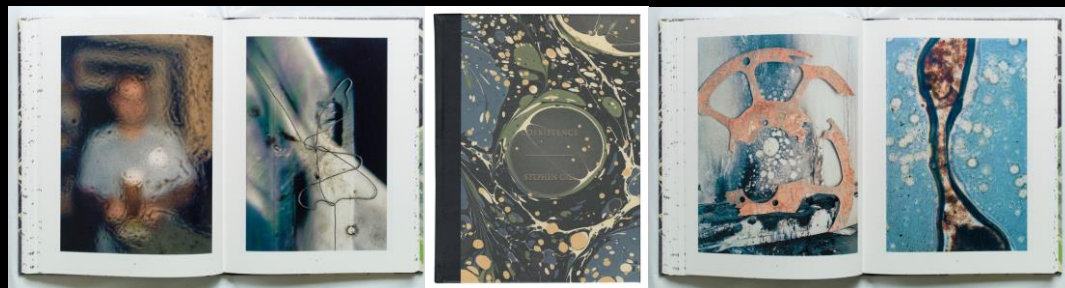
My aim with the cyanotype experiments was to take advantage of the unpredictability of the prints and the lack of control I have over how they turn out once placed in the sun in the clip frame. The lack of control and unpredictability of the prints reflects the lack of control and unpredictability we have over both locations future.

When prints are left outside to develop, they're left vulnerable to the quick changing weather, much like how Dryslwyn and Paxton are both vulnerable to the aggressive weather at their prominent locations.



Stephen Gill Daisuke Yokota

Stephen Gill's Coexistence is a response to the industrial wasteland of the remains of the steel-making industry in Dudelange. Gill is known to physically integrate the surroundings of his subjects into the final pieces of work. Concentrating on a pond that was used to cool the blast furnaces up until 2006, Gill considered the new formation of microscopic life that would be slowly returning to the pond. Gill scooped water from the pond and hired a medical microscope to study and photograph these microscopic creatures. He would also dunk his camera into the water from the pond before capturing his images of people he met while in Dudelange. The result of his work is a mix of recognisable and unrecognisable. (Ladd, 2013)



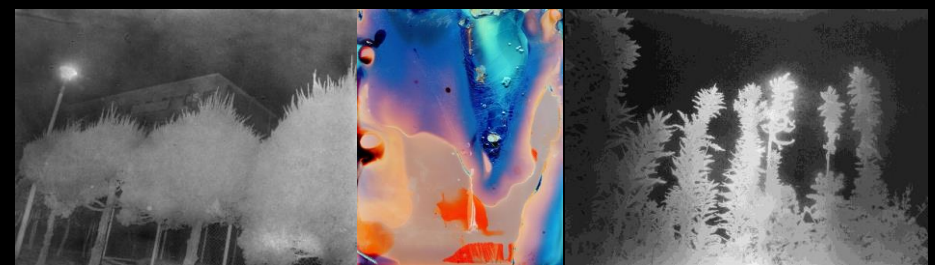
Daisuke Yokota's images links the past and future of Japanese photography reflecting how memory is affected by the passage of time. Many of his images resemble a science fiction film set with the lack of detail and silvery tones.

Yokota focuses on multiple processing and experimentation for his practice saying

"There are no stories in my work. There is only what the viewers find within it for themselves. I am more interested in exploring time and multiple possibilities that exist in reality."

He often rephotographs his images to create 'happy accidents' and adds *"natural phenomenon to digital data"*. (Amison, 2013).

Although his images are unclear and unrecognisable they possess a strange feeling of familiarity. His colour images show how photography is not reliant on the camera but instead on the film.



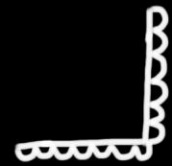
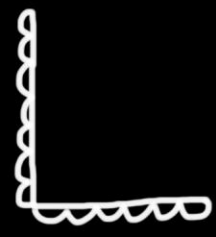
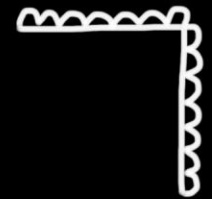
Experimentation

LUMEN PRINTS

Inspired by Stephen Gill's 'Coexistence' where he physically integrates the surroundings of his subject into his work, I decided to create lumen prints focusing on the surroundings of Dryslwyn castle and Paxton tower. I aimed to represent how the surroundings of both locations are better known than their history. Lumen prints rely on nature and the sun to develop just how these locations rely on word of mouth and local people to keep its history going.

Lumen prints rely on nature and the sun to develop just how these locations rely on word of mouth and local people to keep its history going.

Some lumen prints were more successful than others and some 'happy mistakes' were made along the way but overall I am happy with the outcomes of these experiments.



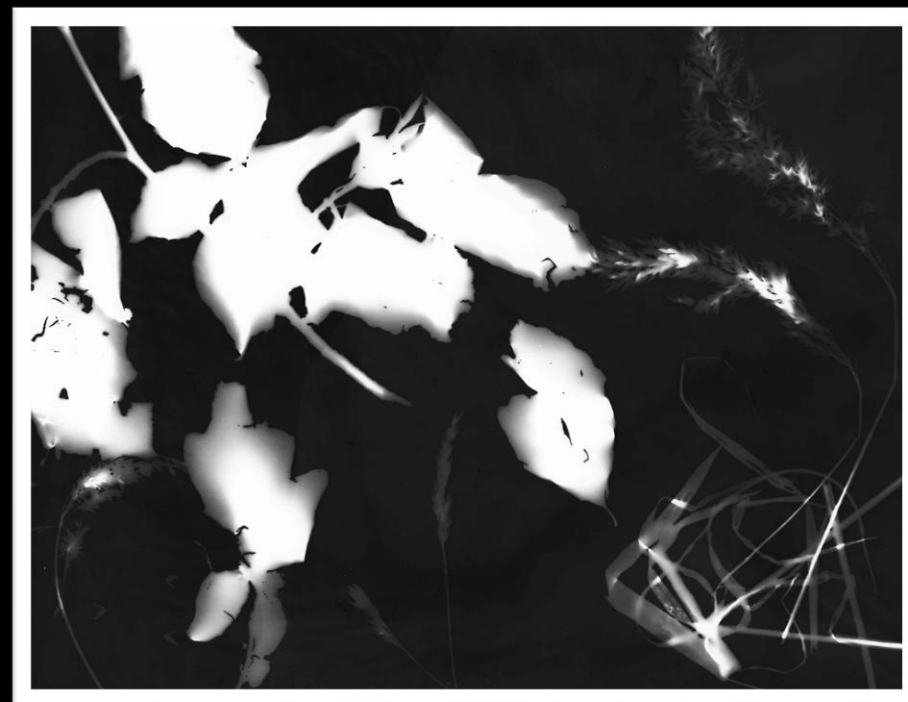
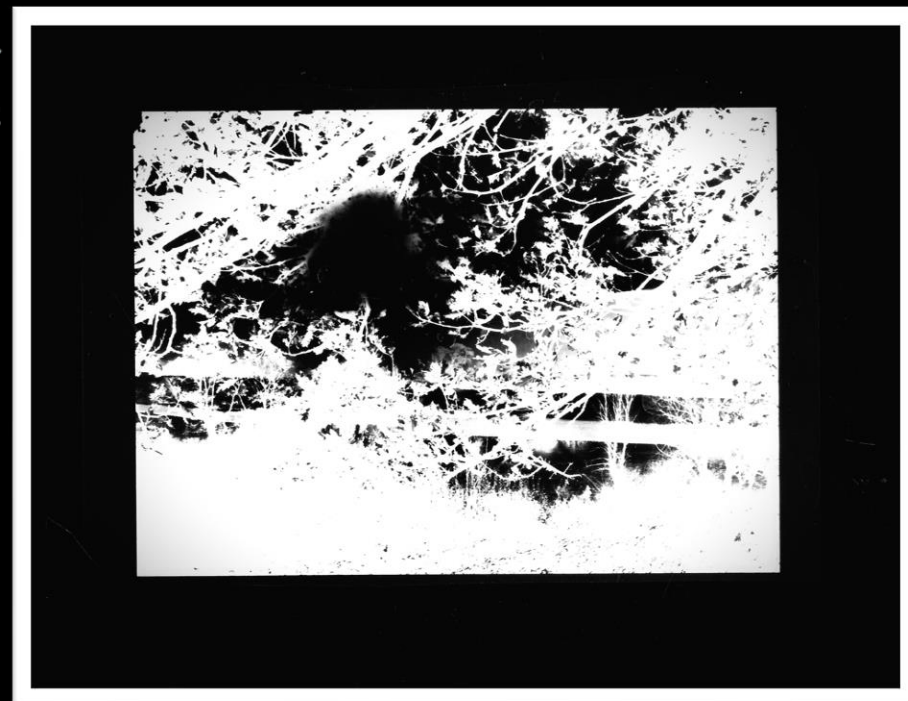
Experimentation

PHOTOGRAMS

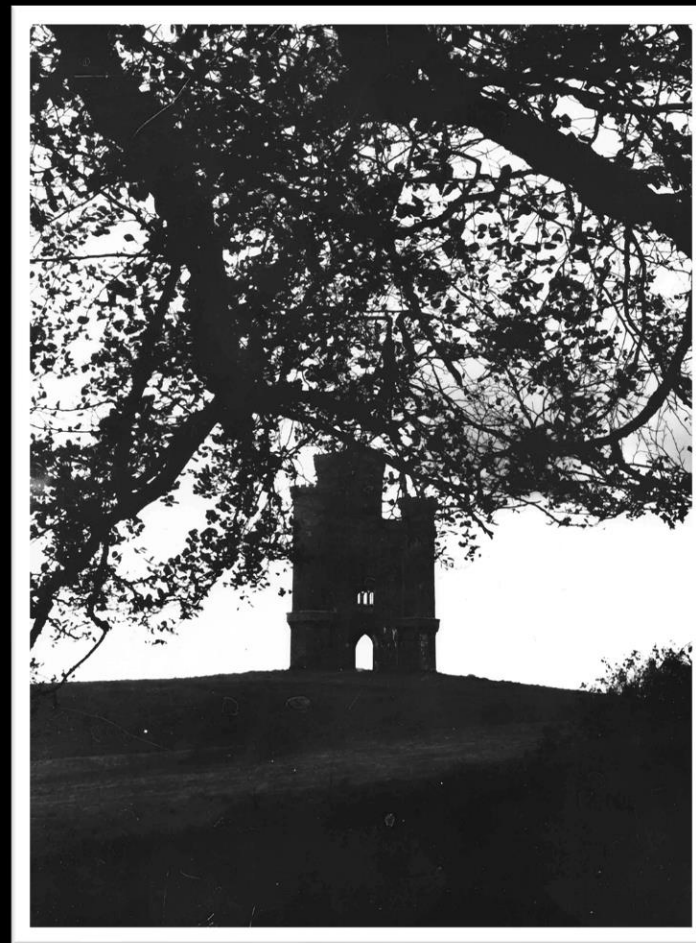
Following my lumen print experiments, I decided to experiment in the darkroom creating photograms. Using acetates and objects of nature collected from the surroundings of Dryslwyn and Paxton I created these high contrast black and white images.

I decided on using more objects and images of the surroundings rather than images of the historic monuments for my photograms. By doing so, I aimed to reflect how the surroundings and stunning views at both locations are more publicised than the significance of their history.

I enjoyed the unpredictability of creating these photograms. By combining the use of acetates and objects from the surroundings, I have been able to make a simple, cliché image a lot more interesting with the bold lines created by the leaves and other objects from the surroundings.







Final Outcome

These well known historical places I have lived near for the majority of my life hold a fading, unclear history with many alternative stories for their existence. These beauty spots have been photographed many times by various people using a phone or digital camera. Taking this into consideration, I decided on using alternative processes and printing methods aiming to create an image where the location isn't instantly recognisable and to reflect the uncontrollably fading and unclear history. Nature and corrosion takes its toll on these prominently placed buildings and their surroundings are ever-changing while the castle and tower are both frozen in time. Much like Stephen Gill's Coexistence, I have incorporated objects from the surroundings of Dryslwyn Castle and Paxton's Tower in my work to connect the present state with their past history and to emphasise how the surroundings are much more appreciated than the monuments themselves.





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Experimental Strategies

Evaluation

During the coronavirus pandemic finding creative inspiration has been a struggle. Therefore, I have found myself venturing out on adventures exploring the area I live in. I've come across places I never knew about while also learning new information. This has been tremendously helpful in sparking ideas and has made me truly appreciate the beautiful countryside around me. It's also made me realise how little I know about my surroundings. I am surrounded by beautiful scenery I've often seen captured in images but have never taken the time to truly appreciate with my own eyes. I've learnt that an image of any location is never a "true" depiction.

Inspired by my adventures and the beautiful scenery, I decided to investigate the naturalism movement of the 19th century. After researching into writers and artists associated with naturalism, I began experimenting taking digital images at Dryslwyn castle and Paxton tower. Of the several images taken, there were only a few I was slightly happy with, none of them seemed to show any kind of significance to the naturalism movement and the lack of knowledge regarding the locations is clear.

I did some research into Dryslwyn castle and Paxton tower hoping to familiarise myself with their history. Unfortunately, both Dryslwyn castle and Paxton tower are better publicised for their stunning views and surroundings rather than their history. My next experiments led me to lith printing hoping to reflect the fading, unclear history. I turned some of my digital images into acetates to convert into lith prints. The unintentional grain on the prints contributes to the outdated look.

Further research led me to Gerhard Richter's overpainted photographs which consists of photographs complicated by the obscuring application of paint. I attempted a mixed media style image of my own but quickly realised that it wasn't reflecting what I had hoped and appeared more like doodles on top of a blurry image. Inspired by the bold colours in Richter's work I experimented with creating cyanotype prints. Lack of control over these prints reflects the lack of control we have over both monuments' future.

Stephen Gill and Daisuke Yokota are both artists known for their unrecognisable images. Much like Gill's work, I decided to incorporate objects from the surroundings of Dryslwyn and Paxton to create lumen prints reliant on the sun to develop. Some prints were more successful than others but I'm overall happy with the outcomes.

Combining the use of acetates and objects from both monuments, I created these high contrast photograms. I aimed to reflect how the surroundings and views of both monuments are more publicised than the history.

My experimental images have helped me decide on using lumen printing and photograms for my final images. I aimed to create an image where the location isn't instantly recognisable and to reflect the uncontrollably fading and unclear history.

These well-known places I have lived near for most of my life hold a fading, unclear history with many alternative stories for their existence. Much like Stephen Gill's *Coexistence*, I have incorporated objects from the surroundings of Dryslwyn Castle and Paxton's Tower in my work to connect the present state with their past history and to emphasise how the surroundings are much more appreciated than the monuments themselves. I'm pleased with how both sets of images have turned out and believe that they successfully accomplish my aims.