

The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes



Christopher James, *Kafka-man*, Venice, Italy, 1987
(Diana plastic camera negative—platinum print)
(Courtesy of the author)

Christopher James

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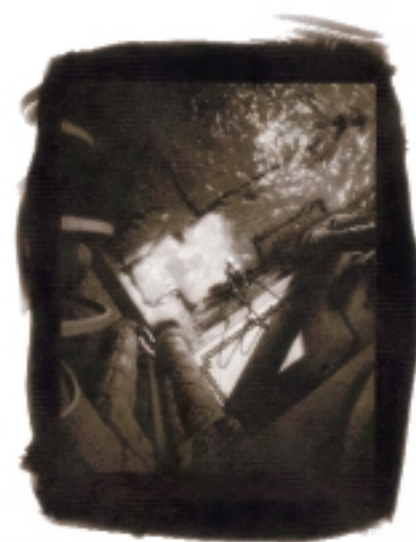


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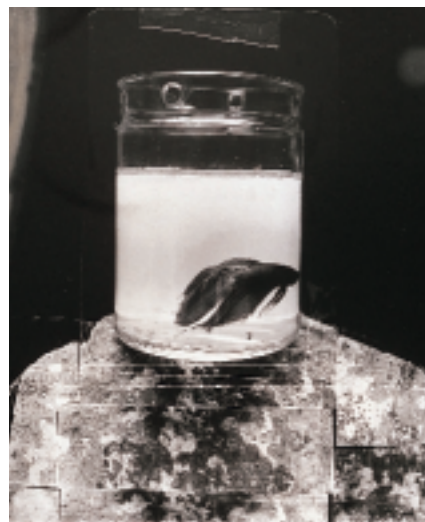
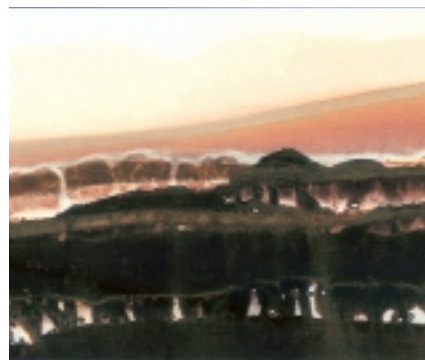
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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Alternative Photographic Processes

This book represents a significant part of the evolution of my education as an artist and teacher of artists. For the last two decades I've been modifying and adding to these pages, and in their abbreviated form, they have served as working notes for my students. The content represents what we have learned together; pertinent and peculiar observations, techniques, anecdotes, and a good dose of interesting history to enhance the connections between the past and contemporary process. My intention was to create a resource that was interesting to read and "user friendly" and to write a flexible guide that would encourage the reader to see what might happen if they let their creativity, and interdisciplinary associations, out to play. To paraphrase Mark Twain: ... it hardly matters when your technique is great if your imagination is out of focus.

I have organized this book to meet the needs of several different audiences. For the teacher, the book is designed to be flexible and compatible with individual teaching styles, and I have done my best to make the contents accessible to "students" from high school through the professional levels. Teachers will be able to use this book to guide their students through the alternative photographic arts, via the generating of hand-made camera negatives through a logical evolution of alternative process techniques. It is very significant, to both teacher and student, that many of the wonderful illustrations in the book were made by students at all levels of instruction.

For the student, the book is designed as an inspirational and comprehensive technical resource because it addresses the historical, procedural, and interdisciplinary connections from the beginning of photography through digital. The word *student* implies someone in a class, but in truth we are all forever... students. In that regard, this book is a guide for photographic artists of all abilities and levels of knowledge.

The creative opportunities of alternative and non-silver photographic processes have been, until recently, relatively unexplored territory for contemporary artists. A recognition of the genre's interdisciplinary possibilities is rapidly changing this situation, because creative people of all ages and disciplines are seeking modes of expression that best suit their intentions. They are embracing, in this digital age, the interdisciplinary potential of alternative processes; the marriage of nineteenth century handmade craft, science, and romanticism in concert with twenty-first century technologies and conceptual perceptions.

I've made every effort to avoid creating a book that functions as a dogmatic archetype or to serve the reader as a pedagogical and scientific model. You will discover that repeatable success in alternative image making will be based on a



Christopher James, *Gellert Baths*, Budapest, 1983

(Black and white silver print, sepia, selenium, gold toners, watercolor, pencil, and enamels)

(Courtesy of the author)

willingness to enjoy making images for the *process* rather than the *product*. As you work, practiced techniques, patience, and attention to detail will reward your efforts. You will often see that it is the unexpected accident, in tandem with your practice, that will transform the science to art. It is often the logic of the unplanned effect that is one of the fine benefits of working in this discipline. It is this philosophy that has allowed our dexterity in the arts to evolve. If you get excited by challenges and are willing to enjoy the idiosyncrasies of alternative process, you will have wonderful times learning and will discover a vast menu of inspirations for your personal vision. The primary thing I would like you to remember is to enjoy your creative self and not to settle for the quick solution. Take your time and pay attention to your technique, small details, and chemical safety. In that regard, I have done my best to make this book a safe one to use. Always handle the chemistry with reasonable care, pay attention to my safety notices, and you will not have any problems.

Alternative and non-silver processes are somewhat mercurial in nature and full of surprises; enjoy their quirks and see them as opportunities. Much of what you will personally discover will emerge as a result of play, and your discoveries will be similar to the process of learning that you experienced as a child. If you stop to consider the things that you do best in your life you will come to the reasonable conclusion that your special, and unique, talents are ones that you taught yourself. This is the ebb and flow of how the animal kingdom learns, and it is called *play*. It is this play that delights the mind and stimulates the process of teaching yourself—just for the joy of it. That is, of course, why you decided it was a good idea to be an artist in the first place. This book, like you, will always be a work in progress.