



AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE
FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

Education Kit

30 October - 6 December 2015

The Alchemists: Rediscovering Photography in the Age of the Jpeg

Curated by Suzanne Buljan, Cherine Fahd &
Dr. Martyn Jolly

Recommended for

Year 9-12 High School Students

Stage 5-6

Visual Arts

Photographic and Digital Media

This kit is designed to assist discussion and promote a deeper understanding of the concepts and techniques presented in ACP's exhibitions by focusing on selected works.

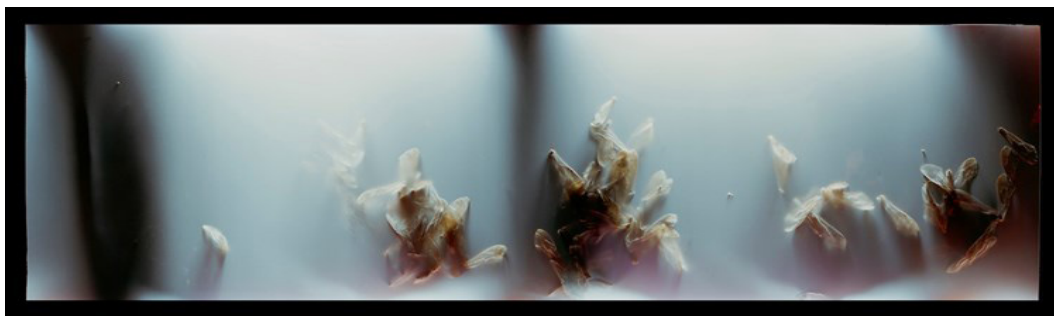
Want to book a visit for your school or find out how ACP can assist your students to learn about photography?

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EXHIBITION CYCLE THEMES

Darkroom practices
Historical processes
Materiality
Perception
Abstraction

Introduction

The Alchemists: Rediscovering Photography in the Age of the JPEG is a collaboration between the Australian Centre for Photography, Australian National University and The University of Sydney, Sydney College of the Arts. Involving an exhibition, symposium, masterclass and digital publication, *The Alchemists* is curated by Suzanne Buljan, Cherine Fahd and Martyn Jolly. At a time when digital images are rapidly created and consumed, this project considers the resurgent interest in experimental darkroom processes within contemporary photography. The project invokes new hybrid practices to hone in on the nexus between analogue and digital photography, with particular consideration of an Australian perspective within a broader Asia-Pacific context.

The Alchemists centres on an expansive exhibition presented across all of the galleries at the Australian Centre for Photography, featuring the work of 25 artists from Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Thailand. The exhibition brings together new and recent works from early-practice and established artists from the region, exemplifying new analogue/digital forms that collapse historic processes and future innovations.

From co-curators Dr Martyn Jolly, Charine Fahd and Suzanne Buljan:

This is not just a nostalgic retreat to the past, a hipster reinvention of the outmoded, or a retro fad. Nor is it part of some redundant 'debate' between the lost 'purity' of the analogue in the face of the encroaching contamination of the 'digital'. Rather, it is a discovery of another mode of making — a slower making, a more curious making, and a making which looks, in the words of one young artist, 'simultaneously backwards and forward.'

Artists:

Joyce Campbell | Ben Cauchi | Danica Chappell | Lisa Clunie | Lucinda Eva-May |
Ashleigh Garwood | Mike Gray | David Haines | Joyce Hinterding | Matthew Higgins |
Benjamin Lichtenstein | Todd McMillan | Dane Mitchell | Laura Moore | Sarah Mosca |
Anne Noble | Sawit Prasertphan | Kate Robertson | Catherine Rogers | Aaron Seeto |
Benjamin StoneHerbert | CJ Taylor | Craig Tu n | James Tylor | Daisuke Yokota

Read more in the online catalogue https://acp.org.au/images/Exhibitions/2015_Cycle5/TheAlchemistscatalogue.pdf

Kylie Banyard, 'A Politics Of The Outmoded', *Photography & Fictions: Locating the Dynamics of Practice*,
(ed. V. Garnons-Williams), QCP, Brisbane, 2014, p.44.



THE WORK

Sawit Prasertphan

Occupying Ground, 2015
Accumulated photographs with
liquid emulsion

Rationale

Today hundreds of thousands of images are uploaded a minute, *The Alchemists: Rediscovering Photography in the Age of the JPEG* allows for a meditation on the historical or analogue processes in photography. Here artists celebrate the materiality of photography and the elemental foundations of the medium that have seduced scientists and artists alike for centuries.

Question:

Having experienced the works of 25 contemporary artists working with historical practices throughout the three galleries of the ACP consider the following;
Has the digital imagery that dominates universal visual culture changed the way contemporary artists employ historic processes into their practices?



THE WORK

MIKE GRAY

Phonomex MK II, 2014

Single element lens projecting
into a glass sphere

All works from the series *New
Australian Plants and Animals*

All works courtesy of the artist

Perception and Sight

Mike Gray's practice explores the dislocation of the science of sight and our complete visual perception. Sight is not just what the eye sees but is shaped by the brain and the nervous system and is completed by memory and experience. Gray uses a single simple lens box camera to explore the true quality of sight in the human eye. As you will observe, the focal length will vary depending on the distance. The curved field of focus offers photographs which are blurred and fades around the edges.

Questions:

Look through the Phonomex MK II at the entrance of the exhibition, what do you see?

Gray has used this single simple lens camera to make the photographs seen on the wall. Consider the quality of the photographs and their subject matter. Do the works evoke familiar or uncanny feelings for you?

Using the cultural frame, consider the significance of the title of Gray's series of photographs and the experience of perceiving Oxford Street through Gray's Phonomex MK II. What does this work say about Australia's historical relationship with its people, flora and fauna?

Activity:

Make your own camera obscura and perceive the world through a lensless camera...

As a class select a classroom with a window with a view. Create a completely light-tight blackened room with black tarpaulin. Create a pin-sized hole in the covering over the window. Now watch the outside slowly appear inverted on inside!



THE WORK

BEN CAUCHI

An illusion among the shadows 2013,

Ambrotype

That which can be seen is not all there is

2013, Ambrotype

Courtesy of the artist and Darren Knight
Gallery, Sydney

CJ TAYLOR

Rearcheology of the bush (rising doe)

2014, Acrylotype

Rearcheology of the bush (.223) 2014,

Acrylotype

Courtesy of This Is No Fantasy,
Melbourne; .M Contemporary, Sydney
and Galleria Marcolini, Forli

Ambrotypes

The ambrotype process (from the Greek 'ambros' meaning 'immortal') was invented by James Ambrose Cutting in 1854.

The ambrotype is made with a thin or underexposed collodion negative on a glass plate. When backed with black varnish, paper or cloth, the thin negative turns into a positive photograph. This technique was popular until the 1860s. Today, black glass and other stained glass are used in addition to clear glass ambrotypes.

The acrylotype is a contemporary version of the ambrotype in which a sheet of black plexiglass is used in place of glass.

Contemporary artists Ben Cauchi and CJ Taylor employ this historic photographic technique to look at contemporary ideas of memory and history.

Questions:

Using the structural frame, how does the colour and contrast of Ben Cauchi's works play with the historical and the contemporary. How does the Ambrotype process lend to the ethereal nature of his works?

This pre-industrial photographic practice often created imperfections in the prints. This made quality in the works reveal the hand of the artist. How have both Cauchi and Taylor cultivated this to the advantage of their works.

Using Cauchi and Taylor's work as example, discuss how ambrotypes lend themselves memory and history, authenticity and fiction?



THE WORK

JAMES TYLOR

Terra Botanica II (Acacia iteaphyllia)
2015

Terra Botanica II (Macademia
integrifolia) 2015

Terra Botanica II (Leptospermum
scoparium, Mānuka) 2015

Terra Botanica II (Ipomoea batatas II,
Kūmara) 2015

Terra Botanica II (Ipomoea batatas I,
Kūmara) 2015

Terra Botanica II (Metosideros excelsa,
Pōhutukawa) 2015

All works are Becquerel daguerreotype

AARON SEETO

Fortress (Returning Head) 2010,
Daguerreotype

Fortress (Returning Finger #1) 2010,
Daguerreotype

Fortress (Returning Finger #2) 2010,
Daguerreotype

Fortress (Returning Hand) 2010,
Daguerreotype

Daguerrotype

Often thought of as the 'original form of photography, the Daguerreotype was invented by Louis-Jaques-Mandé Daguerre and introduced worldwide in 1839.

In this process, a polished sheet of silver-plated copper is treated with fumes that render the surface sensitive to light. It is then exposed inside a camera for as long as the photographer wants, depending on the external lighting conditions and the desired artistic effect. The image on the plate is made visible by fuming it with mercury vapour, after which it is bathed in a liquid chemical treatment to retard its light-sensitivity. It is then rinsed, dried and sealed behind glass in a protective enclosure.

Less toxic than the original Daguerrotype processs the *Becquerel Daguerreotype* uses filtered light in place of mercury vapours in the developing process.

Questions:

The process of the Daguerrotype produces an ethereal quality in the photograph created, the image does not seem 'grounded' on the plate, but floats on the surface of the metal. Consider the title of Aaron Seeto's series 'Oblivion', how does the relationship between technique and subject matter lend itself to this theme?

Artist James Tylor explores his ancestral heritage including Aboriginal (Kurna), Māori (Te Arawa), European (English, Scottish, Irish, Dutch and Norwegian) and Australian ancestry. His technique uses a combination of digital imagery and historic processing to create works that provide historical and social commentary. Consider Tylor's series *Terra Botanica II* (*Acacia iteaphyllia*). How does the content of Tylor's images and the techniques used subvert Australia's colonial history.

Activity:

Look around at each of the different processes in the exhibition. In considering your own identity, what historical photographic technique would you select to portray your own narrative and why?

THE WORK

MATT HIGGINS

Crushed 2015, Unique chemigrams from the series *Hit, Crushed, Rammed*



Chemigram

One of the 'newer' analogue photographic techniques, the Chemigram was discovered by Pierre Cordier in 1956.

The process involves chemical resists, which are applied directly to photographic paper. This is a camera-less photographic technique. Sometimes thought of as a combination of photography and painting, the Chemigram offers artists a great deal of flexibility and the opportunity for endlessly experimentation with intricate patterns and effects.

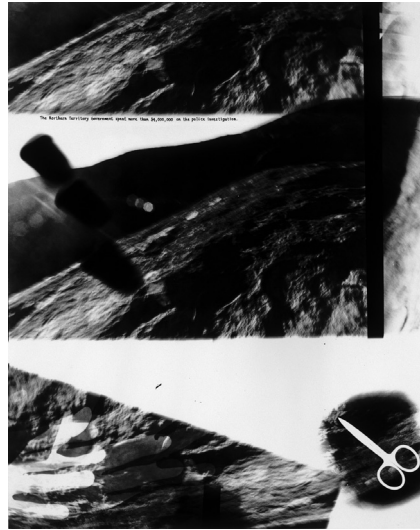
Questions:

Observe Matt Higgins' ten unique chemigrams. Consider these works as traces of our world, how does Higgins' exploration of form play with ideas of documentation and photography itself?

Do these works alter your understanding of the nature and function of the photograph?

Activity:

Chemigrams are an intersection of painting, photography and graphic design. Make your own! Have fun crossing alchemy and photography. All you need is light sensitive material and resists that, can range from wax and oil to peanut butter. The resist can be incised or drawn on to the surface to distinguish pattern in the work. Expose the work to daylight, develop and fix it and see the intricate and detailed work that can be produced.



THE WORK
 CATHERINE ROGERS
 The Nature of Evidence
 (The Trials of Lindy
 Chamberlain), 1986, Photogram

Photogram

A photogram is a camera-less photograph. A 1:1 negative image is revealed through its direct contact with a light sensitive material. The Photogram predates the development of the camera. This lens-less technique has been used over this period, from Anna Atkins to Man Ray, for varied scientific and artistic reason.

Questions:

Observe the title of Catherine Rogers' work. How does the Photogram process lend itself to notions of 'evidence'.

Consider how Rogers has used photograms as a form of documentation and history making. How does this technique differ in affect from scientific or archival photographic imagery?

Activity:

Consider how Rogers has conceptualised and employed layers to develop an historical story. Design your own photographic narrative using photograms and techniques of layering in your story telling.