
Camera-less Photography

BY KIRSTEN SPRY

One of the areas of alternative photography that fascinates me most is camera-less photography, where images are recorded directly onto paper without the use of a camera.

Camera-less photographs can be made using a variety of techniques, the most common of which are the photogram, the luminogram and the chemigram. These techniques are sometimes used in combination. All involve an element of chance. Here's a brief look at some artists I admire who are making cameraless.

Floris Neusüss (born Lennep, Germany, 1937) has dedicated almost half a century, his whole career, to extending the practice, study and teaching of photograms. He is a Professor in Experimental Photography at the University of Kassel since 1971, he was one of the first to take up camera-less photography, which had been played with and then discarded in the medium's very early days (Fox Talbot was the first to trial the photogram in 1834). Botanists were the only ones to continue using it by laying plant specimens directly onto the surface of the paper, before the technique enjoyed a mini-renaissance in the 1920s under the Surrealists. Man Ray, who dubbed it the 'Rayograph' used it to give familiar objects an uncanny twist. The artist Laszlo Moholy Nagy was another disciple and wrote: "The photogram, or camera-less record of forms by light...is the real key to photography".

Susan Derges (born London, England, 1955) is another contemporary ground-breaking photogram pioneer. Her 1985 work Chladni Figures produced by sprinkling carborundum powder directly onto photographic emulsion where it was exposed to sound waves at different frequencies. During the 1990s, Derges became well known for her photograms of water. To make these works, she used the landscape at night as her darkroom, submerging large sheets of photographic paper in rivers and using the moon and flashlight to create the exposure. Her Under The Moon

series seems to combine a number of processes and involved working with photographs of the moon and combining these with water and branch patterns exposed to sound vibrations in the darkroom.

Pierre Cordier (born Brussels, Belgium, 1933) discovered the 'chemigram' process in 1956. Working more like a painter Cordier, works on photographic paper in place of a canvas. He applies photographic developer to the paper to create dark areas and fixer for lighter tones. Further changes to shape and pattern are made by 'localising' products such as varnish, wax, glue, oil, egg and syrup. These protect the surface of the photographic emulsion or can be incised to create a drawing, graphic motif or written text. Entrancing chemical and physical reactions can then be made by repeatedly dipping the paper in photographic developer and fixer. This method allows him to create images impossible to realise by any other means. The process has become the artwork and his style is his technique.

Garry Fabian Miller (born Bristol, England, 1957) is know for making abstract images in the darkroom, using only glass vessels filled with liquids, or cut-paper forms to cast shadows and filter light. This technique of creating abstract photographs by casting shadows, or blocking and filtering light on photographic paper is called making luminograms. He says, "The pictures I make are of something as yet unseen, which may only exist on the paper surface, or subsequently may be found in the world. I am seeking a state of mind which lifts the spirit, gives strength and a moment of clarity."

I find all these artists inspiring. I hope you do too.

Source: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/c/camera-less-photography-artists/>

Check out this site for interesting videos of these artists as well as others at work.