

Research in context

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Question = From the **Lens-Based Image Making** research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners

How can photographers utilise alternative photographic processes to explore artistic themes?

This essay will discuss the use of alternative photographic process in photographic arts and explore a range of alternative photographic processes. Different artists who use alternative photographic process will be analysed to explore how photographers can use alternative process to explore artistic themes.

Joseph Nicephore was one of the first photographers to experiment with alternative photographic processes in the early 1800s (Stulk, 2012). Stulk (2012) talks about digital photography potentially replacing chemical photography such as alternative photographic process. This can result in decrease of scientific information into chemical photography. If these processes were to fall out of use, it could result this knowledge about past artists and experimental photographic processes to be lost.

To start with a cyanotype is a camera-less technique where you lay on object on a papercoated with iron and salt to then be exposed to UV light to create a white and blue image (White, 2019). The history of cyanotype started with Sir John Herschel began experimenting with sun prints and photograms (Bagnall, 2023).

In this section we will talk about why you should consider working with cyanotypes than any other alternative photographic process. The key aspect to discuss is the advantages and disadvantages of using this method in your body of work. In addition to this cyanotype are more economical than other process (*Cyanotypes – alternative photographic process*, 2021). Secondly cyanotypes utilize the UV rays from the sun rather than using silver of early photographic processes (AlternativePhotography.com, 2023). Another advantage is that cyanotype is easy to make as there is no need for a darkroom only light from the sun. This suggests that cyanotype is convenient for artists to use anywhere which makes it easier for the practitioner to produce work (*Cyanotypes – alternative photographic process*, 2021). On the other hand, cyanotypes can be a riskier process due to precise timings required. If exposures incorrectly timed the images could come out pale and you will not be able to see what is in the image.



Figure 1 Endless forms most beautiful Janelle Lynch, (2022)

Janelle Lynch is an artist where her images respond to the themes of connection, presence, and transcendence (Carty, 2023). Lynch believes that the power of an image should hold spiritual presence (Carty, 2023). The artist uses cyanotypes to help bring the vision to life

because Lynch has associate cyanotypes with her grandmother who has passed away. Janelle talks openly about making cyanotypes with her grandmother when she was younger which led to the artist exploring of connection due to her close connection with her grandmother. Her work *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* took its title from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of the Species*. Janelle borrows of the title as his theories are fixed in the material world. For example, Lynch says, "his words also allude to what may exist beyond it, including the afterlife" (LensCulture, 2012). This means that alternative photographic process re not the only factor that can help explore artist themes. It a collective of different resources such as research on theorist as Lynch as utilised Darwin.

The artist explores this theme in her work by communicating with nature and use her process to metamorphose as a result (LensCulture, 2012) . Lynch does not have a plan with what work she does but rather she carries her film camera and cyanotype around ready to make work. Lynch does this so she can communicate with nature and explore the theme for example "I was completely free inward, to talk to myself, to talk to the trees" (LensCulture, 2012). Lynch work on cyanotypes is actual object of nature element such as sea plant and osprey wing. The artist describes this work as "affirming the fundamental value of all in the life in its various manifestations, including the afterlife" (*Janelle Lynch | Endless Forms Most beautiful*, no date). This shows that the artist uses the cyanotypes to help bring out these artist themes for her audience to understand her body of work. Lastly the cyanotypes help explore the theme of realm of the spirits.

A C-print is a colour print analogue photographic process. This process is to expose a colour negative onto chromogenic photographic paper (*Glossary C-Print*, 2014). The paper is light sensitive which means the amount of exposure to light determines which colours come out the strongest. This paper contains three layers that are sensitive to blue, green, or red light. (*Glossary C-Print*, 2014). C-prints were created in 1942 when Kodak discovered the process and managed to make photography modern (Tate, 2012). The aesthetics of c-prints is strong contrast of colours that help bring the photo to life rather than the image being in black and white. This process can work better than the traditional black and white print in the darkroom because the colour can add more of a story to the photo.

A digital c-print uses the same equipment, but they use digital images rather than objects or negatives (Artlex, 2013). The only differences are the light exposure works differently. They rely on special lightboxes such as light-emitting diodes or LED light (Artlex, 2013). In addition to this modern c-print has the advantages of getting rich colours and wonderful details in the print. On the other hand, larger prints with the modern c-print can lose details and colours in the print (Artlex, 2013). Lastly, this process is a hybrid process because it uses both digital and analogue photography to make this print.

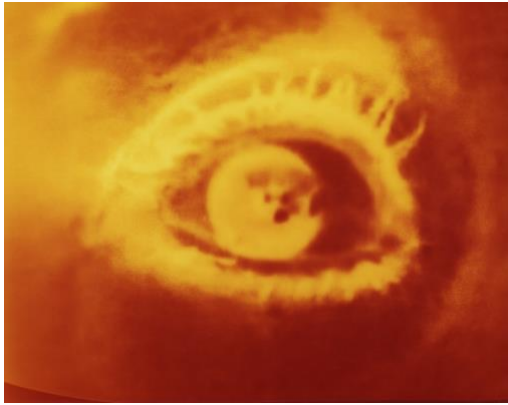


Figure 2 The Eye who witnessed Kei Lto's,(2012)

Kei Lto's work respond to the theme of recalling the human toll of the atomic war (Ciurej, 2023) . The body of work respond to atomic bombs over the city of Hiroshima in 1945. Kel Lto was affected by this event as his grandfather survived the blast but sadly died of cancer due to the atomic bombs. *The Eye Who Witnessed* is a c-print photographs of 108 eyes (Ciurej, 2023) . The portraits are of 54 Americans and 54 Japanese bomb victims. The images were curated from books, interviews, and images from Kei Lto family album (*Eye who witnessed — KEI ITO*, no date). the artist mixed up the print before the exhibition so it would be unclear on who was a Japanese victim or an American victim. This suggest that Kei Lto was making a point that nuclear weapons affect everyone it does not matter about their nationality. Lastly Kei Lto says "we will to become a witness of a radiated light and be sacrificed for the next so-called peace" (*Eye who witnessed — KEI ITO*, no date). this means that the problem around atomic war has not gone away and that it is only matter of time before this happens again.

Using c-print help the artist explore the theme of atomic war because the print brings out strong colour of red and yellow which help create the illusion that eyes are in the atomic blast. Roland Barthes semiotics theory can be applied to eye who witnessed work by Kei Lto.

According to Barthes the message should be easily understood, and the audience should apply their knowledge to the photo (Sonesson, 2015). This theory applies to Kei Lto work because the audience walk away with the clear message of trying to stop atomic war. The artist does this by using signs of facial expression by having portraits of eyes being printed on to c-print to represent the eyes looking out of the blast of the atomic bombs. To sum up work with c-print has helped the artist explore this theme well but there are other factors that have made this work explore this theme such as Roland Barthes semiotics theory.

A tintype is also called a melanotype. This process is made by making a positive on sheet of metal which is coated with enamel to support the photographic emulsion. Collodion photography was invented in 1850 which allowed two new photographic process to be develop, these are ambrotype and tintypes (Sonesson, 2015). This process is monochrome. There are many different variations of this process some can be wet and dry. Each of these processes will bring a different effect and distortion. The wet plate creates this illusion of water being run over the work rather than dry plate just looking like an image on glass. The details and distortion can change depending on how the image is exposed.



Figure 3 The light becomes eternal Frank Hamrick (2023)

The artist Frank Hamerick creates books of history using tintypes to tell a story of time and memory (Smithson, 2023). Hamerick's new work is a book called *When the Light Becomes Eternal* (Smithson, 2023). The book contains 14 tintypes of moving objects of different recycled materials. The title comments on how the photographs record the light reflecting off subjects (Smithson, 2023). The images in the book are trying to convey something more than originally intended. This is done by the chemical process making the image blur and fade. This is done to bring out the theme of memory, age and things fading over time. Hamerick is not only using alternative processes in his work to explore artist themes but is also using knowledge of theorists, for instance the work is using Roland Barthes' semiotics, to help explore different techniques on using facial expression, composition to convey meanings related to memory.

Tintypes were highly suited to this project because the detail in the image is like a blur which ties into the theme of memory being a blur as we get older. Another reason as to why this process is suited because images have strong colours of grey which adds to the narrative of the image being old and looking back on old memories. This work well as the artis concept is working with history and memories. Lastly the distortion on person is

almost like a silhouette where it suggests as pictures get older, they fade and can be hard to pick out details much like when we get older are memories fade and we slowly forget details. Lastly this process works well this theme because the work helps bring the narrative and connections people have with the theme of memories and history.

Charles Sandes Peirce was one of the founders of semiotics. He believed that signs can be categorized into three types (Bradley, 2016) . The three types are icon, index, and symbol. An icon is a physical resemblance to the photograph being represented. The index shows evidence of what being symbolised for example having a image of smoke to indicate fire. The symbol has no resemblance between the images. The connections between the image and the symbol must be culturally learned for example numbers and alphabets. Kei Lto's work (see figure 2) explore the signs and symbols of Sandes well. For example, the colours red, yellow symbol the blast which comes into the index category. The icon is the eye being the physical resemblance of the people that witnessed the blast. Lastly the c-print and other process can help bring these themes out in artist work if used correctly and with help of researching theorist like semiotics.



Figure 4 A Layer Deep, Eszti Fulop (2023)

My practice is focus on experimenting with different chemical process to explore a different view of seeing photography. Alternative photographic process helps me helps me explore this way of working because the work looks different to other to artist's work. This is because a lot of artists use digital photography and with social media growing the audience has got used to seeing digital work. My work *A Layer Deep* (see figure 4) explores the concept of merging different darkroom process in hopes of exploring time, journey to create a narrative how things develop over time. These process help bring this narrative in my work by layering photograms of objects from the location within in the image to evoke the memory of the place.



Figure 5 Aestus, Eszti Fulop (2023)

My current project (see figure 5) is working on the theme of how the sea is constantly changing and moving; How we as individuals cannot understand these changes as we do not live long enough to see them. So, I have been making photograms of sea and of different tidal flows to explore this concept. As you can see within my work alternative process help me explore these themes because they help bring the story and vision to life with different chemical processes.

This essay has explored how different artists use alternative photographic processes to explore artistic themes. Janelle Lynch uses cyanotype to explore the theme of connection, presence, and transcendence. Cyanotype can help explore this theme because the rich blue object creates this ghostly, spiritual affect. The work looks completely different which makes you see the object in new ways rather than if the objects had been shot on digital camera. Lastly cyanotype works well with this effect because it helps her audience understand her body of work. Kikito work is using c-print to explore the theme of atomic reactions. C- print

help bring out this theme because the c-print bring out rich red, orange, and yellow colours that create the illusion that the eyes are looking out to the blast. This helps the audience understand the theme behind his work and understand his method of working. Frank Hamrick is using tintypes to explore the theme of memories and history. Tintypes help bring out this theme because the images are like a blur which create this effect that memories become a blur as we get older. Adding to this the distortion on person is almost like a silhouette where it suggests as pictures get older, they fade and can be hard to pick out details much like when we get older are memories fade and we slowly forget details.

The reason as to why artist should use this process because it a different way for audience to see photography and two explore themes. Another advantage is the predominance of artist using digital work so less photographer use this process so it can make the audience more engaged in your work. but on the other hand, the process can be hard to learn which means more failures and slower progress that can make artist not wanting to engage in the work because the result does not come quickly. this process can be rewarding to work with when the results are done correctly. Lastly these processes work better conceptually with the right themes.

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