**Artist Profile: Kirsten Spry**

Kirsten Spry is a Sydney photographer who is interested in alternative photographic techniques, including cameraless photography. It’s not as contradictory as it sounds. The techniques she uses can be traced back to photography’s early beginnings: mixing chemicals and coating paper to make it sensitive to light, using the sun instead of an enlarger, and placing objects on the paper to record their image – no camera in sight. The historic processes she uses include photograms, cyanotypes, and salt prints. But she’s not a total purist. She also throws some technology into the mix by using a digital camera and digital darkroom (Photoshop). “I’m not very hung up on megapixels or lenses; I’ve found a scanner does quite nicely sometimes instead of a camera, and just a lens cap with a pin-hole in it can make for a lovely lens. The final print is more hand-crafted

**Series: Lucky Charm (Cyanotypes)**

The images in Kirsten Spry’s Lucky Charm (2011) series are all cyanotypes. The English scientist and astronomer Sir [John Herschel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Herschel) discovered the cyanotype procedure in 1842. He considered it as a means of reproducing notes and diagrams, as in blueprints. It was [Anna Atkins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Atkins), a botanist and photographer, who applied this process to photography in 1843. She had learned directly from William Henry Fox Talbot his "photogenic drawing" or “photogram” technique (in which an object is placed on light-sensitized paper which is exposed to the sun to produce an image). She combined the two processes by placing plant specimens on paper coated using the cyanotype method, using sunlight to create a sillhouette of the plant, and in doing so became the very first female photographer. Atkins is also considered the first person to publish a book illustrated with [photographic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Photograph) images.

Following in Atkins footsteps, Kirsten has produced this cyanotype series, taking it a step forward by experimenting with what she calls “double exposure” cyanotypes. These images are sun prints that show two cyanotype images in one artwork. They have been created by coating the paper a second time after the first image is achieved. The first image used a lith photogram, and the second, a digital negative. The differences in the blue tone are due to variations in the strength of the sunlight on the days the images were made. About this series, Kirsten says: “If you saw these images in a dream they would herald success of some kind. What you see in daily life imprints itself in your mind’s eye. I hope that by looking at these images, the image will reappear in your dreams, providing a lucky charm for future endeavours.”

**Series: Salt Prints of Sea Pools**

William Henry Fox Talbot, known as “The Father of Modern Photography”, invented the salted paper process in 1833, while he was on his honeymoon. He was the first to make a silver image on paper. On his first attempts, paper coated with a silver nitrate solution and exposed to light only gave a faint metallic silver image. He later discovered that by first applying salt to the paper and then coating it with the silver nitrate solution he could get a much stronger image. This is basically the same way that Kirsten Spry has made this series of salt prints — only she’s added a few tweaks, including toning each print in gold (gold chloride), to grant permanence to the image.

While photography’s pioneers were slogging it out with toxic chemicals in primitive darkrooms, early out-doorsy Sydney-siders were enjoying the delights of ocean baths and pools. There are about 100 sea pools in NSW today, some are natural depressions or rings of rocks, some are indigenous fishing spots (or bogey holes), and others are hewn out of rock platforms or built with concrete to form a swimming pool. Inspired by these unique pools in their magnificent settings, Kirsten Spry has created this series: *Salt Prints of Sea Pools*. “This series reflects my love and awe of the ocean. The images portray a new interpretation of our of our world-renown beach culture,” she says.