

Colour Photography: From Autochrome to Cibachrome

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Abstracts and Biographies

Women's use of early colour photography Pam Roberts

The introduction of the autochrome in 1907 and other new colour processes in the first few decades of the twentieth century particularly attracted the attention of women photographers. Early colour processes were often time-consuming, labour-intensive and expensive so were largely the domain of wealthy amateurs. Amongst those many women who had the necessary expertise, both aesthetic and technical, to master the intricacies of a variety of colour processes were the American Helen Messinger Murdoch and four British women, Sarah Angelina Acland, Agnes B. Warburg, Violet K. Blaiklock and Madame Yevonde.

Murdoch was an indomitable explorer and traveller who journeyed round the world between 1912-1914 photographing on autochrome plates and lecturing to local audiences en route illustrating her lectures with her own projected colour images. The first woman to undertake such a resolute venture, she was aware of the importance of minutely recording her experience in both images and words, keeping diaries of her trip as well as compiling albums of black and white snapshots to supplement her colour work.

Warburg and Acland travelled widely too but their colour photography also captures the intricacies of their domestic lives and social circles. With Blaiklock, Warburg established the Colour Group of the Royal Photographic Society, of which all five women were members at different times. Most of them also showed their work at the Halcyon Club in Cork Street, dedicated to exhibiting work by women artists.

As colour photography became increasingly commercially available in the early 1930s when companies like Vivex in the UK evolved a rapid factory-based printing process, it led to a proliferation of advertising, glamour, celebrity, fashion and portrait photography in vibrant colour which Madame Yevonde's work splendidly illustrates. These five women set their own agendas and made colour very much their own medium.

Pam Roberts is the author of *A Century of Colour Photography, from the autochrome to the digital age* (André Deutsch, 2007), the most recent survey of the history of colour photography. Now an independent researcher, curator and writer, she was the Curator of the Royal Photographic Society in Bath from 1982-2001, organising over 70 exhibitions and writing catalogues on subjects as varied as Julia Margaret Cameron, Madame Yevonde, Edward Steichen, *Camera Work* and Don McCullin. In 1995 she was awarded a museums' exchange programme to work at the Library of Congress in Washington on an exhibition and catalogue on Fred Holland Day and in 2003, was a Guest Scholar at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles working on a publication on Roger Fenton, *All the Mighty World* (Yale University Press, 2004). Previous publications include *Madame Yevonde, Colour, Fantasy & Myth* (London:



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National Portrait Gallery, 1990), *Camera Work* (Cologne: Taschen, 1997) and *Photogenic* (London: Scriptum Editions, 2000).

Work in progress includes a book and exhibition on Alvin Langdon Coburn and the Secession movement in photography with the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. She is the founding editor of the recently published 2-volume *Encyclopedia of 19th Century Photography* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

The Autochrome: Tonalism in Colour **Anne Hammond**

In 1907, the Autochrome appeared to demonstrate in photography the theory held by some of the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist painters that the perceived colours of nature were mixed in the eye from points of coloured light. Already tonalists, many pictorial photographers moved readily into a colour process that was technically pointillist, but which expressed colour not by opaque reflection but by transparent illumination. Despite Alfred Stieglitz's prophecy that the world of photography would now go 'colour mad', for a few early Autochromists the new process offered not an explosion of prismatic colour, but a tonalism of late impressionist photographic style subtly flavoured by a use of hue articulated through tone, an expression by suggestion rather than direct statement. Writing about Whistler, the art and photography critic Sadakichi Hartmann wrote that the ultimate goal of the Impressionist was to represent an inner experience through tone, and that most impressionists were tonalists rather than colourists. When Alvin Langdon Coburn, interviewed by Dixon Scott in 1907, identified himself as Whistlerian in his desire to preserve the fidelity of essential nature, he was referring to nature as selectively composed, seen through the soft-focus lens, and inflected with feeling through a restrained and harmonious use of hue. This paper explores the work of a group of early Autochromists, including Coburn, Alfred Stieglitz, Eduard Steichen, Frank Eugene and Heinrich Kühn, who rejected colour for colour's sake in preference for a colour aesthetic deriving from their commitment to tonalism in monochrome photography.

Dr. Anne Hammond was co-editor of *History of Photography* journal from 1991-2000. She received a DPhil in the History of Art from Oxford University in 2000, and is currently Research Fellow in Photography in the Centre for Fine Print Research, Bristol School of Art, Media and Design, University of the West of England. She has recently guest-curated an exhibition for the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 'Georgia O'Keeffe and Ansel Adams: Natural Affinities', which opens in May 2008 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and travels to the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Norton Museum, West Palm Beach, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Contact: anne.hammond@uwe.ac.uk.

Colour at the Photographers' Gallery **Helen James**

This paper will explore the early history of exhibiting colour photographs at The Photographers' Gallery (TPG) based on my ongoing research into the history of the gallery from 1971 to the present. Focusing on several key exhibitions, from 1971-1987 this paper will explore the changing critical and curatorial perception of the colour photograph in the (TPG) gallery context. The exhibitions that will be considered are: *Modern & Experimental Colour* (1973), *Ways with Colour* (1975), *European Colour* (1978), *Californian Colour* (1981), *Mysterious Coincidences* (1987), and *Stages* (1987).

In the early years of TPG's history colour photography was exhibited specifically in association with the word 'colour' as indicated in the first 4 exhibitions mentioned above. This paper will explore the specific (curatorial) and contextual reasons for doing this in relation to the wider cultural perception of colour photography in the 'art' gallery during this period. By focusing on the curatorial decisions behind these exhibitions I will investigate how TPG engaged with common perceptions of colour photography as the choice of the amateur or commercial photographer rather than (during the period) the artistic photographer. I will also consider these 'early' exhibitions in contrast to the, perhaps, more articulate 1987 exhibition *Mysterious Coincidences* (curated in collaboration with Ffotogallery, Cardiff) that pioneered the exhibition of a new type of British (colour) photography that utilised, explored, parodied or applied the language of colour in an attempt to form a new vocabulary in fine art photography. And, highlight the (now) obvious distinction between photographs created for the gallery environment and photographs exhibited in the gallery environment as evidenced by the TPG decision to exhibit *Stages* (1987) – a review of colour advertising photography – in parallel to *Mysterious Coincidences*.

Helen James is a photographic historian / writer specialising in the history of publicly funded photography in general and the history of exhibited photography in the UK in particular. She is currently working with The Photographers' Gallery to research and write a biography of the gallery's history and she also is an associate lecturer on the film history and visual theories programme at the University of East London.

Based in Edinburgh, James also works as a freelance writer, lecturer and consultant on photography for publications and organisations that include: *The Times Education Supplement*, *FiveArts Broadcasting Publications*, United Business Media, University College Falmouth and London Metropolitan University. She has previously worked across photography as an education manager and lecturer most notably at: the National Portrait Gallery, Photoworks (Brighton), Modern Art Oxford, University of the Arts (London), Association of Photographers, London South Bank University and Open Eye Gallery (Liverpool).

Saul Leiter and the Cinematic Eye **Abraham Thomas**

This paper will examine the early colour photography of Saul Leiter and its relationship with, firstly, the Technicolor-saturated cinema of 1950s film directors such as Douglas Sirk, and, secondly, with the muted palette of 1990s American independent cinema.

Having originally trained as a painter, Leiter's semi-abstract compositions of flat planes of colour brought a sense of restrained classicism and grace to the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* in the early 1960s. A large collection of non-commercial colour work also exists from the 1950s, some of which was exhibited by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1953. However, these images remained virtually unknown to the wider art world for forty years afterwards.

Through photography, Leiter recreated the European intimacy of painters such as Vuillard and Bonnard, translating modern subjects into romantically delicate washes of colour. He created poetic images by exploiting the colour distortions of outdated film stock, and embraced the unpredictable colour renditions in emulsions from smaller manufacturers. His work provides a striking contrast to the excessive use of artificial lighting and lurid colour schemes in Douglas Sirk's 1950s Hollywood melodramas such as *Imitation of Life* and *All That Heaven Allows*. Leiter's images, however, anticipate the muted colour tones of 1990s American independent cinema, from directors such as Sofia Coppola (*The Virgin Suicides*), David Gordon Green

(*George Washington*) and Gus Van Sant (*Elephant*). These examples of colour film-making and colour photography offer vivid rebuttals to Roland Barthes's assertion that colour photography is simply a "coating applied later on the truth of the black-and-white photograph".

Abraham Thomas is Curator of Designs at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London. He curated the current display 'Paper Movies', which explores the ground-breaking work of the two Russian émigré-designers, Alexey Brodovitch and Alexander Liberman during their tenures as art directors for the American editions of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue* respectively, during the 1940s and 1950s. The display features key works by photographers including William Klein, Richard Avedon, Lillian Bassman and Saul Leiter. He curated the photography/illustration section of the current major V&A exhibition, 'The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947-1957'. Abraham is the V&A's lead curator for architecture, and has curated a number of architecture displays including 'On The Threshold: The Changing Face of Housing' (2005/6) and 'World Expo 2010 Shanghai: Designs for the British Pavilion' (2007). He also co-curated 'Alternating Currents' (2005), a 5-month season of V&A events looking at historical and contemporary Islamic architecture.

Russell Lee's Personal Colour Photography **J B Colson**

Russell Lee put more photography in the FSA file than anyone. His images have been the most requested from the FSA file at the U. S. Library of Congress, black and white documentary work of 1930's America that has ensured his place in the history of photography. After his government service Lee retired to Austin, Texas in 1947 to relax, regain his health, and fish. However he also photographed for liberal political causes, did occasional freelance jobs for big oil and steel, and taught at the University of Texas. His previously little known work since coming to Texas has recently been presented in a book with black and white photography selected and arranged by Linda Peterson, a Foreword by John Szarkowski, and my Introduction (<http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/excerpts/exleerus.html>).

My work now is to make public the stunning color photography Lee did while travelling with his wife, Jean in Norway, Labrador, Mexico and the U. S. Mostly 35mm Kodachromes, some of these images show the insightful candid vision that was Lee's greatest talent. Others are landscapes and cityscapes notable for their precise compositions and elegant sense of light. A skilled black and white darkroom worker, Lee did not print colour. His wife, Jean, thought of these slides as personal snapshots, of no value to the reputation of a great documentary photography. Remembering my encouragement to save them, she gave them to me years after his death. The corrective measures now available with digital photography make possible a clarification of Lee's colour vision that silver printing would not have allowed. The merits of digital treatment to enhance and preserve historic colour are an important theme here. Russell Lee's personal colour photography offers a significant extension of what we know and have seen from this important documentarian and artist.

J B Colson studied under the direction of Clarence White, Jr, for his BFA in photography. After serving as a Signal Corps photographer in Panama he studied for his MA in documentary film with Ray Fielding, Hugh Gray and Colin Young at UCLA. He made non-theatrical films in the Detroit area before teaching photojournalism at the University of Texas, where he inaugurated a program at the Bachelors, Masters, and PhD levels. Students from the program have many awards, including a thirteen Pulitzer Prizes. In the 1980s he worked in Mexico with Jean Meyer and the Collegio de Michoacan documenting village life in the High Meseta. This work had

seven major exhibitions in Mexican venues including a 160 print showing at the Museo Nacional de la Culturas in Mexico City. Professor Emeritus, School of Journalism and a Senior Fellow at The Center for American History, at The University of Texas, he teaches a graduate course in the history and criticism of photography and writes for the Digital Journalist.

The Colour of Politics or the Politics of Colour?: The Reinvention of British Documentary Photography in the 1980s

Alexandra Moschovi

If one were to summarise, albeit with some degree of simplification, the morphological traits that characterize the 'bigger' picture of British photography in the 1980s in a single word, this would be colour; luscious, oversaturated, often purposefully kitsch colour. In the United States where photography had a stronger "sense of continuity and direction" being institutionalised much earlier than in Britain, colour had since the mid 1970s been sanctified from its commercial connotations and inherent "vulgarity", as Walker Evans would have it. John Szarkowski's dithyrambic take on William Eggleston's drugstore-like colour photographs as the poetics of the everyday was instrumental not only in legitimising colour vernacular photography in the rarefied realm of high art, as the numerous "New Colour" photography exhibitions that sprang across the United States in the late 1970s manifest, but also, to a certain extent, in the 1980s re-conceptualisation of British photography, and documentary practice more specifically.

A technical determinant some may suggest, this explosion of colour, and scale no less, in British photography coincides chronologically, and ontologically, with the demise of traditional black-and-white politicised documentary, which echoing the 1970s spirit of (left) sociology had until then dominated independent practice. Being emblematic of the emergence of subjective documentary as an expressionist, socially concerned, but no longer overtly political factographic genre and the constructed image, the employment of colour was more than an aesthetic trend. As it will be argued, it signalled an ideological shift from what came to be seen as the 'old consciousness' of photography and its 'social contract' into an ontologically distinct conceptualisation of the medium as a picture making device, of its truth value, objectivity and political engagement.

Dr Alexandra Moschovi lectures in the theory and history of photography at the University of Sunderland. She studied photography and communication at Goldsmith College and completed her doctoral thesis on the accommodation of photography in British art institutions at the Courtauld Institute of Art. She is an independent curator and art critic contributing to various publications including *Source*, *The Burlington Magazine*, and *a*, the Athens contemporary art review. Publications and curatorial projects include: "Who's Afraid of Contemporary Art: The Metamorphosis of Tate Gallery in the Postmodern Period" (paper, MoMA, New York, to be published); "Distance and Proximity" in *Work*, ed. A. Moh (Kuala Lumpur: National Gallery of Malaysia, July 2007); "The Face of Labour" in *Work II*, ed. B. Vroege (Amsterdam: Veenan, 2007); "Photography, Photographies and the Photographic: Between Images, Media, Contexts" in *The Athens Effect: Photographic Images in Contemporary Art*, ed. T. Tramboulis (Milan: Fondazione Mudima, 2006/ Paris: Maison Européenne de la Photographie, 2007); *Coincidences and Constructs: Interpretations of the Everyday* (exhibition, The Museum of Photography, Thessaloniki, 2004). In 2000, she curated the 7th *International Month of Photography in Athens*, "(Un)familiar City" organised by the Hellenic Centre of Photography.

The Politics of Aesthetics in Yto Barrada's Photographs **Anthony Downey**

This paper will examine the politics of Yto Barrada's aesthetic practice. Drawing on her 'A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project' and more recent work (shown at the 2007 Venice Biennial), I will examine Barrada's use of colour photography and the politics of documentary images. 'A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project' evokes a series of questions that interrogate the relationship of the aesthetic impulse – the use of colour in particular – to the documentary imperative that informs these images.

To start with a simple (but nonetheless provocative) question: to what extent does the application of an aesthetic sensibility depoliticise the residents of Tangiers – Barrada's 'subjects' and the subject of her work – in the name of getting a 'good' picture? Further, do Barrada's photographs overlook the residents of Tangiers by, somewhat paradoxically, looking at them with the eye of a trained artist and therefore over-aestheticising their predicament? These questions address the perennial conundrum faced by photography that takes as its subject social, political, economic or cultural inequality. The documentation of injustice – or the discursively segregated other – can often present an aesthetically over-determined subject who, as a consequence, becomes not only decontextualised but symptomatic of both suffering and so-called otherness. However, I will suggest that this is precisely what Barrada's photographs recognise and manage to negotiate: the refinement, that is, of a documentary practice that implicates (and therefore complicates) the formal presence of an aesthetic without negating or relegating either.

Dr. Anthony Downey is the Programme Director on the MA in Contemporary Art, Sotheby's Institute London and a London correspondent for *Flash Art International*. He is regular contributor to *Third Text* and has published essays, criticism and interviews in *BOMB Magazine (New York)*, *Wasafiri*, *New York Arts Magazine*, *Art Review*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, *Pluk*, *Untitled*, *Radical Philosophy*, *Bridge Magazine (Chicago)*, *Contemporary*, *Circa*, *Art and Architecture Journal*, *Contemporary Visual Arts*, *The Irish Times*, *The Cuirt Journal*, *Skylines*, *Wanderlust* and *Upstart*. He is currently writing a book on Aesthetics, Ethics and Politics (Routledge, forthcoming 2008).

Projecting Touch: Francesca Woodman's 'blueprints' **Harriet Riches**

Shortly before her death in 1981, Francesca Woodman had begun to experiment with non-silver photography, making use of the cyanotype or blueprint process to create a number of blue-toned photographs. Discovered in 1842 by John Herschel, this simple process was quite quickly forgotten in the early days of the medium's drive toward reliable and cheap reproducibility, and has subsequently been marginalised in the medium's written histories. Attacked for its strength of colour, the tones of its Prussian blue salts offended a contemporary taste for monochrome shades of grey or sepia, and its simple camera-less method of exposure seemed to resist the advancing sophistication of photographic vision, refusing to reproduce the image of the world offered by improving optics. Too easy to produce, the blueprint was quickly considered primitive and unsophisticated, suitable only for children or the unskilled amateur.

This paper addresses the 'blueprints' Woodman produced at the turn of the 1980s as she began to experiment with the related diazotype process, a commercial application that enabled the production of the large-scale prints that were first exhibited in the 'Beyond Photography 80'

show at the Alternative Museum in 1980, and contributed to the unfinished Temple Project series (recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum).

Produced by projecting existing negatives and translucencies onto the sensitised paper for periods of up to 8 hours, the prints' attenuated period of exposure recalls and exaggerates that of early photographic process. Mapping a relationship to the cyanotype impressions of botanical specimens produced by Anna Atkins in the mid-nineteenth century, I will argue that Woodman's blueprints re-stage the spaces, intimate method and temporality of an early process that 'remembers' a moment from photography's past, whilst making use of a limited non-naturalistic tonal range that re-forges severed links to the photographic present, resituating Woodman's practice within the concerns of the 1980s.

Harriet Riches completed her doctoral thesis on self-representation and performance in the photography of Francesca Woodman at UCL in 2004. She has published on Woodman in *Object* and the *Oxford Art Journal*, and is currently developing her thesis into a book on the topic, and is also working on a book on the theme of photography and touch. Harriet has taught at UCL and the University of Warwick, and is currently Lecturer in Visual Culture and the History of Art at Middlesex University.

Additive Screens Rule! **Gawain Weaver**

Screen plate processes, such as the Autochrome, were the first commercially successful methods of producing colour photographs. The first commercial screen plates were produced in the 1890s and different varieties were made (and often discontinued) into the 1950s. Viewable only by transmitted light or in projection, screen plates are often thought of as a dead-end additive colour process that was eclipsed by the superior subtractive technologies, such as Kodachrome, beginning in 1935. But the advent of digital imaging has given screen plates a new place in photographic history. Images are now more often viewed on-screen than printed out. And after all, what is a LCD monitor but a dynamic screen plate? Using screen plates and photomicrographs from the collection of the George Eastman House and the author's personal collection, this presentation will examine the various additive colour processes from the screen plates of the 1890s to the CRTs of the 1950s to the LCD monitors of today and the underlying principles common to them all.

Gawain Weaver is a photograph conservator from San Francisco, CA. He is currently spending a year as a research assistant at the Image Permanence Institute in Rochester, NY. He received B.A. degrees in art history and chemistry (2001) from Sonoma State University, and an M.A. in art history and diploma in art conservation (2005) from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He recently completed a two-year fellowship in the Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation at the George Eastman House in Rochester, NY. Over the course of his academic career, he interned at Library and Archives Canada, the Museum of Modern Art, the Getty Museum, the Amon Carter Museum, the Northeast Document Conservation Center, and the conservation studio of José Orraca. Gawain's research interests include the deterioration and treatment of gelatin silver prints and the history of additive colour imaging.