

The HAND

THE MAGAZINE FOR REPRODUCTION-BASED ART

ARTIST INTERVIEWS:

LAURENT MILLET

SEAN STAR WARS

ANNETTE GOLAZ



Photo by Roberta Fele

ANNETTE GOLAZ

Experimenting with a variety of alternative photographic processes, the Swiss photographer's work captures the sometimes subtle and overt beauty of everyday life. Each image has an inherent vibrance and immediacy that is palpable and leaps off the page.

Hi Annette! Thanks for taking time to talk with us. We have been very excited about your new book, "Cyanotype Toning". Can you tell us how that book came about and why you wanted to write it?

It came about quite miraculously, I must admit. Writing a book was the last thing I planned to do or thought myself capable of, let alone one in English. The only person more surprised than myself that I really completed it must be my English teacher from high school. It was more like when an introvert child discovers something new and is so excited about it that it needs to shout it from the roof tops regardless of its shyness. I just saw so much potential and creative possibilities in my findings that I simply wanted to share them. I could not only tone a rainbow of colors with plants but also achieve tricolor prints with the use of only one botanical. I felt the world needed to know about that. I started by telling Christina Z. Anderson and she instantly suggest I write a proposal for Routledge and in turn they immediately commissioned me to write this book. The writing process was totally overwhelming. I was by no means ready, since I realized just as I started that I needed to repeat the testing of all 380 botanicals under controlled conditions since the quality of the water was decisive for the color outcome. Before I could even start to write the first sentence, I needed weeks to perform the tests all over again. The emergence of covid 19 and lockdown passed by me completely since I did literally nothing other than doing my money-making job and writing the book. It was probably the most challenging work I have ever done in my life. I am glad I had a lot of support from my friends. In the summer of 2020, I was two months behind my schedule, and I just sat in my friend's garage on a worn-out leather sofa sobbing. I was so desperate, thinking that I would never be able to complete this book. I would not claim to have written it effortlessly.

Were there any toners in particular that surprised you or did something really strange? And what are some of your personal favorite toners to work with?

My search for green toners brought me some total surprises. Green tea and coffee are widely used as toners, and they are of course full of tannins, which tone the prints by binding with the iron salts of the cyanotype. So when I first started looking for botanicals to use as toners, I tried those with high levels of tannins. And they worked. But here comes the surprise. A friend of mine had given up trying to drink wheat grass powder and gave her packet to me to try as a toner. I knew it had a relatively low tannin count—but it was a wonderful green toner. It turned out to have high levels of yellow dyes (flavonoids). A chemist friend explained that iron binds not only with tannins but also with other substances in the polyphenol group, in which many plant dyes are found. I'm sorry this sounds so technical! This was when I started to investigate dyeing fabric with botanicals. It opened up a totally mesmerizing world.

One of the most compelling and fascinating toners to me is the madder root. Discovering the madder root was like getting introduced to a very withdrawn person. Over a long period of deep conversations, this person starts to reveal themselves and turns out to be very complex and multilayered. Madder roots contain many different colors like yellow, orange, red and brown which appear at different temperatures and at different pH values of the water. This means that you can get a multicolor image from this botanical alone. I am still learning about them. And I love them, of course, because they made it possible for me to achieve tricolor cyanotypes. Time and again, it blows my mind that this should work at all. When I apply the last cyanotype layer on the reddish-brown, not very differentiated print, I always think: No way can something remotely tricolor come out of this. Then in the developing bath, a color image emerges that is even more magical than it was in the dark room as a black and white photograph.



Windy Day At The Beach #6 Tricolor Cyanotype 5'x 14.5"



Refecting OHP Film Tricolor Cyanotype 11.8'x 11.8'



Photo by Roberto Fele

When did the book come out and where can people get a copy?

The book came out at the end of September 2021. It can be ordered through any book shop and online, for example directly from Routledge (the publisher) or other online retailers.

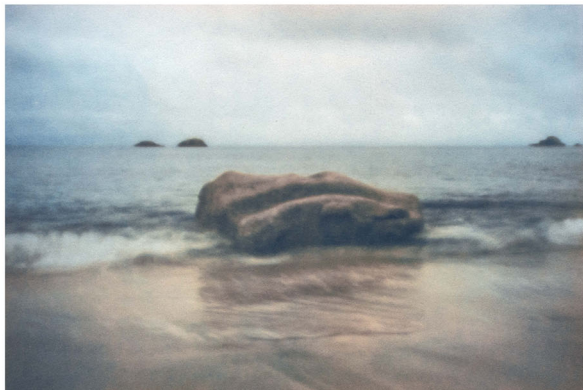
Can you tell us about how you got started with photography? Where are you coming from with your work?

There is this photograph in a family album of us three kids – my two brothers and me – at a fairly young age standing next to each other in the Roman amphitheater in Arles (France) holding up a camera and shooting probably the exact same image. Instructed by my father we kind of had to learn to handle analog cameras and develop and enlarge the photographs in the dark room. He considered this part of a proper education, like playing an instrument. The latter never really took off. But photography always fascinated me, mostly the moment the image appeared in the developing bath accompanied by the smells of the chemicals that seemed magical to me. My dad was a real camera buff. He left us a collection of 400 cameras and an attic full of photographs, negative and super 8 film footage. However, this was my father's area of expertise, and we remained his students.

While he was alive, I felt almost as if I didn't have permission to work independently as a photographer, so I first went into painting and drawing. Only after my dad passed away ten years ago did I feel like picking up photography again. When I discovered Alt Processes, I instantly knew this was the perfect meld of these two art forms.

When I look at your work, I get a strong feeling of both memory and being present, is that accurate? Memory of a particular place, the smell, light on a dresser... and also finding beauty in the current moment.

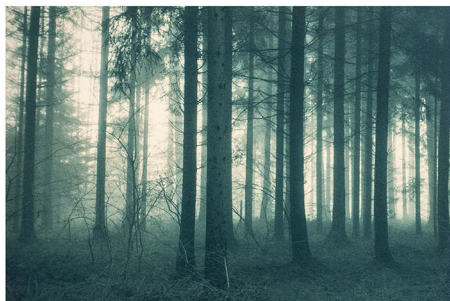
I had to ponder this statement for a while and I have a feeling that it could be true. I work very intuitively. Suddenly my gaze frames something that appears full of beauty and often indeed conjures up a memory. It's as if I could take a deep breath with my eyes, fill my chest with a warm fuzzy feeling and make my heart skip a beat. At such a moment, people can easily hear me speak to myself out loud, expressing my awe. It very often has to do with a particular light. I can walk by a place a hundred times and only at one moment, the sun plunges the place into a special – very often warm and nostalgic – light. As if using a magic wand, it transforms the scene into a work of art. All I do is capture this magical moment with my camera. I see myself very much as a mere observer.



Isles of Scilly Rock Tricolor Cyanotype 9.8" x 13"



Cheers Tricolor Cyanotype 13" x 9.8"



Vanishing Forest Cyanotype toned with moringa leaves 10.5" x 7"



Water Shy Duotone Cyanotype 7" x 10.5"

Do you plan your photos or come across something and it catches your eye? Are you exploring with a camera in your hands always?

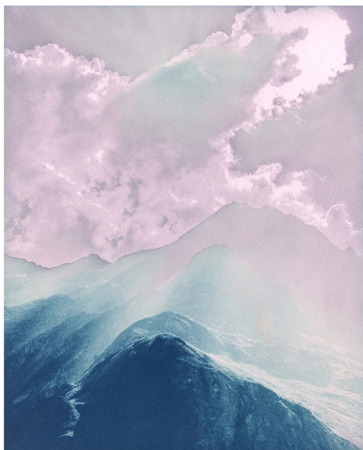
I go through different phases. I can get totally obsessed with a certain theme and go out with nothing else in mind. Therefore, my surroundings offer new motives over and over. For example, for a long time, I was totally absorbed by reflections – at first on the surface of the lake, and later in windowpanes. Or I focused on the ever-changing light seeping into the stairway and basement in the house I live in. Depending on the time of the day and position of the sun throughout the year, the light depicts dreamlike, surprisingly colorful images on walls, doors and furniture. For me, it is helpful to impose limitations on myself when I am studying something in depth. The limitation can also lie in the camera I choose.

For more than a year, I explored nature with an early digital camera with 0.3 megapixels (an apple QuickTake 200). I was amazed by the close-ups that this camera produces despite the ridiculously small resolution. I felt like a child who's been given a magnifying glass and discovers a new microcosmos of its own. I love to go out with my camera with open eyes and an open heart and just see what comes my way. It's so amazing what you find when you don't know exactly what you are looking for. When I get home, I am totally exhausted

from the act of observing. So I do not carry a camera with me all the time. Sometimes I need to go for a walk to ponder a problem, an incident, life, myself; then it's a matter of looking inside.

You use a lot of hand-coated alternative processes and it goes with the type of imagery you choose, is there something about the softness of the paper and the way it's processed that influences the type of images you choose?

Maybe it has to do with me coming from painting that I am intuitively drawn to painterly looking images. Before I discovered alt processes, I used to print my photographs on fine art paper resembling watercolor paper, this just seemed the appropriate substrate. Being able to print them myself on real watercolor paper is a pure pleasure and ultimately really satisfying. I enjoy using a brush with a warm wooden handle and super-soft bristles albeit with a certain resistance. It took me forever to find a brush I really liked to work with. And coating a soft hot press paper is a completely different experience from coating a rough cold press one. I could spend days in art supply shops looking at papers and touching them, it fills me with awe for the craft of paper making, even though not many are in the end suitable for my tricolor process.



Forgotten Valley #5 Cyanotype toned with Madder roots 8.25" x 6.7"



Hydrangea #3 Tricolor Cyanotype 7" x 9.4"

I imagine that besides photography, you are a gardener as well. Your images and your work with natural toners make it appear that you love to be outdoors. What are some of your favorite activities when you're not printing photographs?

I indeed used to be a passionate gardener. In my early thirties I even worked with a landscape designer for almost a year. However, nowadays I spend more time in my studio than weeding the gravel paths and flower beds. Luckily, the others living in the house have been happy to take over my vegetable plot for the time being. However, going for a long walk – preferably in the woods – is part of my daily routine. I kept up with this even while writing my book. Without my strolls, I don't think I could have completed it – or kept my sanity. Time and again, my walks were the time when I had a new idea for how to proceed when I got stuck. Or when I worked out why certain botanicals reacted in a way I hadn't expected. When I go on vacation, it's a walking holiday or a weekend in the mountains. I never understood the concept of beach holidays in a resort or shopping trips. My dream is to live in a tree house so that I could lie in bed and watch the



Under the Beech tree Cyanotype toned with Fenugreek seeds 10.5" x 7"

rustling leaves changing color over the seasons. I guess I am very much an outdoor person.

Now that the book is done, are you doing anything else with it? What is next for you after such a big accomplishment?

As ever, I have no plan at all. I am open to what happens in the wake of publication. For the book itself, I hope it will start to have a life of its own. My wish is for it to inspire others to explore their fauna and marvel at the potential botanicals have to tone cyanotypes. For myself I can only wonder what my next obsession will be. For now though, I am still in my "Blue Phase", honing my tricolor cyanotype process. I have so many "what if" questions left in my head that seek answers. Then I am getting invited to hold workshops—so I am digging out the teacher in me who lay there idle for the last three decades. I am the spectator of my career and my life and I am excited about this totally riveting movie.

See more of Annette's work at: agolaz.ch

And get Annette's book,
Cyanotype Toning: Using Botanicals to Tone Blueprints Naturally
Routledge Books, 2021