Proposal for a Hybrid Class in
‘Light & Time Based Alternative Imaging’

What are we to make of signs when they are no longer simply independent of their signifiers but indexically related to them? What are the implications for time, history and memory once Xeno’s paradox becomes a physical reality? And how can contemporary artists take advantage of 2300 years of scientific and artistic knowledge?

The main thrust of improvements in light sensitive technologies over the years has been one of speed. In the 19th Century, low light sensitivity produced long exposures. Within each image, time was compacted instead of bisected and stopped altogether. As newer more sensitive films were developed the old techniques were cast aside and forgotten. Recently there has been a revival in these techniques. And that revival has spurred some interesting questions. What are the possible advantages of slowness, of delay? How can the inherent ‘disadvantages’ of antique photographic processes be used to our advantage? What strange combinations of technologies have yet to be tried and what will the results be? The potential for experimentation is great.

The digital age supposedly heralds the death of chemical photography. Yet strange hybrid practices are commonly being used and invented by scientists. What about the many medical and scientific applications of recorded and fixed images; X-rays, CT scans, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Fiber Optics, or the Hubble Space Telescope, the Chandra X-ray observer, the Mars Global Surveyer? How can we combine the practical knowledge from 160 years of chemical imaging with newer possibilities of radiation detection and recording? Why not alter cheap digital cameras? Or outfit outmoded cameras with alternative sensing devices?

In a sense, all of art history led up to the day when Nicephore Niepce first captured and then fixed reflections of light on photographic emulsion. Since then, technological changes throughout the history of photography have provided the opportunity for forward thinking artists to rewrite the rules of photographic imaging. What happenned to the techniques that lost favor? Perhaps combinations of lost practices used over the centuries can yield new and different ways of recording and transforming visual and temporal ‘realities.’ From our vantagepoint, we can look back over 2000 plus years of human knowledge (relating to light and its reflective properties) for artistic inspiration.

This class will provide a foundation for the exploration of photographic alternatives. Issues and processes relating to light sensitive materials and home-made lenless, lens-based and altered cameras will be studied, debated, attempted and perfected. We will start in antiquity by exploring the foundations of photography in terms of pinhole imaging and proceed through the 18th century and camera obscuras. Then we will move into the industrial age and learn a multitude of possibilities for light sensitive emulsions. Next we will synthesize these technologies and begin to create variations of cameras and imaging systems based on contemporary conceptual desires.

Why does a photo have to be on paper? Why does it have to be positive? Why does it have to be right side up? What happens if it’s drawn or painted? What makes a photograph a photo?

Various alternative processes will be studied including silver, iron and chromium based. Artists, scientists and philosophers throughout history who have used similar approaches will be presented for discussion and inspiration. These may include: Lao Tzu, Aristotle, Alhazen, Alberti, Athanasius Kircher, Jan Vermeer, W.H.F. Talbot, Daguerre, Edgar Degas, Harold Edgerton, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Wallace Berman, William Larson, Joel Peter Witkin, Anselm Kiefer, Daivd Hockney, Susan Rankaitis, David Hockney, Krsystof Wodizcko, Joan Fontcuberta, Ruth Thorne-Thomsen, Willie Middlebrook, Pinky MM Bass, Eric Renner & Nancy Spencer, Abelardo Morrell, Rita DeWitt, Dan Estabrook, McDermott & McGough, John Dugdale, Jerry Spagnoli, Jayne Hinds Bidaut, Scully & Osterman, Jochen Dietrich, James Welling, Adam Fuss, Steven Pippen, DIck Torcchia, Vera Lutter, Starn Twins...

Processes and Techniques

Calotype
Albumen Print
Cyanotype & Van Dyke Brown
Kallitype
Platinum and Palladium Print
Gum Bichromate Print
Gumoil
Carbon Print
UltraStable
Carbro Print
Daguerrotype
Bromoil Print
tintype
photogram
salt print

Unusual Cameras I Have Known

someone's mouth
fruit and vegetables
watermelon
VW Bus
trailer
toilet
empty building
washing machine
clock
tent
hat
pocket book
book