Photobook Research Report

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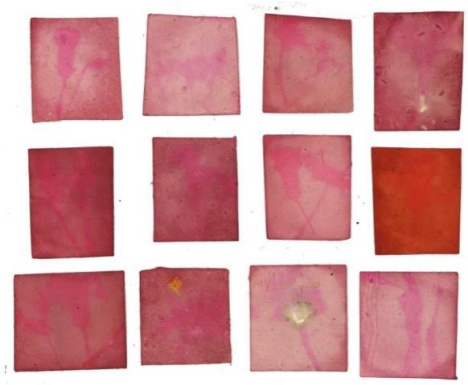
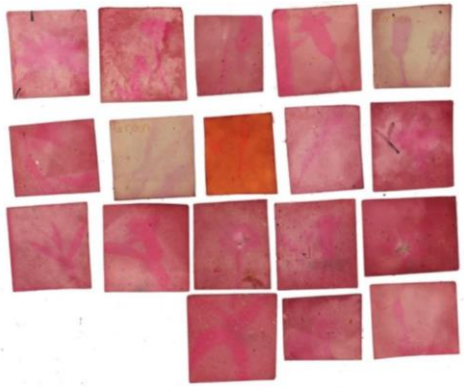
Women's Shed

My photobook 'Women's shed' contextually unravels gender roles, the environmental crisis, and the celebration of Women through the documentation of interpersonal relationships between women and the environment. 'Men's shed' a community that is symbolic of masculinity, where male dominant activities such as woodwork and carpentry alongside gardening, take place leaving no room for women to often join in. With the rise in female only groups in our current climate 'Petallica' a flower business has created 'Women's shed' where women of all ages join to help grow flowers as well as make friendships. Inspired by Anna Atkins as both an iconography in photography for defying patriarchy and her Cyanotypes of a botanist exploration, I began to embody her in a contemporary form. Cyanotypes as a process contextually harmonises with the growth of flowers, as using UV light, time, and water an image is produced in the same way a flower can grow. The symbolism of the colour blue is often related to men, so having my book printed in this colour gives power to women and plays on gender roles. Furthermore, materiality was a fundamental factor of my book where I considered the current climate crisis and its relation to gardening, this became apparent after finding out that the algae 'Cystoseira foeniculacea' below has been severely impacted by climate change. This poses the question whether in a century will my flower prints be archival? The beetroot seed paper Anthrotypes within my book allow the viewer to contribute back to the environment and join the community at home, while also serving an aesthetic purpose with the prints being of flowers grown by the women at Women's Shed.

1843 A cyanotype of 'Cystoseira foeniculacea' from 'Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions'.

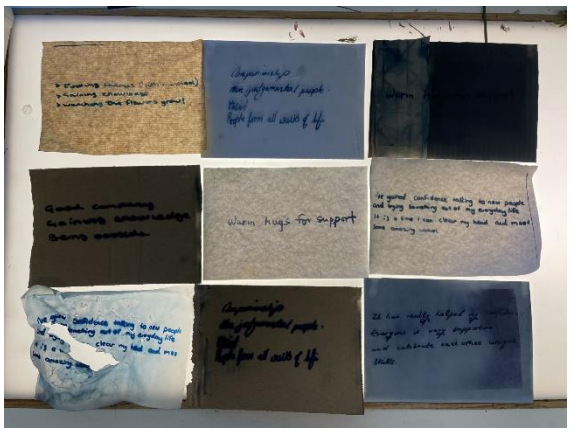
Observing and integrating into the group over the six weeks through weeding, planting, and creating relationships has made my book evoke a deeper narrative. The first photobook being made by a women empowered this project as I later found in a visit to the archive how limited the documentation of women is through history, with Nurses in Swansea General Hospital (now Homegower House) being the only form of female groups and community documented. Mary Somerville the inventor of anthrotypes couldn't publish her findings as she was a woman, which is why with contemporary artists such as Guerrilla girls still striving for women's equality in the art world, my book is so historically representative. Furthermore, Ossi Pisspanen through the manor house and editorial research such as Huck influenced me in how I represent a community, using handwritten responses throughout my book on what women's shed means to them shifts the perspective and makes the book theirs, putting my writing at the back of the book shows this. Theorists such as Susan Sontag have supported my work and exhibition visit to Acts of Creation: On Art and Motherhood.

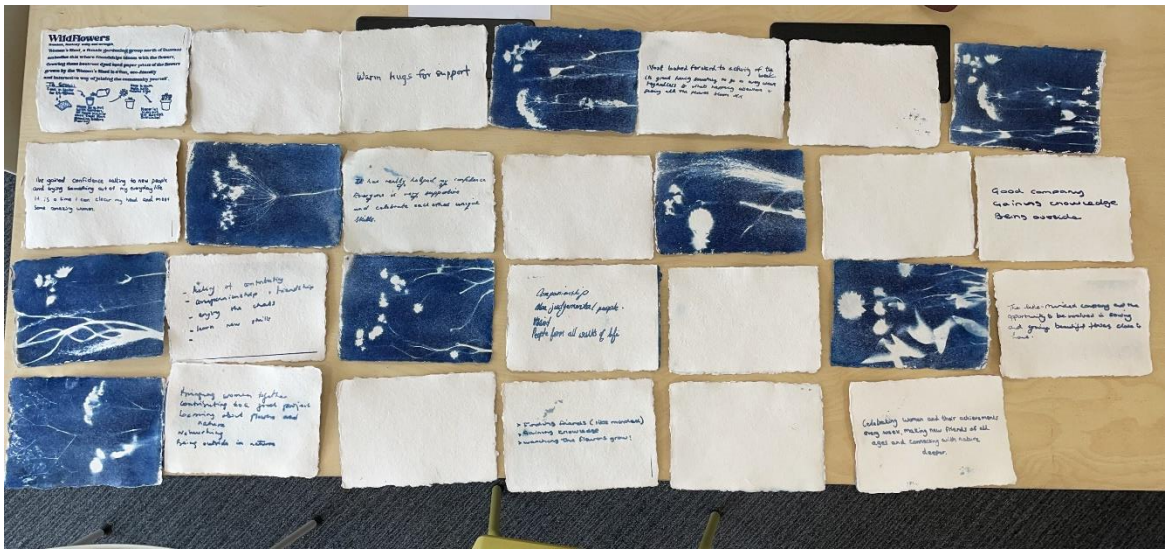




Overall, I have learned a large range of skills both physically and digitally. Firstly, I developed my cyanotypes into experimenting with cyanolumen, anthrotypes and photograms, this allowed me to see the effect that light has on different processes. Additionally, I experimented with different thicknesses (GSM) and textures of seed paper to see which holds the prints the best. I learnt different binding techniques such as the saddle stitch, embroidery and sewing, as these processes of hand making the book relates into nature of gardening, where viewers interaction in handling and opening the book mimics this, such as landscape and portrait images making you constantly turn and touch the book. Through binding I took inspiration from gardening equipment and how order effects the narrative of my work, which I opposed as nature has no order and not binding shows the women as a collective rather than a structured group. I tried to limit my digital input to better the environment but learning more about my camera in shooting in aperture and shutter priority was beneficial, and using InDesign, lightroom, photoshop, illustrator to support my process helped a lot.

All materials used were environmentally considered and from small businesses reducing my carbon footprint, for example I used jute instead of garden twine as it is more biodegradable. Additionally, inspired by Tamsin Green all waste I reused or recycled, such as seed paper I used for further experimentation, my left-over beetroot I put into my compost bin and experimental practice was done on scrap materials. I avoided artificial alterations to my work such as using unedited images, not printing lots of book dummy's instead I created them digitally and practiced binding on scrap materials. Additionally, I used the type face of 'Petalicas' website as the front of the book to create further links back to the group as well as using flowers grown by the group in both the book and Anthrotypes. Recycled cotton paper worked especially well for double sided cyanotypes as the texture and prints mimic roots through the images. Here the pages aren't binded to mimic seeds in a seed packet and with them being loose it shows there's no hierarchy and order to the women's community and nature.



In conclusion I have challenged the idea of a photobook through its form, production and purpose in a contextualised way that celebrates women in an often-masculine setting. Due to the time restrictions of the module, I feel that this limited my book due to the long

periods of time my anthrotypes took to make and vast amount of experimentation needed. Additionally, I felt I was pushed out of my comfort zone as after every failure such as batches of anthrotypes failing to work I had to accept the nature of the project isn't perfect through both the processes and printing of the book, this contextually works as gardening is messy and unpredictable. Although to combat this I would've been more organised with my time and prioritised doing the anthrotypes towards the start of my project. I'd further like to experiment with more natural dyes for anthrotypes such as flower petals, as well as this using recycled cotton yarn to embroider would be more sustainable than the thread used and a different material for the seed paper as stabbing through the paper didn't work contextually. My cyanotypes also could be a better quality due to me leaving the solution too long on a few pages, I will develop my processes to avoid this. Finally, this book will be given to the women's shed to share, I have not produced it in the aim of making multiple as it is personalised to the women who inspire and support me every week.