

Don't Press Print - the collodion process: online conference

Online: 1 and 2 October 2020

Presenters' biographies and abstracts

Below are details of the presenters and short abstracts of papers where we have been supplied with them. They are in order of presentation. If you have any questions please email: director@rps.org

Dr Michael Pritchard

The Royal Photographic Society

Frank Menger

CFPR, University of the West of England

Thursday, 1 October 2020

1. Mark Osterman / *Collodion as a Medium*.

Mark Osterman and France Scully Osterman established Scully & Osterman in 1991. Through extensive primary research and practical application, the Ostermans have evolved as historians and modern masters of a wide variety of historic (alternative) photography, most notably, the wet-plate collodion process.

Located in Rochester, NY, Mark Osterman is Photographic Process Historian at George Eastman Museum. Mark's unique series of workshops chronicling the evolution of photography are now open to the public. These workshops tap the extensive resources of the Eastman Museum collection, including period publications, inspection of vintage masterworks and equipment from the archives.

The Ostermans are both represented by Howard Greenberg Gallery, NYC and Tilt Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ.

<http://www.collodion.org/>

2. Adrienne Lundgren and Rachel Wetzel / *Archer with a Shelf-Life: Dry Plate Collodion and Its Use in the United States*

The announcement of Frederick Scott Archer's wet collodion negative process in 1851 has consistently been described as an improvement over the calotype negative, in that its clarity and detail far surpassed its predecessor. This description of wet plate is a broad simplification, overlooking the loss of a key feature of earlier processes, the ability to sensitize and store negatives for future use. The flexibility of making negatives in advance opened up the world for exploration, allowing photographers to easily make views in remote and rugged places, unhindered by photographic chemistry and darkroom tents. Archer's invention, while conveying a crisper more detailed image, limited photographers by weighing them down with the darkroom equipment that was necessary to transport to the outdoor site. One could argue that only with the perfection of Archer's process by later experimenters who produced dry plate variants, did the collodion process truly supplant the calotype, providing increased clarity along with matched convenience for the plein air practitioner.

Dry collodion, while born of wet plate, underwent its own long and winding evolution to achieve dependability. It would struggle with balancing its advantage of convenience with its distinct drawback, long exposure times. Though with advancements, dry plate negatives had shorter exposure times, produced more successful images, and were more widely used than modern scholars contend. From the mid-1850s to the 1870s, the literature was rife with discussions on how to perfect the pre-sensitized dry collodion plate, extending its shelf life and reducing exposure times. The results of these experiments produced several processes that could be stored for a period of up to 18 months, and whose speed nearly equalled that of wet plate. The increased shelf life allowed for the manufacture and sale of dry collodion plates, opening the medium to the true photographic amateur.

By re-examining the wet plate collodion process and allowing space in the narrative for the dry processes, one does not diminish the contributions made by Archer, but instead revises the narrative on the role his invention played in the continued expansion and evolution of photographic technology. The gelatin dry plate negative no longer emerges from the ether in 1871 but is instead part of a continuum of dry negative processes which originated with the calotype. This paper hopes to shed light on the evolution of the collodion dry plate and its use by American photographers as exemplified by the work of Amateur Photographic Exchange Club.

Adrienne Lundgren has been a Senior Photograph Conservator at the Library of Congress for the past 17 years. She is a graduate of the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (2001) and attended the Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation at the George Eastman House (2002). Her research has focused on reinterpreting photographs from a technical perspective, publishing and lecturing on coatings applied to daguerreotypes, the use of glycerin in platinum printing, and photographic maps of the Civil War. More recently Lundgren has focused on the creating of large datasets to aid in the attribution and interpretation of photographs. To this end she was awarded a John Kluge Fellowship at the Library of Congress (2012) to study the photographs of F. Holland Day and is currently working on a book on 19th century photographer John Wood.

Rachel Wetzel is a photograph conservator at the Library of Congress, in Washington, DC, USA. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) in Art History in 1997 and Master of Arts degree with a certificate in Art Conservation from (SUNY) Buffalo State College (New York) in 2005. She was a 2017 recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities Research and Development Grant, where for two years she examined, photographed and created an online, publically accessible database on the daguerreotypes of Robert Cornelius, pioneering Philadelphia photographer responsible for the first photographic self-portrait. Wetzel has lectured extensively on the preservation and treatment of photographs as well as on the history and technology of the early daguerreotype.

3. Ashleigh Black / *Lights and Shadows of Nature Reversed - George Washington Wilson's Guide to the Collodion Process*

Ashleigh Black is a second year PhD candidate in Film and Visual Culture at the University of Aberdeen. While pursuing her Masters in Museum Studies she had the opportunity to work on a placement with Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums cataloguing their George Washington Wilson carte de visite collection. Ashleigh's PhD research is centred on the life and work of George Washington Wilson and she is currently designing and curating an online exhibition based on his cityscapes of Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

4. Zsuzsanna Szegedy-Maszak / *The Recently Discovered Notebook of Miklós Barabás*

A Case Study of How Photographers in Eastern Europe Acquired Information on the Wet-Collodion Process

A few years ago, a notebook filled with recipes for the wet-collodion process was found in the bequest of the 19th-century Hungarian painter-photographer Miklós Barabás. The notebook dates from 1862 to 1865, and over the course of thirty hand-written pages, we find variations of all the steps needed to create carte de visite portraits and stereo views by using the wet-collodion process, from sensitizing the glass plate to the making of albumen paper for printing. The recipes are usually recorded with the names of their respective source, most of them French, British, and German publications, and the names of some of the key figures in the development of the process (such as André Disdéri, Valentin Blanchard, Thomas Sutton, Alois Löcherer, Gustav Kleffel, and Dr. Hermann Heid) appear alongside others which have nearly faded into oblivion. In addition, there are also recipes that Barabás and his assistant jotted down after having watched fellow photographer colleagues working in Hungary, and there are even examples of the artist's own experiments of perfecting the technique. Among the variations of the wet-collodion process, we find some that improved the procedure either by extending its sensitivity with additives such as Peruvian balm or by making it possible to remove the negative from its glass carrier to be transferred to different surfaces. The notebook begins before the terminology had evolved in the region and well over a year before the first detailed description of the wet-collodion process was published in Hungary. In other words, it was a time when many photographers in the region were still inclined to guard their recipes from potential competitors.

Although Miklós Barabás is best known as a portrait painter, recent scholarship has acknowledged the significance he had as a photographer. In addition to his photographic work, his theoretical statements in defence of photography and his investment in constructing a grand photo studio position him as a key figure in the history of photography in the region during the period of the wet-collodion process. A notebook such as this offers a good case study of how photographers in Eastern Europe collected and acquired knowledge of the wet-collodion technique, even though they lived in a region where there were still no specialized publications on photography.

Dr. Zsuzsanna Szegedy-Maszák is the head of the Budapest Gallery, Budapest History Museum. She wrote her dissertation on the photographic oeuvre of the 19th-century Hungarian painter-photographer Miklós Barabás. In 2019, she served as the curator of the Hungarian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale.

5. Tony Richards / *The Digiype and the Inter-positive. A new Collodion narrative*

It may come as no surprise that with the resurgence of the wet plate collodion process, photographers and artists have begun to merge digital working methodologies into contemporary collodion practices with the first experiments dating from as early as 2011. Those initial experiments split opinion within the wet plate collodion community. What was described as a gimmick and a fad is still now common practice with some wet plate collodion photographers. The seclusion of the Covid19 lockdown has led to a resurgence of these hybrid methods. With each new iteration of the digital-collodion process, the unique visual and physical properties of historic wet plate collodion are changing, challenging established ideas within the historic photographic community.

Tony Richards is a photographer at the John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, specialising in multispectral and advanced imaging techniques. He has twenty years experience of imaging in the museum and heritage sector. He is also a practitioner of historic photographic processes with a specific interest in wet plate collodion and its application in contemporary working practice.

6. Ian Chamberlain / *Altered states; The use Collodion as part of an inter-disciplinary approach*

My presentation for the symposium will discuss my use of the wet plate collodion process and its developing role within my creative practice. I will give my personal viewpoint into how working in collaboration with experts in their field has given me greater insight into how the wet plate collodion process can work alongside and enhance my existing practice. I will be commenting on my use of the process to combine figurative and abstract qualities working under unifying themes.

Ian Chamberlain's work reinterprets manmade structures as monuments placed within the landscape acting as architectural metaphors of past and current technological achievements.

Ian has had a longstanding fascination with technology and architectural forms, these have included structures within industry, agriculture, science and the military. These in the past have included Goonhilly Earth station, The Lovell Telescope, The Maunsell Sea Forts and the Acoustic Sound mirrors. His most recent body of work deals with 'The Atlantic wall' the WWII German defence system built along the west coast of Europe. These brutalist forms are being interpreted as architectural metaphors concerning boundaries and borders,

Ian is interested in the use of a traditional Print process such as etching being used to record subject matter that is generally at the cutting edge of technology for its time. The etchings become an extension of his drawing allowing him to record the location through the interlinking processes of drawing and printmaking. The work serves as a visual historical document and record of places that he has visited.

Ian has exhibited Nationally and Internationally including London, Hong Kong, Sydney, New York, Barcelona and Berlin. His work is held in several national collections

7. Chihoko Ando / *Foreseeing the Future; Ambrotype Portrait Photos as a Symbol of Life and Death in the 19th Century Japan*

The ambrotype technique were introduced to Japan by European and American merchants and travellers, which included both professional photographers and amateurs, in the 1850s. It should be noted that the ambrotype was mainly adopted to take portrait photos of male warriors (samurai) in photo studios as a keepsake for their families. However, in the history of Japanese photography, the ambrotype as a portrait photo technique has been overlooked. This paper examines the portrait photo of Shina, an elderly woman, the photographer–merchant Osakaya Yohei's mother in comparison with some other ambrotype portraits and Japanese traditional portrait paintings in terms of motif, composition, and case. The analysis shows that the ambrotype portrait photo had mostly the same spiritual tradition of Japanese portrait paintings and could make it easier for the general people to practice this spiritual tradition of linking life and death. This characteristic of the ambrotype portrait photo is certainly one of the contributing factors to the establishment of photography among the general people toward the latter half of the 19th century, and with time, entry into the modern period of Japan.

Chihoko Ando / Email address: d9882001@edu.kit.ac.jp

Affiliation: Ph.D. Candidate in Design, Kyoto Institute of Technology, Japan

Education: 2019 M. E degrees in engineering, Kyoto Institute of Technology, Japan

Publication: Chihoko Ando “A study on Acceptance of Photographic Practice by Shimadzu Nariakira at the Dawn of Japanese Photography”, *Bulletin of The Japan Society for Arts and History of Photography*, 28(2), 2019, 5-15. (In Japanese)

Research theme in the doctoral program: Study on acceptance of calotype in the dawn of Japanese photography

8. Shreya Mukherjee / *Rebirth of the Picture-perfect Collodion: The New Indian Story*

Shreya Mukherjee is a researcher and an art educator. Her research interest is in the historical photographic processes and how they complement each other weaving visual languages. Her recent publication and presentation were on the Indian history of the calotype, a conference organised by The Pushkin Museum Russia, 2018. She is a co-founder of ‘Studio Goppo’ a research centre dedicated to the research on the historical photographic process and history. Shreya did her graduation and post-graduation in History of Art from Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati and is presently pursuing her research on Indian Photography during the pre-digital era.

9. Bill Nieberding / *A Withering Gaze: Technical Excellence and Aura in Contemporary Wet-collodion Photography*

Dr. Bill Nieberding is associate professor of art education at Stephen F. Austin State University. As recipient of a research and creative activities grant from SFA, he has been investigating the wet-plate collodion process and creating a “Portrait of East Texas” through still-life work, landscapes and portraits. Nieberding’s research interests include photography, phenomenology and the discourse of vision as it relates to contemporary image-making. He has published in the journals *Photographies* and *Art Education*, and has presented his research at conferences of the National Art Education Association, Texas Art Education Association and the Society for Photographic Education. Nieberding holds a Ph.D. in Art Education from The Ohio State University and a master’s degree in photography from Purdue University.

10. Alan Hodgson / *The collodion halftone process 1895 - a technical appraisal*

Alan Hodgson has a PhD in Chemistry but has worked primarily as an image physicist for the past 40 years. He spent 22 years with Ilford, first on silver halide photography and later on inkjet printing. He has taken a journey embracing glass photographic plates through to smartphone imaging, all the while retaining an attachment to the hard copy print, from production to conservation.

He is a Fellow of both the Institute of Physics and RPS. He is currently President of the RPS.

Friday, 2 October 2020

11. France Scully Osterman / *Crossing Paths*

Mark Osterman and **France Scully Osterman** established Scully & Osterman in 1991. Through extensive primary research and practical application, the Ostermans have evolved as historians and modern masters of a wide variety of historic (alternative) photography, most notably, the wet-plate collodion process.

France Scully Osterman is an artist and educator. She and works and teaches in their skylight studio, and gives lectures and workshops at universities and museums in the U.S. and internationally.

The Ostermans are both represented by Howard Greenberg Gallery, NYC and Tilt Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ.

<http://www.collodion.org/>

12. Erin Solomon / *The Chemistry of Trauma: Practical Research inspired by photographs from the American Civil War*

The collodion process is a delicate and timely photographic method that was used in a range of settings from studio portraiture to battlefield settings, in the middle of the 19th century. In the United States, the American Civil War (1861-1865) was primarily documented by photographers who used the wet-plate process; which dictated how photographers constructed their compositions. My goal is to give a brief overview about how the collodion process played a role in certain political narratives during the American Civil War; and discuss how one of my research methods deconstructs this process, and historical event, as a means to critically assess the lasting effects of childhood trauma.

Erin Solomons is an artist who lives and works in London. Through her photography-based practice, she critically assesses how trauma is embodied through case studies, such as the American Civil War. Her selected awards include the Wood Institute Travel Grant (2017); a Magnum Photo Graduate Award (2017); a part of the Warden's Collection at Goldsmiths College (2012); and Finalist in Photography for the Celeste Prize (2012). Her work has been exhibited across the United Kingdom, Europe, New York, and Brazil.

She is currently at PhD candidate at the University for the Creative Arts, Rochester.

13. Rob Ball / *Dreamlands: Tintypes at the Edge*

This illustrated paper considers the use of the tintype process at the coast in both a historical and contemporary context by discussing three photographic projects; Dreamlands, Coney Island and The Itinerant.

Margate in England and Coney Island in the United States are the locations for long term, coastal-based photographic projects with the tintype process making a significant contributions to this work. The paper looks at the use of the tintype to make both landscape and portrait photographs at the coast and the subsequent exhibitions, interactions and responses.

British Photographer **Rob Ball** was awarded an MA in Photography from the University of the Arts London and is currently undertaking a PhD. He is Director of SEAS Photography and Senior Lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University, England. Ball's photographic works is principally based by the coast. Where he employs a range of techniques to respond to and find new ways of looking at coastal communities and cultures. His projects have been exhibited and published internationally including at The Photographers' Gallery, London; The National Portrait Gallery; Format Festival and Illinois State University. Publications include Dreamlands (2015), Coney Island, (2017) and Funland (2019).

14. Paul Elter / *Travel and the Mobile Darkroom – Silver, Salt, & the Arctic Sea*

Paul Elter is a multidisciplinary artist working in photography, painting, sculpture, drawing, and collage, working with analogue tools and techniques, handwork and process being fundamental. Born in Kitchener, Ontario to European parents,

he studied animation and worked as an educator teaching art and photography. Today he lives in the village of Chelsea, Quebec with his family in a historic cottage they have lovingly restored. Working as a photographer at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, he coordinated the transition from analogue to digital and the development of its extensive digital archive.

15. Christian Klant / *Wet Plate Collodion Then and Now - Observations of a practitioner*

Then: The invention of the wet plate collodion process in 1851 was a revolution. For the first time a negative process was available, that offered fine details, sharpness, a long tonal range and reasonably short exposure times at the same time. And of course the option to print multiple images from one glass plate negative.

Now: The rise of digital photography made photos available for everyone, everywhere. With a smartphone even, out of the pocket, and the majority of images remain, automatically optimized to be viewed on a mobile screen, in the world of bits and bytes and never get printed. Some people are bored by the perfection and constant availability of digital photographs. Some are longing for an analog photographic experience. A growing number of professional and hobby photographers is starting to work with the historic wet plate collodion process again, yet mainly with positives. Most of them don't even know that this process was originally invented to produce a negative to print from, and shoot the former by product 'tintypes'.

Christian Klant is drawing a bigger picture of why wet plates (along other historic techniques) are getting so popular nowadays and why so many practitioners don't shoot negatives. The red thread will be his own journey from being a professional photographer in a digital world to becoming a specialist for historic photographic processes, artist and workshop teacher.

Topics to be covered: Tintypes', the new Polaroids; knowledge transfer in the wet plate scene; shooting 16x20" plates for personal projects; a path into printing - learning how to read a negative; modern approaches that make a wet platers life easier

Christian Klant is a specialist for the wet plate collodion process. He creates wet plates in formats up to 40x50 cm (16x20"), for artwork and for commissions. In addition, he works with various historical printing techniques such as salt, albumen, platinum/palladium, carbon, and cyanotype printing.

Klant taught handmade, analogue photography through workshops and lectures. Christian Klant is a professional member of the German Association of Photographers (BFF) and founder of the 'BFF art initiative'. In 2020 he was commissioned by the Rijksmuseum to do a research project about the seascapes of Gustave Le Gray. He published his first book "100 Wet Plates - 100 Words" in 2014 and is exhibited internationally.

16. Steve de Grys / *An Accidental Journey*

My working life started in 1977 as an apprentice camera operator for a London book printer. The majority of my career has been in the production of photographic imaging and digital artwork. In 2015 I left the print industry to study for a degree in Photography at the University of East London. Awards: RHS Silver Gilt Medal 2019; RPS 365 Competition 2018; BA (Hons) 2017; Associate of the RPS 2017; Free Range, Truman Brewery 2017; Finalist, RPS 160 IPE 2017; Finalist, AOP Open Award 2017; Finalist, Photo London 2017. Web and contact: www.stevelegrys.co.uk / enquiries@stevelegrys.co.uk

17. Niamh Fahy / *Interpreting Interruption*

The planning and precision involved in wet-plate collodion photography necessitates a certain amount of formality, through the methodical workflow followed, a sense of order is imposed (Barger, 2015). However, this order co-exists with the countervailing material agency of the collodion, organic and uninhibited, it possesses a liquid intelligence (Pasek, 2019) that has the capacity to interrupt the formality of the process.

In this paper I argue that the purposeful use of imperfections on the collodion plate can be exploited as an interruptive force to abstract or erase part of the image with the intent of activating narratives beyond the material representation of the world. Interventions within the image can function as pivotal characteristics that enable creative practitioners to communicate imperceptible changes in landscape and respond to the corresponding complexities of those narratives.

The presence of interruption in the image demands attention of its audience, the intent of glitch within the formal and historic holds a weight of implication that extends beyond the boundary of the plate, tension emerges between the structured order of the formal and the fluidity of the informal that amplifies a yearning to grasp the narrative that has been obscured through interruption as Jacques Derrida suggests it enacts “an erasure that allows what it obliterates to be read” (Derrida, 1982 cited in Batchen, 2013) Glitch art has been much discussed as a response to emerging digital technologies. In this paper, glitch or interruption in the analogue will be discussed as a form of intervention indicative of a broader thematic concerns within the age of the Anthropocene.

Locating this discussion within my own creative practice as a multidisciplinary print artist and through examples from a collaborative project with artist Cecilia Mandrile, I will address the potential for expanding creative impact beyond the distinctive aesthetic, specific to the process. Engaging in both digital and analogue modes of creative practice, a key concern within this paper is the relationship between wet-plate collodion photography and digital methods of making. Through addressing this relationship as interrelated in my own practice, I demonstrate that both modes of practice can be negotiated to fortify and support emerging dialogues that inform a visual language appropriate to the age of the Anthropocene.

Niamh Fahy is an Artist and Research Associate at the Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West England, she is currently studying for a PhD. Through her practice and research, she investigates the possibilities and capacity for the print artist to challenge and expand modes of understanding anthropogenic changes within landscape. She is interested in the historical relevance of 19th century wet-plate collodion photographic techniques and photomechanical reprographic methods in the contemporary depiction of landscape. Through a multidisciplinary practice of print and photography she considers narratives of fragmentation and interstices within landscape.

<http://www.niamhfahy.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/niamhfahyart/?hl=en>

<https://people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/NiamhFahy>

18. Wilson Yeung / *Paleontology Guide: Images-Objects-Being*

Abstract: This presentation investigates how to construct and deconstruct the interaction between traditional wet-collodion process and contemporary art creation. It will use the collaborative art project *Paleontology Guide* (2013) conducted by two Hong Kong artists, Wilson Yeung and So Wing Hong, as a case study. *Paleontology Guide* is an archaeological expedition. This description means rejecting all the dull, ordinary and superficial things in the current world, and is often inspired by history, nostalgia and mystery. This practice-based research examines how contemporary art practitioners learn and apply principles and elements of tintype (wet plate process) with unique creative experience and practical methods in contemporary art production.

Wilson Yeung Chun Wai, College of Design and Social Context, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Wilson Yeung Chun Wai is an artist-curator and creative producer. Wilson is currently a PhD candidate and researcher at RMIT University's Contemporary Art and Social Transformation (CAST) Research Group. He holds a Master's degree in art curating from the Department of Art History at the University of Sydney and a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) in Print Imaging Practice by RMIT University. His works have been presented nationally and internationally, including at the Jogja Biennale, Shenzhen Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture, Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Pingyao International Photography Festival, Hong Kong International Photography Festival and International Multidisciplinary Printmaking Conference.

<https://wilsonyeung.weebly.com/>

19. Jo Gane / *Contemporary Practice with Wet Collodion: Time-travel and Public engagement through the performance of processes*

This paper explores the ability of contemporary photographs made with historic processes to time-travel and engage with archives by disrupting the linear recording of time. It also discusses the elements of magic and ritual inherent in the performance of producing these images and how this engages audiences. It looks at two contemporary projects by the author to illustrate these ideas; Birmingham (2008/9) commissioned by Pete James and made in response to the Warwickshire Photographic Survey collection at Library of Birmingham and The Elephant Trap (2019/20) made with Jason Scott Tilley of Photo Archive Miners in Coventry.

Jo Gane is an independent artist and educator. Graduated in 2007 with 1st Class BA Hons from Birmingham City University in Visual Communication (Photography) and MA Photography at LCC in 2010. Recent exhibitions include 'A White House on Paradise Street' at Birmingham Open Media and The JHB Archive at Nuneaton Museum. Currently working on a new body of work on the River Cole in Birmingham using drawings, photograms and the Calotype process in response to historic images and research about George Shaw (1817 – 1904). She also works with museums to create education programmes around exhibitions and produces socially engaged photographic work within communities and schools. Currently HPL lecturer in Photography at Coventry University.

Convenors:

Frank Menger joined the Centre for Fine Print Research in November 2019 as a Senior Research Fellow as part of its Expanding Excellence in England investment from Research England. Frank apprenticed in the discipline of analogue photography in Germany the 1980s, and completed his MA in Multidisciplinary Printmaking at UWE in 2007. He has an in-depth knowledge of how photographic techniques contribute to multi-disciplinary artistic approaches in the fields of fine art, information design, moving image, documentary photography and printmaking. His research interests lie in the innovative Print Techniques Reconstructing Historic Reprographic Methods, and he is currently working with Dr Susanne Klein on Lippmann Colour Photography.

Dr Michael Pritchard is Director, Education and Public Affairs, at the Royal Photographic Society. He worked for Christie's as a photography specialist for twenty years, before undertaking a PhD in the history of photography. He has worked on cataloguing the Kodak Historical Collection at the British Library to make it available for public access and has taught the photography and industry module on De Montfort University's history of photography MA, before joining the RPS in 2011. He writes and lectures extensively of many aspects of photographic history and technology. His most recent book is *A history of photography in 50 cameras* (Bloomsbury) and in his spare time he edits the [British Photographic History blog](#).
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