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## ARTIST INTERVIEW WITH STEPHANIE SLATE- INSPIRATION AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Posted by Tim Danyo on 21st Apr 2017

We are excited to have the opportunity to interview, Stephanie Slate about her work and the catalyst for it's creation. Stephanie is one of a growing and vibrant community of alt process Photographers. She is pushing forward into new depths of expression and creativity.

With the contrasting hyper speed of digital Photography where (within seconds) images can be captured, filtered, and posted, Stephanie's work asks us to pause and stay awhile- to reflect and look within. Many have said her work is "haunting."

In this interview you will learn what drives her to create. You'll get a glimpse into her creative process and why she chooses to work in this way.

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Stephanie Slate

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### What first got you into making art?

I grew up surrounded by photography. My grandparents were both artists and owned and operated a photography studio, Studio Royal, in northern New Jersey. When I was young my grandfather passed and I spent just about every weekend with my grandmother where the work they created together hung on every inch of her walls. I did not realize then but this was highly influential on me.



Snap shot of 'Studio Royal'

### Why do you make art now?

I know this is such a corny thing to say but I do not feel like I have a choice! Creating is a personal necessity; it is a catharsis. Making art allows me to purge my system by releasing my thoughts and emotions from my conscious by translating them visually onto paper.

### Why did you choose this method and process of photography?

I chose to use alternative processes such as cyanotype, van dyke and platinum/palladium for many different reasons, but mainly it is because of my love for science and chemistry. In fact, if reincarnation is real then I was definitely a scientist in a past life!

Evidence of the artist's hand as well as having control over the medium is important to me. Being able to tweak my 'recipe' to get a desired visual outcome is imperative. Factory products, such as pre-made Silver Gelatin paper simply does not allow for as much control.





*'The Blue of Distance' Cyanotype, letterpress and gold leaf. 6"x13"*

**Your work seems to come from places of disconnectedness, abandonment, loss, loneliness, etc. Why do you chose to explore these themes?**

Well I would not say that I necessarily chose to explore them. I can only create work that comes from personal experience, anything else would be disingenuous. At an early age I learned how to handle death in an unorthodox way. Furthermore, after losing my own fertility and two children to ectopic pregnancies, thoughts of losing my surviving daughter haunt my dreams consistently. The fear of loss has been embedded into me and has definitely found its way in to my studio practice.



*'Mother and Child' Platinum/Palladium print, India Ink and gouache 13"x13"*

**How does the photographic medium help you express this?**

Physically the medium allows for a visual experience of great ambience and depth. My photographs are often quite ethereal, as if you are waking up from anesthesia and are not quite sure what is real or what is the imaginary. Techniques, such as using rock salt on wet chemistry as it dries, allows for these powerful visual effects.

More conceptually, the photographic medium allows me to collect and preserve. I am afraid of loss and as a result have become a very sensitive and nostalgic collector.

Photographs grant me satisfaction in that the moment of time is forever frozen, or actually burned, onto my film which I get to keep and collect for myself. Whenever we view a photograph we are seeing a moment in time, which will not and cannot exist again. It is preserved, because of this photographs provide evidence and proof of existence.





*'Twenty Feet' Cyanotype 18" x 26"*

### **How do you see photography evolving?**

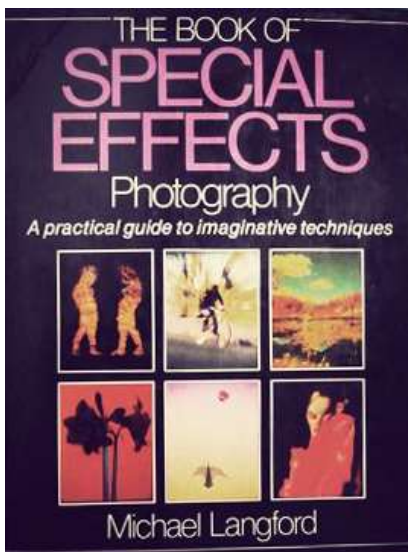
Honestly, I do not see it necessarily evolving. Instead, I see more and more people rediscovering the magic that the historical medium has to offer, which I think is incredible!

### **Do you get a sense of a rebirth or a "getting back" to pre-digital techniques starting to happen?**

From my perspective it does not seem like it is starting to happen, but rather that it never went away. For that reason I would be hesitant to consider it a rebirth because I do not believe that analog techniques ever died. There has always been a strong community of people who have kept the techniques very much alive and well. However, as I mentioned above, I definitely do believe that more and more people are appreciating and practicing analog techniques. In fact, I cannot help but chuckle to myself right now! A couple years ago I went to Sally Mann's Artist Talk at the Philadelphia Free Library and she said something along the lines of: "You can't throw a cat in any direction without hitting someone who is doing wet plate collodion."

### **Do you include digital elements into your work flow?**

Yes, I do! For many years I was quite stubborn and resisted digital technology completely. I thought, if Jerry Uelsmann can do it so can I! And I can; I have spent many hours reading my grandfather's books on darkroom 'trickery' and have slaved over Kodalith negatives many a time. However, in my personal case, I noticed that my art was becoming more about the process only. Setting such strict limitations on my work flow was hindering instead of nurturing my work.



*One of my grandfather's books*

### **How do you incorporate these techniques?**

Well, I began by scanning my medium and large format negatives and printing larger digital negatives. This alleviated all of my Kodalith woes. (I never could get that contrast control just right with Kodalith!) Also, when I am working with artist books, I lay things out digitally to get a sense of the overall flow before I begin the printing process. Lastly, and I know this will make many of you cringe, I have been known to create digital negatives from imagery that I shot with my phone's camera, though this is the kind of in-a-pinch type of situation.

**Tell me about your process, where do you start?**

The majority of my work is pre-visualized. I attempt to recreate my dreams and the melancholic and anxious emotions that they provoke visually. My first step tends to take form of photographing the subject which is often myself and/or daughter. I use a large format or medium format camera to do so.

**What gets you inspired?**

I find inspiration from many sources. Of course my dreams, but also from reading, seeing other artists work, and also from my family. The maternal bond that I have with my daughter sparks ideas for work constantly and my husband is a firefighter who is a constant source of inspiration.

**What drives your curiosity?**

Hmm that is a tough question because I cannot really find words to describe it. It really seems to be an inner drive that I do not have control over. I also have an extreme distaste for boredom and like to keep my mind fresh with experimenting and creating new work.

**Are you ever disappointed with the outcome?**

Yes, all the time! Though I often find that my disappointment can morph into a kind of fondness and that whatever the "mistake" was that initially disappointed may spark a new interest or direction for the piece to take.

**How much experimentation is involved in your work?**

A LOT. I try to let my materials take over a bit and welcome "mistakes." I will often experiment with different printing processes, combinations, exposure times, toning, bleaching, and also scale. Also, the medium will often take on a set of rules and life of its own and thus experimentation will happen even if you do not intend for it to. For example if my workspace is humid, the platinum/palladium process will produce a deeper black. If I hang my paper before it is completely dry, my chemistry may migrate along the paper's surface creating mesmerizing patterns. Some of these unexpected 'experiments' oftentimes end up being my favorite part of the process.



'Twenty Feet Part II' Toned Cyanotype 30"x40"

**Are you ever shocked or surprised by how things turn out?**

All the time. It is precisely why I love analog photography!

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For more about Stephanie Slate's work you can visit her website at: [www.stephanieslate.com](http://www.stephanieslate.com)

Stephanie will be holding a Summer Workshop in Condon, Montana at the Photographer's Formulary this September 3 - 8 of 2017. "Alternative Process Photography Unleashed: Exploring Mixed Media Using Cyanotype and Van Dyke." You can find more details and/or register here: [www.workshopsinmt.com](http://www.workshopsinmt.com)

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