

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF THINGS

A Master's Exhibition
of Anthotype Photography
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
in
Art

by
Jennifer Linnea Daly
Summer 2009

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF THINGS

A Master's Exhibition

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APPROVED BY THE INTERIM DEAN OF THE SCHOOL OF
GRADUATE, INTERNATIONAL, AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES:

Mark J. Morlock, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Cameron Crawford, M.F.A.
Graduate Coordinator

Thomas E. Patton, M.F.A., Chair

Eileen Macdonald, M.F.A.

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 SUMMER 2009

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ABSTRACT

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF THINGS

by

Jennifer Linnea Daly

Master of Fine Arts in Art

California State University, Chico

Summer 2009

The exhibition, *The Temporal Nature of Things*, is an exploration of sustainable art-making and its contemplative properties using recycled and renewable materials to create anthotype prints. Anotypes allow for an exploration of the temporal nature of the landscape and the effects of time and light on the natural world. The images, simple, formal compositions on a light or dark background, are a deconstruction of the larger landscape allowing for contemplation of the individual parts. As anotypes, the images have a finite lifetime and like the actual plants themselves, continue to change during their existence eventually fading into oblivion. As this work is concentrated on photographing the landscape, I've needed to think about my impact on the environment around me. I can't talk about the environment without considering the materials I am using. The work should create a dialog, inciting a new look at the world and how we exist in it.

THE TEMPORAL NATURE OF THINGS
SECULAR HUMANISM, CONTEMPORARY
RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND THE
ENVIRONMENT

While a reverence for the environment is not new to modernity, several developments in the 20th century paved the way for a new understanding about how humans are but a small part of a great whole. It is these ideas, both theological and secular, that have been a driving force in the ecology movement.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, a movement known as Humanism began to coalesce, bringing together modern ideas of social well-being based on science and “(a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from them; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few.”¹

The author, Kurt Vonnegut, described Humanism as “trying to behave decently without expectation of rewards or punishment after you are dead.”² As modern thinking and science has evolved, so have the tenets of Humanism.

In 1973, the American Humanist Association published the second Humanist Manifesto, updating the original manifesto published in 1933. It states in part:

The world community must engage in cooperative planning concerning the use of rapidly depleting resources. The planet earth must be considered a single ecosystem. Ecological damage, resource depletion, and excessive population

growth must be checked by international concord. The cultivation and conservation of nature is a moral value; we should perceive ourselves as integral to the sources of our being in nature. We must free our world from needless pollution and waste, responsibly guarding and creating wealth, both natural and human. Exploitation of natural resources, uncurbed by social conscience, must end.³

Fourteen years later, the United Nations, an organization founded on humanist principles, released a report titled “Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development.” Outlined in the report were the basis of many of the approaches today to sustainability and green practices, including the idea that “Ecological interactions do not respect the boundaries of individual ownership and political jurisdiction.”⁴ The treatise goes on to list examples of how actions by an individual, community or business can affect the environment around them.

Along these same lines, contemporary religious leaders are seeing the connection between spiritual beliefs and stewardship of the environment. In 1995, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, along with scientists, economists, artists and religious leaders from diverse religious traditions gathered on a ferry in the Aegean Sea. As a result of the conference, these leaders put forth the “Patmos Proposals” that in part state:

A New Sense of Sin. All religions affirm as an imperative, the need to care for the Earth and for the whole of nature. To pollute the environment or not to take care of it should be seen as sin. This new sense of sin extends beyond what has been traditionally considered wrong.

This new category of sin should include activities that lead to:

- species extinction
- reduction in genetic diversity
- pollution of the hydrosphere, lithosphere, and atmosphere
- eutrophication of the hydrosphere, lithosphere, and atmosphere
- habitat destruction
- disruption of sustainable lifestyles⁵

Whether it is called sin or responsibility as a human being, modern thought is incorporating ideas that we are all interconnected and nothing is without consequence. This exhibition, with images as a catalyst for contemplation, reminds us of our moral obligation to consider the world around us.

Photography and the Environment

Since its inception, photography has been a toxic endeavor. To create a Daguerreotype, one of the earliest photographic processes, the artist would polish a copper plate, coat it with silver, and sensitize it with iodine fumes. Once the plate was exposed, the image was developed with heated mercury vapors in a small-enclosed darkroom.

By the end of the 19th century, photography had become more standardized, and subsequently less perilous, but the chemistry involved was still hazardous. Until the introduction of digital photography at the mass-market level in the 1990s, the process to develop film and to make black and white prints stayed relatively unchanged. At the end of the day, there are still toxic solutions left over.

Moving to Northern California in the summer of 2006, I found myself living on a property with a septic system, at the top of ravine on one of the four major watersheds in the area. Up until this point, I had been working with traditional chemical materials and, aside from recycling the silver, hadn't given much thought to everything that went down the drain and into the sewer. All that mattered was, it went somewhere else. The septic system presented a new challenge. Anything that goes down the drain literally stays in my backyard or leaches out into the watershed.

As a child, I spent many weekends and summer vacations at my family's farmhouse in the Ozark Mountains. I had almost unlimited access to the woods, creeks, and cornfields of southeastern Missouri. I developed a deep appreciation for the delicate nature of that ecosystem and how easily humans could alter it.

When I started photographing, I was immediately drawn to the familiar landscape. The Missouri landscape was comfortable and I knew what to expect. Moving from the Midwest to California required some adaptation. While I had been comfortable photographing the landscape at home, California seemed like another planet. In Missouri, I knew when the trees would change, what colors they would be, and when they would flower again in the spring. Here I was lost, everything was new. I realized that I had such an intimate knowledge of the flora of eastern Missouri and it was what allowed me to work with the landscape as a whole. The thought came that if I was to be able to digest the landscape, I needed to understand its parts. I began to make studio photographs of leaves collected from the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve and the Butte Creek watershed. Collecting, identifying and cataloging these specimens allowed me to start to understand this new landscape.

Handmade

My first introduction to historical and alternative photographic processes came when I was taking a History of Photography course as an undergraduate. I was immediately smitten with the way an image could be transformed solely by the way in which it was printed. However, these techniques seemed relegated to history and the Photo Succession. In researching photographers who worked with alternative processes, I

came across Lyle Rexer's book, *Photography's Antiquarian Avant-Garde*. Rexer's catalog addressed the history of the photographic medium from its inception through its contemporary uses by artists who have chosen to use historical processes to enhance their conceptual ideas. I was drawn to contemporary photographers whose images were the antithesis of so many of their predecessors; the perfect, infinitely detailed image. Instead, these images were out of focus or distorted or otherwise imperfect and often the hand of the photographer was visible in the making of the image. The image became more about an expression of an idea of something than that of a object itself. I realized I could make images about an idea that incorporate both image and process.

Pictorialism and the Photo-Secession

Until the late 19th century, photography was a time consuming and laborious avocation and the men and few women who pursued it were devoted to the cause. They celebrated the technology and photography's ability to duplicate the world through mechanical means. They generally strove for clear, sharp and faithfully reproduced images.

By 1888, photography was available to almost anyone in the form of the Kodak Number 1 camera. Photography was no longer limited to the trained artist or wealthy gentleman, it was being sold to the masses as evidenced in Kodak's slogan, "*You push the button, we'll do the rest.*" In the 1880s, Peter Henry Emerson and Henry Peach Robinson led a movement to re-interpret photography in a "naturalistic" manner by focusing the camera to emulate the natural focal depth of the human eye and to relate

aesthetic ideas from contemporary painting to photography. The movement came to be known as Pictorialism.

Photographers working in the late 1800s and early 1900s worked with a variety of exposure and printing methods that suggested the Barbizon and Impressionist painters, including gum bichromate, platinum and cyanotypes as well as soft focus and shallow depth of field lenses. By using these techniques, the Pictorialist photographers were able to control not only the content of the image, but its look and feel as well. Their images were no longer solely a representation of the subject, but a deeper look at its meaning and metaphor.

By the early 20th century, amateur photographers had begun to follow suit and make “fuzzy” photographs as well in an attempt to be considered artists themselves. Coupled with the beginnings of the modernist art movement, this took fine art photography in another direction characterized by clean lines and formal designs. But a few artists persisted and by the late 20th century the number of photographers using historical processes had grown.

Sally Mann

One of the artists featured in Rexer’s catalog was Sally Mann. Mann, who is best known for her flawless large format images of her children from the 1980s switched to wet-plate collodion⁶ in the 1990s. Her first project with the wet plate process was *Deep South*, a look at Civil War battle sites. Mann states in an interview with Lyle Rexer that collodion is “the ideal medium for landscapes. It is contemplative, memorial.”⁷ Her

project is predicated on the thought that place must have a memory and these sacred battlefields still hold ghosts after all these years, that time changes little.

Mann's collodion images were some of the first I saw that directly linked the process with the conceptual idea. Mann didn't just make these images in collodion because she loved the labor-intensive process, but because the process helped to convey the history, loss and quiet contemplation that the subject matter deserved.

Sustainability and Environmentalism in Art Making

Following my move to California, I became more interested in concepts of sustainability and how I could incorporate them into my life and art practice. Since my work is concentrated on photographing the landscape, I've needed to think about my impact on the environment around me. I can't talk about the environment without considering the materials I am using. Much of the sustainable/eco art being produced today looks at recycled or reclaimed materials and physical interaction with the landscape.

In their essay, "The Art of Making Do with Enough," Maja and Reuben Fowkes write:

Sustainability in art brings awareness of a wider ecological context around the production and reception of art works. It questions the sacrosanct status of the art object as the highest civilisational value and problematises the belief that artworks are created, and should be preserved, for eternity. Just as in society there is a tendency to stop seeing nature as an endless resource, attuned artists problematise the understanding of art as commodity, and are reluctant to add to the stockpile of art objects, choosing instead to explore alternative means of expression.⁸

I was looking for alternative processes with the hope of finding a technique that would fulfill my creative and aesthetic goals. The process in this body of work has

become very important to me. It has become a commitment to see how far I can push image-making using renewable, sustainable, or recycled materials. Each part of this project was examined to determine how to best use available materials, renewable resources and environmentally friendly processes.

What I discovered was an early photographic process called anthotypes.⁹ Introduced in 1842 by the British scientist, Sir John Herschel, the process was an anomaly in early photography. Most of the early photographic processes were complicated and toxic. Anthotypes were simply created by expressing pigments from plants and using the sun to bleach an image. (Appendix A) There was a certain paradox in finding a photographic process from the mid 19th century more environmentally responsible than anything else used today.

My images are printed on Fabriano Disegno Ecologico Per Artisti. According to the manufacturer Cartiere Miliani Fabriano, the paper is produced with 100% post consumer recycled pulp.¹⁰ Cartiere Miliani Fabriano claims on their website:

The use of recycled pulp allows to save [sic] 15 trees per ton of paper produced. Thanks to hydropower 14.000.000 m³ of methane are spared, avoiding 26.000 tonnes of CO₂ air emissions. The company respects the Kyoto protocol, certified by the ministerial authorization n. 566. The paper is labeled "FSC 100% recycled" guaranteeing that the product is made of post consumer reclaimed material (in this case post consumer waste office paper) in accordance with Forest Stewardship Council standards, supporting responsible use of forest resources.¹¹

The emulsion I use is most often spinach, a renewable material, usually harvested 6 weeks after planting. The deep color of the plant and its relatively quick fading properties makes it ideal for making anthotypes.

The framing in the exhibition is made with reclaimed lumber from the Habitat for Humanity's ReStore, a retail store that supports the Habitat for Humanity mission by reselling surplus building materials.¹²

This exhibition has a finite life, the images will fade and eventually disappear. But rather than add to the Fowkes' "stockpile of art objects" the pieces from this exhibition can be broken down, reused or recycled.

Contemplative Meditation and Imagery

The imagery in this exhibition comes from a desire to better understand my personal environment and to comment upon it and to stimulate a new look at the world and how we exist in it. Unlike traditional botanical specimens that explicitly categorize and define a specimen, these images are an implied expression of the form.

This exhibition is intended to combine the historical aesthetic of botanical specimens with contemporary ideas of landscape and sustainable art. Unlike Mann's ideas of permanence and place, anathotypes allow for an exploration of the temporal nature of the landscape and the effects of time and light on the natural world. The images, simple, formal compositions, are a deconstruction of the larger landscape allowing for contemplation of the individual parts. As anathotypes, the prints have a finite lifetime and like the actual plants themselves, continue to change during their existence eventually fading into oblivion.

In his exhibition and book, *An Octave of Prayer*, Minor White explores the relationships between meditation, images and photography. The images chosen for his exhibition fell in to two groups, those depicting prayer or meditation and those images

that White sees as a “catalyst” for mediation and as a beginning for a union with God. In the essay, White writes

WHEN TWO FORCES (original subject or its image and a person in meditation) ARE INTERACTING (coming together with a light degree of resonance) A THIRD FORCE MAY ENTER. In the context of prayer we may say the third force is grace. When the divine third force *enters* the meditation of the critic, photographer or viewer, his state might assume some aspects of the *contemplative* and thus the mystical.¹³

He later states, “Whenever we perform our medium as orison or prayer we become capable of expressing reverence for life...”¹⁴ It is these ideas of union between object, viewer/maker and a larger awareness that are woven into the anothotype images.

While White’s ideas in *An Octave of Prayer* exhibition are more overtly religious than my more humanist ideas, the idea that an image can become a catalyst for something more powerful than just its surface façade carries great weight. It allows the images to begin a further dialog.

In this project, the documentation of the forms is done with a digital camera. The expediency of the digital format as well as its negligible marginal cost (both monetarily and environmentally) makes it ideal for making multiple images. The digital format also allows for the immediate review of images in the pursuit of the essential image and the ability to enhance the images to best express them as anothotypes.

Through the digital camera, it becomes possible to concentrate solely on the act of image-making and a complete study of the specimen. It is in these moments that White’s ideas of photography as prayer or meditation are realized. In an *Octave of Prayer*, White quotes Haridas Chaudhuri’s writing in *The Philosophy of Meditation*:

In a very wide sense, meditation is the higher phase of concentration...Every now and then irrelevant thoughts and images distract your attention, but by perseverance

and practice, you succeed in shutting out all irrelevancies...The object occupies the mind. This uninterrupted flow of relevant ideas centering around the object.¹⁵

White continues to quote Chaudhuri's thoughts on non-religious "meditation" in artists and scientists and the similarities in glimpses of the Divine and flashes of inspiration through focused concentration.

The ease of the digital camera allows for this concentrated and sustained focus on the object and subsequently that glimpse of the Divine. Through this process, I have found I now instinctively relate to my new environment.

Through their formal qualities, the images become a catalyst for meditation. By encouraging an intimate look at the environment, the imagery asks the viewer to consider not only the formal aspects of these works, but their transient nature and to contemplate the impact of humans on the environment.

Conclusion

Creating this work has become a form of meditation. Each specimen is photographed multiple times while I explore the formal essence of the leaves or flowers. During these times, my mind becomes focused solely on the intricacies of each plant and how best to represent them. For me, meditation is not a quiet, still moment, but rather one where I am totally absorbed in what I am doing. While I work in my studio, or am in the process of collecting specimens, I strive to be free of any outside distractions, no music, no companion or other diversion. When I am in the field, this discipline allows me to concentrate on the landscape and to look at the fundamental nature of each plant and explore what "it" is that I find interesting about each plant.

ENDNOTES

ENDNOTES

1. Raymond B. Bragg, "Humanist Manifesto I," About Humanism, http://www.americanhumanist.org/who_we_are/about_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_I (accessed May 3, 2009).

2. American Humanist Association (AHA), "Frequently Asked Questions." About the AHA, http://www.americanhumanist.org/who_we_are/about_the_AHA/Frequently_Asked_Questions (accessed May 3, 2009).

In a letter to AHA members, Kurt Vonnegut (author, lecturer, philanthropist and former honorary president of the American Humanist Association) wrote: "I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without expectations of rewards or punishments after I am dead" (Elaine Friedman, "Kurt Vonnegut, Humanist, 1922 – 2007," Humanist Network News/American Humanist Association, <http://americanhumanist.org/hnn/archives/index.php?id=293&article=2> (accessed May 3, 2009)).

3. Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson, *Humanist Manifesto II*. American Humanist Association, http://www.americanhumanist.org/who_we_are/about_humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II (accessed May 3, 2009).

4. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development, II. Equity and the Common Interest* (paragraph #17), <http://worldinbalance.net/agreements/1987-brundtland.php> (accessed May 3, 2009)

5. Religion, Science and the Environment, "Patmos Proposals," The Aegean Sea Symposia 1995, <http://www.rsesymposia.org/more.php?catid=131&pcatid=50> (accessed May 3, 2009).

6. Wet-plate collodion negatives are made with gun-cotton, soaked in alcohol and ether and sensitized with potassium iodide. The syrupy mixture is then poured on to a glass plate and exposed in the camera while still wet. It was invented in 1848 by F. Scott Archer and a prevalent method of photography between 1855 and 1881.

7. Lyle Rexer, *Photography's Antiquarian Avant-Garde* (New York: Harry N. Adams, Inc.), 80.

8. Andrew Hunt, and Catrin Lorch, "The Art of Making Do With Enough," in *The New Art*, ed. Maggie Smith and Matthew Arnatt (London: Rachmaninoff's/Zoo Art Fair, 2006), 104. <http://www.translocal.org/writings/makingdo.htm> (accessed June 1, 2009).

9. Sir John Herschel first created Anthotypes during a flurry of experimentation with various photographic methods. The process was not permanent and was quickly relegated to obscurity. It should be noted that while the prints do continue to fade, there are some examples of Herschel's original anthotypes in the photography collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin. They are kept in dark storage with limited access to the public. The process was significant enough to be included in Henry Hunt Snelling's, *The History and Practice of the Art of Photography* published in 1849 (reprinted 1970). Snelling's book, the first published in the United State on the practice of photography, has instructions on numerous early photographic processes. Like the anthotypes, almost all of these processes have been forgotten except to a few photo historians and artists.

10. Cartiere Miliani Fabriano, Linea Arte: "Disegno Ecologico Per Artisti," Products: Drawing Paper: Art Line, http://www.cartierefabriano.it/prod_scheda.php?cat=3&sot=2&art=26&ln=it

Carta da disegno ecologica, acid free, prodotta con il 100% di cellulosa riciclata post-consumer. Superficie leggermente marcata e con un alto grado di bianco, superiore a quello di una comune carta riciclata. Grazie alla sua ottima collatura superficiale e in massa è ideale per schizzi e disegno con matita, carboncino, pastello, matita colorata e inchiostro. L'utilizzo di cellulosa riciclata consente di salvare 15 alberi ogni tonnellata di carta prodotta (pari a 1.200 blocchi). L'uso di energia idroelettrica genera un risparmio di 14.000.000 m³ di metano e di 26.000 tonnellate di non emissioni di CO₂. L'azienda rispetta il protocollo di Kyoto (autorizzazione ministeriale all'emissione di gas serra n. 566). La carta si fregia dell'etichetta "FSC 100% riciclato" garantendo che il prodotto è realizzato grazie al riutilizzo di materiale riciclato post-consumer in accordo con gli standard FSC, supportando un utilizzo responsabile delle risorse forestali.

11. Ibid.

12. Habitat for Humanity, "Habitat ReStores," Construction and Environmental, <http://www.habitat.org/env/restores.aspx> (accessed May 3, 2009).

13. Minor White, *Octave of Prayer: An Exhibition on a Theme* (New York: Aperture, 1972), 17:21.

14. Ibid., 22.

15. Haridas Chaudhuri, *Philosophy of Meditation* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965), 16. Quoted in Minor White, *Octave of Prayer: An Exhibition on a Theme*. Vol. 17 (New York: Aperture, 1972).

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MASTER'S EXHIBITION

TAYLOR ART GALLERY

SUMMER 2009



FIGURE 1. “*Umbellularia californica*”



FIGURE 2. “Arbutus menziesii”



FIGURE 3. “*Woodwardia fimbriata*”

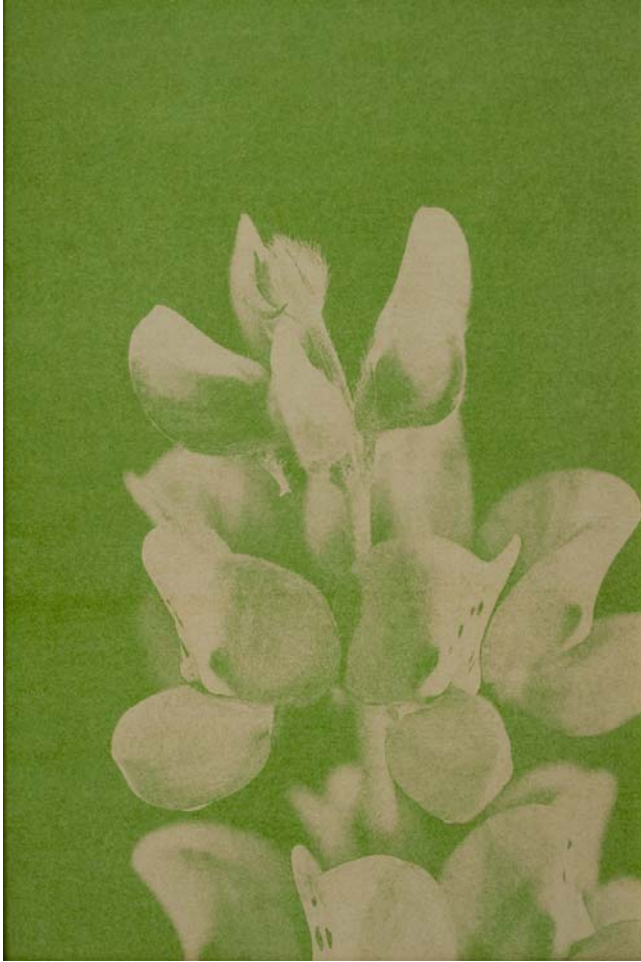


FIGURE 4. “Lupinus nanus”

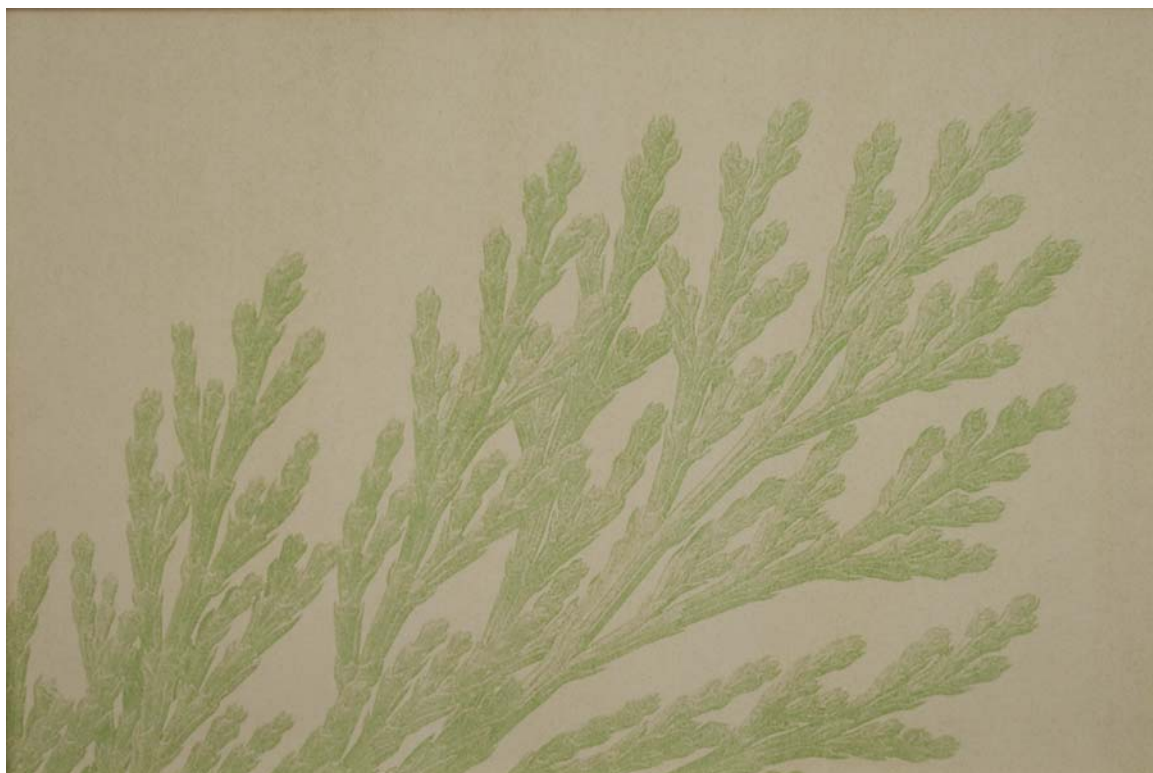


FIGURE 5. “*Calocedrus decurrens*”



FIGURE 6. "Pinus ponderosa"



FIGURE 7. "Quercus wislizeni"

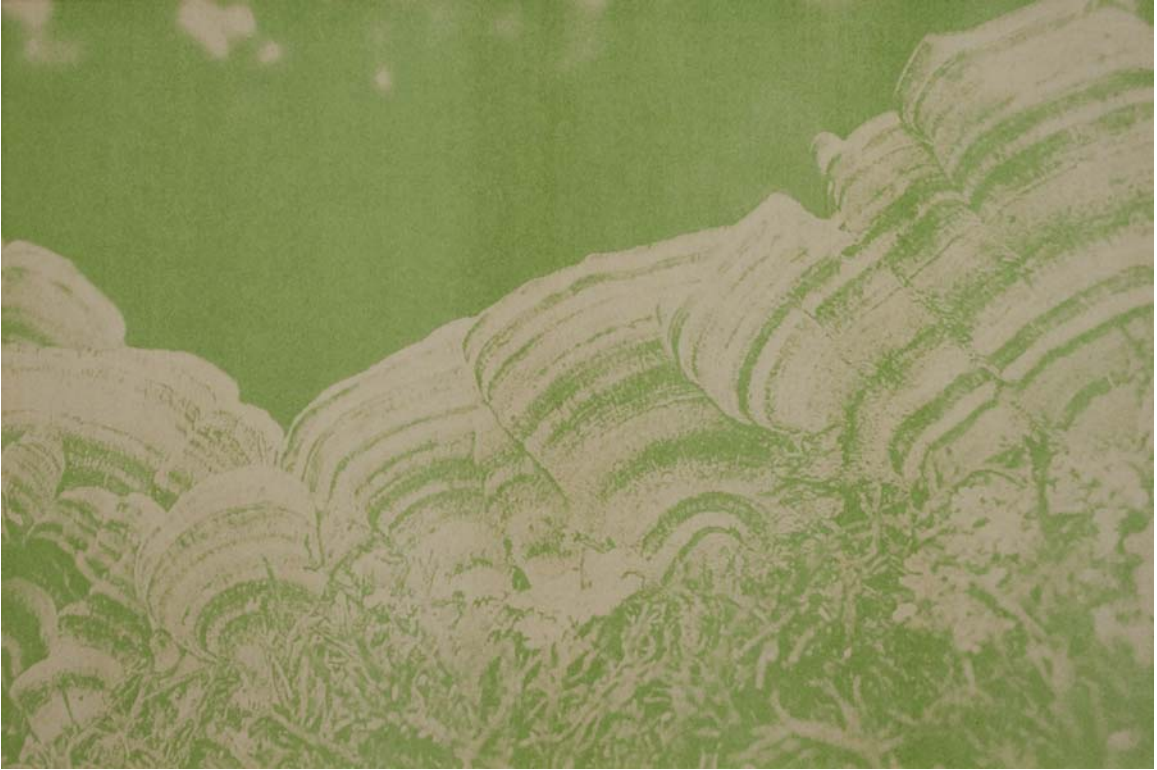


FIGURE 8. “*Triametes versicolor*”

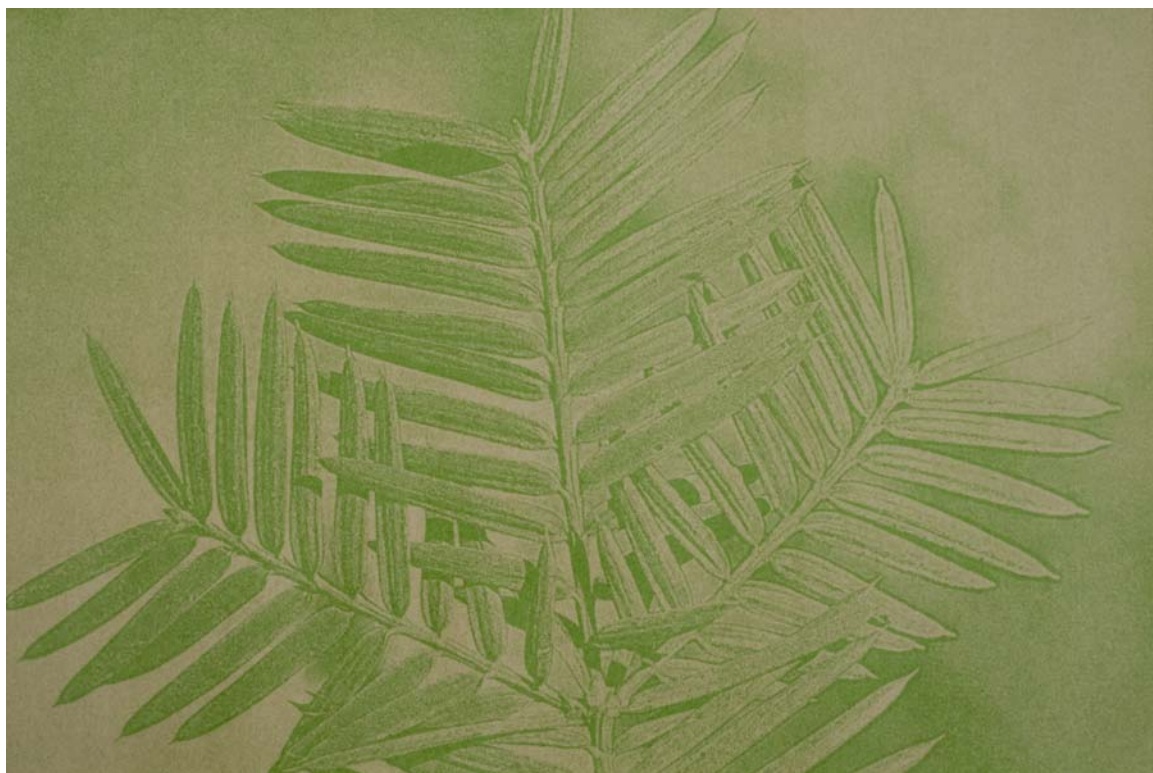


FIGURE 9. "Torreyya californica"



FIGURE 10. "Pinus sabiniana"



FIGURE 11. "Pseudotsuga menziesii"



FIGURE 12. “*Amsinckia menziesii* var *intermedia*”



FIGURE 13. "Pseudotsuga menziesii"



FIGURE 14. "Gilia tricolor"



FIGURE 15. “Calocedrus decurrens”



FIGURE 16. “Woodwardia fimbriata”



FIGURE 17. “*Umbellularia californica*”



FIGURE 18. "Pinus ponderosa"



FIGURE 19. “Arctostaphylos Manzanita”



FIGURE 20. “Still Life with *Dichelostemma capitatum*”



FIGURE 21. “Adiantum aleuticum”

APPENDIX A

METHOD

The images in the exhibition were created using a Cannon Digital Rebel XT camera and editing them in Adobe Photoshop. The images were converted to black and white using the Black & White adjustment layer, the contrast increased using a Curves adjustment layer and were sharpened to better define edges. In some cases, layer masks were used to hide extraneous information in the image. High contrast images with well defined edges work best for this process. Using spinach there is a range of about 4 different tones; unchanged/dark, medium, light and white, though there is usually a hint of tone in even the most bleached out parts of the image. The images were printed on Arista and Pictorico OHP Transparency Film.

To make an anotype print, the leaves or petals are ground to a fine slurry in a food processor or blender [Image 1] and strained to remove the pulp [Image 2]. The remaining juice is used as an emulsion and coated on the paper with a brush [Image 3]. Often, several coats of emulsion are necessary to build up a significant color. Any paper that will withstand the repeated wetting from the emulsion can be used, but a smooth finish paper will yield better detail in the image.

The image comes from a positive transparency that is placed in contact with the coated paper and placed in the sun [Image 4]. After several hours or days, the clear parts of the transparency have allowed the sun to bleach out the pigment leaving an image on the coated paper. In Northern California (latitude 39.8°) exposure of a spinach image on a clear, sunny summer day is 3-4 hours. A coating of gelatin will protect the image and extend its life in sunlight by about fifty percent.



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3

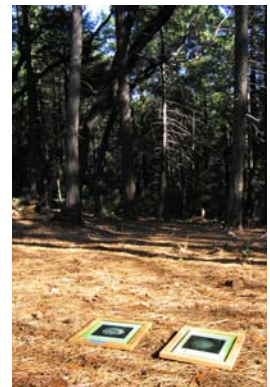


Image 4