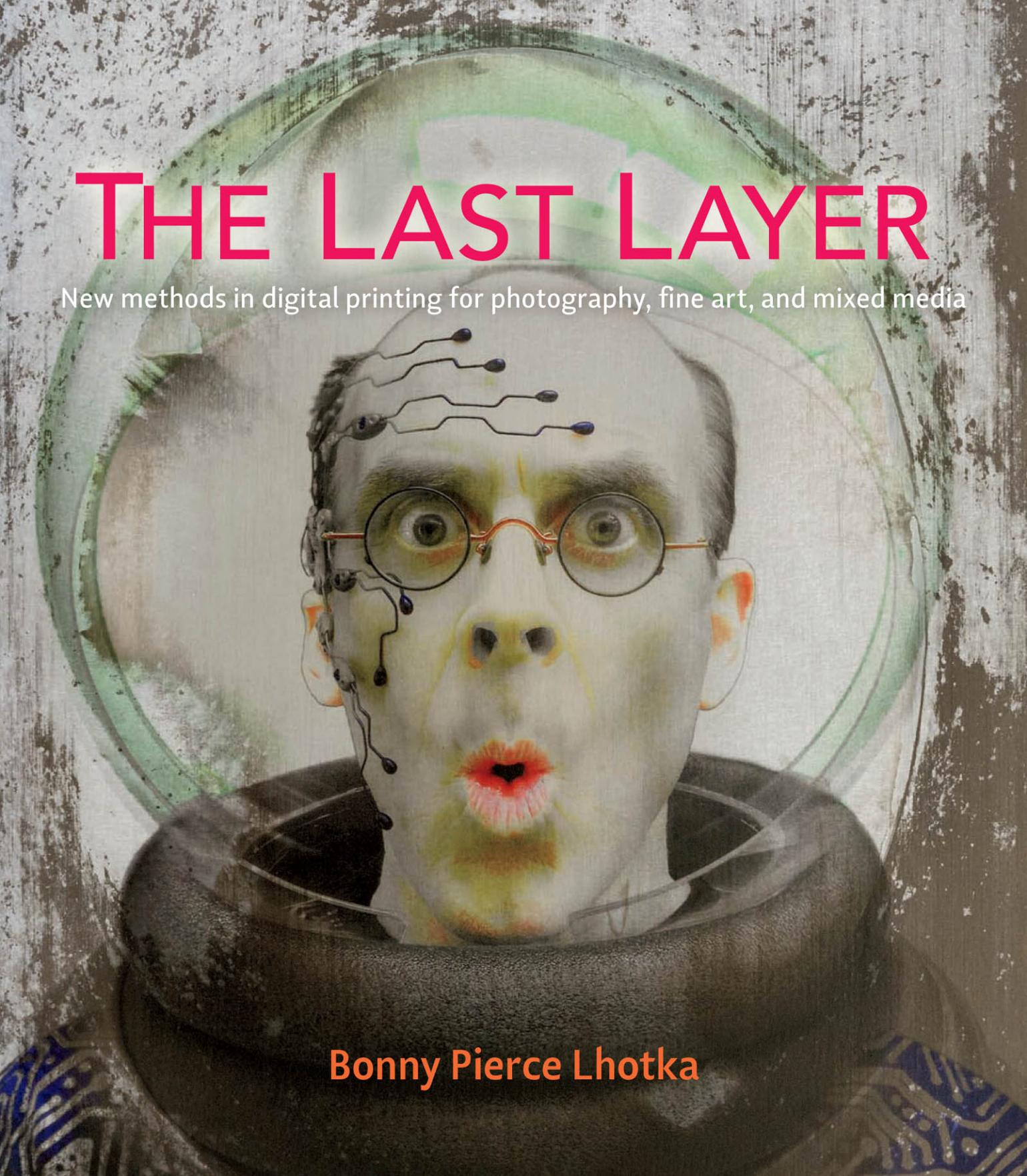


THE LAST LAYER



New methods in digital printing for photography, fine art, and mixed media

Bonny Pierce Lhotka

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*This book is dedicated to my sons, Doug and Greg,
who have always been involved in my interest in the arts.*

Without them I would not be who I am.

They are the light in my life.

About the Author



Bonny Lhotka graduated from Bradley University, where she majored in painting and printmaking. In 1986, she added a Macintosh computer to her studio tools, and today continues her innovation with new approaches to her work.

Her artwork is commissioned by, or is included in, several hundred collections including Consumer Electronics Association, Lucent Technologies, United Airlines, Johnson Space Center, Vestas, Crickett, Qwest, U.S. Department of State, Charles Schwab, the City of Denver, Wells Fargo, The Boeing Company, American Society of Clinical Oncology, and a large number of private collections. Her work is shown internationally, and appears in numerous books and articles featuring experimental media. She is listed in *Who's Who in American Art* and *Who's Who in America Women*.

In 1997, Bonny organized “Digital Atelier: A printmaking studio for the 21st century” at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and was an Artist-in-Residence there for 21 days. She is the recipient of the Computerworld Smithsonian Award for Technology in the Arts.

Bonny worked with a group of curators to help them envision the potential of digital printmaking in “Media for a New Millennium,” a work-tank/think-shop organized by the Vinalhaven Graphic Arts Foundation. As one of three artists of the Digital Atelier, Bonny was invited by Marilyn Kushner of the Brooklyn Art Museum to show a selection of work and demonstrate how to create and combine original digital prints with traditional printmaking and photographic processes.

Over the past decade, Bonny has continued her work as an experimental artist, inventing new processes, materials, and technologies, and combining them with classic fine art materials and techniques. Aside from many one-artist exhibitions, she is in demand as a speaker, educator, author, and artist. Recently, she has worked with major corporations to explore fine art applications for their products. Within this book, Bonny assembles collections of those techniques that you can add to your own studio.

Artist Statement

Throughout my career I've pursued new techniques and technologies, not for their own sake but to further my art. This ongoing push to grow and expand means that once I've produced a body of work with one particular technique, I rarely go back and revisit it unless I can transform it into something new and unique.

Most of my work involves layers, both digital and physical, either placed directly on a surface or moved from one surface to another. This depth and richness comes from piling on too much, and then subtracting until I reach my goal. I used to joke with my sons that if they just chipped away all the excess stone from a rock, they'd find a sculpture inside—that's pretty close to how I work. My biggest challenge is that I'm always so sure I'll find a use for things that I rarely throw them out. I probably still have chips from those rocks stored in a box somewhere.

In my earlier body of work called *Horizons: Altered Reality*, I explore the intersection of reality and abstractions in nature. This common language is created when material and conceptual realities are balanced, and the viewer finds a place to rest and reflect on the timeline of their life—it's a horizon where dreams meet reality.

In much of my recent work, photographic reality captures the moment in time. How I perceive that moment is different from those viewing my work—we're all influenced by the sum of our experiences. And yet there is also a common foundation that we all share. The work uses photographs taken from airplanes, cruise ships, macro photographs, and lazy walks in Colorado, California, Illinois, and Florida. We all can share the majesty of a day of frozen fog along the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and marvel at the textures that nature brings into our lives.

I use the camera to capture those moments, saving them in my archives until the time when I'm working on a piece and it triggers a memory. Then it's a dash to my image library to collect all the individual elements together to share a thought, an image, a concept—to tell the story that I'm trying to tell. That's the beauty of these processes: They let me use any image, even with technical flaws, if it helps further that tale.

For that's what we all really are—storytellers. A photograph of a bloom pushing through the spring snow tells a tale of renewal and the persistence of life. A classic sunset over the California coast reminds us of that wedding reception where we all got our feet wet. And a still life of dolls, antiques, and toys draws a smile of remembered childhood joy. I wish you the best, as you tell your own unique tales.

Acknowledgments

This book would not be in your hands without my son Doug's help. As with my art, I put too much into my first drafts—there's almost enough for another book sitting in my mind and on the shelf. His understanding of my method of piling on too much, and then removing the excess, sometimes stressed his organizational skills (and made for some interesting video conferences). It's a treat to work with someone who knows my heart and mind so well. And he was a good sport for posing for a series of the new vintage tintypes that are included in Chapter 5. I'd also like to thank my husband for fetching every little thing I needed while writing this book. I'm sure he did not expect to spend the first months of his retirement running errands to bring me lunch, or getting supplies from the liquor store for my chlorophyll experiments (I still wonder what the clerk thought when we bought a case of Everclear).

Epson, HP, and Roland manufacture the printers that I use in this book, and have been very generous in helping me to use their products in unusual ways. My friend Karsten Balsley, a fine woodworker, builds all the nutty structures I come up with. Dave Stevens of Universal Laser Systems generously spent time running experiments on the fiber laser. David Saffir's guidance on how to make digital negatives was invaluable—and led me to understand that there really are not any rules for that process. He said it wasn't easy and he was right.

Let me also send a huge thank you to Russell Preston Brown, Senior Creative Director of Adobe Systems, who consented to be on the cover of this book. I've had the privilege to attend many of his conferences and work with his crew to make lenticular prints, laser images, tintype transfers, and all manner of infectious craziness. Jack Duganne, a friend and digital pioneer, works at these events, too. What a great gathering of friends.

And to all the wonderful folks at New Riders: Nikki Echler McDonald, Jan Seymour, Mimi Heft, Tracey Croom, Kim Scott, Emily K. Wolman, and Glenn Bisignani. You're at the end of this page, but first on my list. Without you, this book wouldn't exist.



Table of Contents

Preface • x

Foreword • xiii

SECTION I: BASICS

CHAPTER 1 Introduction • 4

CHAPTER 2 Materials • 12

CHAPTER 3 Equipment • 32

CHAPTER 4 Finding a Voice • 50

SECTION II: AGED ALUMINUM PLATES

CHAPTER 5 Introduction to Aged Plates • 64

CHAPTER 6 Vintage Tintypes Transfer • 84

CHAPTER 7 Direct Imaging to Aged Plates • 94

CHAPTER 8 Gallery of Work: Aged Plates • 108

SECTION III: TRANSFORMED BY LIGHT

CHAPTER 9 Introduction to Photosensitive Processes • 124

CHAPTER 10 Photopolymer Plate Process • 146

CHAPTER 11 Chlorophyll Emulsion Process • 166

CHAPTER 12 Flow Blue Fabric Process • 182

CHAPTER 13 Gallery of Work:
Transformed by Light • 194

SECTION IV: CREATIVE SUBSTRATES

CHAPTER 14 Introduction to Creative Substrates • 208

CHAPTER 15 Transfers to Flexible Substrates • 214

CHAPTER 16 Mixed Media Layered Transfers • 224

CHAPTER 17 Stone Paper Monoprints • 236

CHAPTER 18 Pearloid Transfer to Glass • 244

CHAPTER 19 Gallery of Work:
Creative Substrates • 258

SECTION V: FINISHING UP AND NEW WORK

CHAPTER 20 Postcoats and Finishing • 274

CHAPTER 21 Gallery of Work: New Techniques • 286

Index • 298





Preface

Alchemy of Printmaking

Jack Duganne

The beauty, romance, and passion of the printmaker is best revealed in this Wikipedia description of printmaking:

Printmaking is the process of making artworks by printing...Printmaking normally covers only the process of creating prints with an element of originality, rather than just being a photographic reproduction of a painting...Printmaking is not chosen only for its ability to produce multiple impressions, but rather for the unique qualities that each of the printmaking processes lends itself to.

Many people had a hand in directing my path in photographic silk screening. I abandoned premed and 12 years as a medical technologist after an amazing dream I had which centered on a painting of blood cells. On the other side of the UCLA campus from premed, I began working with Max Hein, who was doing remarkable, large, colorful photographic silk-screen prints. My career was then cast in stone, following the appeal of technology-assisted printmaking. Later, I met John Bilotta in his Westwood studio near UCLA where he ran the first digital printmaking studio in Los Angeles, and then connected with Mits Kataoka of UCLA's graduate Department of Design. Here I discovered the Fujix digital printing system, and later, the IRIS printer where IRIS salesman Steve Boulter connected me with printer David Coons. David was creating very large black and white prints for a traveling exhibition of Graham Nash's work (of CSN fame). Working with David out of Graham's garage got me hooked; at that moment, I became a fine art digital printmaker!

At that same time, these revelations were occurring to many other printmakers, including Bonny Lhotka. Bonny saw the digital revolution and inkjet printing as an opportunity to add another set of tools to be used as matrix and plate with different presses, inks, and papers. At the 1992 MacWorld Expo in San Francisco, an infatuation with Encad printers and eventual pairing with HP, Epson, and Roland printers presented that opportunity—and she has never looked back!

Bonny and I met at a trade show and what I saw of her work on display amazed me! It involved many more processes associated with it than just a straight digital print on rag paper. This was my first introduction to the creative forces at play with Bonny's work. Since then, I've had the privilege of working closer with her and learning incredible techniques and processes developed at her studio in Boulder, Colorado.

Bonny Lhotka is a painter who works as a printmaker. She is a hands-on user of any applicable tool available within her creative reach—both real and virtual. In college, she began working with oil painting and acrylic along with collagraph printmaking, where she used every technique within those mediums to create her art. In a quote made to Videor Art Foundation, Bonny says, "I go into the studio every day hoping for an unknown adventure. I start painting without any preset idea and let incidences intuitively dictate my daily work. I think this method is the best for mixtures of painting, printing, and digital imaging. It is the optimization of a 20-year collection of solutions for the multimedia dilemma. I am using the inherent characteristic of acrylic paint to produce a series: the ability to stick to one surface and not to another is just as important for the creation of my work as its flexible nature. I paint a monotype in acrylic paint for the latter combination with my digital file."

A printmaker's studio is a playground where every manner of madness can occur. Bonny uses so many different techniques and types of equipment in her studio that the ability to move from project to project is seamless and fluid. She invents as she goes. For example, she uses electric kitchen deep fryers as pots for boiling solutions into which metal plates, previously treated with stencils and relief materials, become substrates upon which further unique transfer techniques are used to apply photographs and other graphic elements to create, finally, a finished piece of artwork!

Bonny's printmaking equipment includes a 30" x 40" Griffin etching press, a custom 36" x 48" hydraulic press with a floating bed she designed, an HP Z3200 and an HP 9180, a Universal Laser Systems Versa Laser 4.60, a Roland BN-20, and an Epson 9800. She uses ErgoSoft RIP, Adobe Creative Suite 6, and Super Flip! 3-D Genius. Rexam Graphics, Roland, and Arches products are her primary source for media along with the custom substrates she creates for her art.

Printmaking techniques can generally be divided into basic categories including the traditional and digital, or a combination of the two. Bonny uses them all!

In many cases, she invents the techniques to create some of those processes. She is a chemist, engineer, physicist, biologist, inventor, teacher, and tinkerer—but above all, she is an artist!

Bonny is the penultimate teacher. She gives away all that she has developed, in the form of workshops, training sessions in her studio, books, and DVDs. Her explanations are clear and measured, and her presentations are very well planned and understandable. I have all of anything she has published or produced, and whenever the opportunity presents itself to attend an event where I can work together with her or just watch a presentation that she is having, I am there! I had the privilege of having her to my studio for a two-day workshop of film transfers using her DASS film and SuperSauce, both of which she invented and distributes from her website at www.lhotka.com or at the Digital Art Seminars website, www.digitalartstudioseminars.com.

Bonny's vision supersedes all process and invention. Her photography and imagery are awe-inspiring. I am literally taken away and breathless when I observe her new work for the first time. I no longer see the process behind the pieces, only the power of the color and form before me.

As graphicspower.com states, “The Lhotka style is one of complexity resolved by synthesis. What began as a dual interest in water media and printmaking evolved in multi-layered abstract and semi-abstract painting/collages, often of heroic scale.”

About Jack Duganne

Master Printmaker Jack Duganne, one of the original architects of digital fine art printmaking and the originator of the term *Giclée*, is currently teaching all levels of Adobe Photoshop at Santa Monica College in the Academy of Entertainment and Technology. Involved in the visual arts since his days as a fine art student at UCLA in the late 60s, Jack established the standards for emerging digital printmaking.

Foreword

A Layered Path

Kathryn Maxwell

Long before most of us recognized the importance of computers in our daily lives, let alone our art practices, Bonny Lhotka added a Macintosh computer to her studio tools. Since that time she has been an innovator and inventor of new materials and techniques that utilize the ever-expanding digital technology in combination with her expertise in more traditional art-making methods.

Current digital print technology has come a long way from the days when Bonny first added that early Macintosh to her studio. Advances in digital technology allow anyone with a desktop inkjet or laser printer the ability to create a form of print at the touch of a button. The images created from the average desktop printer can rival the detail, clarity, and color of photographs printed individually by hand and with the best materials of past decades. Now images can be printed relatively easily, inexpensively, and in never-ending quantities as long as the digital file is intact. These images tend to have a sameness that is in large part due to the unchanging coating of dye or pigment on an unvarying, and generally unlovely, substrate. No artist's hand need touch the print until it is completed; no artist's touch is visible in the final output. For the artist, the labor involved in the creation of digital works, whether with small desktop models or high-end printers, is no longer physical but of the cerebral sort. The artist determines conceptual and visual outcomes on a computer monitor with the aid of ever-changing and sophisticated software platforms, a button is pressed, and a print is completed.

In contrast, traditional lithographs, etchings, relief prints, or screen prints, and the early photographic techniques such as photogravures, collotypes, or daguerreotypes, made laboriously by hand, can have variations in color, ink coating, substrate, or even slight changes in registration. All of these processes are labor intensive, and the artist is intimately connected and physically engaged with the materials used to create the works. The mark of the human hand is self-evident in these older forms of printmaking and photography. Some of these works may even contain physical evidence of the artist's hand through the unintentional incorporation of a fingerprint!

Curators and collectors prize the obviously handmade object due to the imperfections and indication of the human hand evidenced in its form. Purely digital prints, while they may be conceptually and visually brilliant, lack the unique evidence of the artist's hand. There has been a resurgence in the field of printmaking in the most basic but hand-intensive technique of relief printing. Other forms of printmaking have also experienced a renewed interest among artists and the general population as contemporary society becomes more familiar with the materials and techniques of the mediums through YouTube, Do It Yourself TV programs, and blogs or other Internet offerings. Within photography, artists have renewed their interest in tintypes, daguerreotypes, cyanotypes, and other older forms of non-silver photography as a means to connect more directly with the material world and create a sense of object. In *The Substance of Style*, Virginia Postrel asserts that sensory pleasure and meaning are fundamental biological wants, universal human desires. Traditional forms of printmaking and photography combine these two elements beautifully; the purely digital may appeal to the desire for meaning but often denies the want of sensory pleasure for both the artist and the viewer. As new digital technologies allow us to exactly repeat an image over and over again, we as artists and humans cannot relinquish the desire for the unique final layer the human hand can provide on prints, photographs, or other art objects.

Where does this leave the contemporary artist? Must it be a choice between the many advantages of 21st century imaging technology or the sensory pleasure and unique layer of the individual artist's hand? Luckily for us, Bonny Lhotka shares her innovations and inventions with the rest of us, opening new realms of possibilities for artists that combine the digital with the unique qualities of the purely handmade art object. In *The Last Layer*, Bonny continues her artistic dialogue with the digital medium after it leaves the printer, exploring traditional and non-traditional art materials to add the evidence of the artist's hand, the last layer to images. Bonny has devised techniques such as the pearloid transfer that references daguerreotypes with their shimmering, ethereal look. The digital image is combined with real-world materials to become a unique object. There is a sensory pleasure for the artist during the creation of the works with these techniques, but also for the viewer. The contemporary viewer can relate to the images, the handling of the layers and vibrant colors provided through the digitally printed images, yet much of the appeal, the sensory pleasure and evidence of the artist's hand is added in the last layer. One need only view the beautiful reproductions

of Bonny Lhotka's artworks in this book to understand the numerous directions a printmaker, photographer, or other artist might go with these techniques.

The digital revolution has indeed impacted photography and printmaking. With the techniques in *The Last Layer*, artists can create artworks that relate strongly to the contemporary world, but have an appeal that links them to the past. The question now is, what will you do with the techniques presented in *The Last Layer* that makes an artwork uniquely your own? What will be your last layer?

About Kathryn Maxwell

Kathryn Maxwell is Professor of Printmaking and Associate Director for Academic Affairs for the School of Art at Arizona State University in Tempe. Her prints and mixed media artworks have been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions. Her work is also represented in numerous public and corporate collections.

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4

FINDING A VOICE

One of the hardest things about being a photographer or artist can be finding a creative voice that reflects the uniqueness of your own spirit. A way you can approach this is by determining which particular medium is right for you—sculpture, photography, painting, printmaking, poetry, film, and song each has their own unique character. One of my sons uses sound to paint mental pictures reflecting dreams and imagination. The other uses written and spoken words (not musical, mind you, as he jokes that on a good day, he can carry a song—in a bucket) to share visions of how the future can be. Both sons use photography to tell stories. And while my daughter-in-law is joining me in the studio using these processes, you'd never guess that her work and mine use the same techniques because we each have our own unique creative voice.

This chapter is an assemblage of ideas that I hope will motivate photographers and artists to assess their work from a new viewpoint. While the work included in this book is a representation of the possibilities, your goal should not be to replicate those images but rather to take the techniques and apply them to create your own signature look.

Be Prepared

The best image is the one you actually take, not the one you missed because your camera is at home. The smartphone revolution has somewhat solved that problem. Hardly a day goes by when I don't take a photograph of some kind, either with my iPhone or my Nikon. Now that everyone has a smartphone camera, we're producing an amazing number of images every day. For most people, these are simply snapshots that will end up on a hard disk or website. The photographer or artist has a different kind of eye, however—they not only see and capture the scene before them but they also visualize what the image can become. In this light, capturing the image obviously is important, but it's what you do with the photograph that really matters. For me, these actions of seeing, capturing, and visualizing are ingredients you can use together or in layers to create a larger message and story.

It helps to keep the story in mind as you take photographs: think not only about *what* you are shooting, but also *why* you are shooting it. We all can benefit from stepping back and thinking about not just a single piece, but about a body of work that we want to create. It may be a series of works through shared composition or subject matter, or with a single technique or techniques. In any case, it's the overall story that we want to tell that's important because this is what launches the creative process.

While basic (or advanced) Lightroom or Photoshop skills can apply filters, make photographs look foggy, replicate toy camera looks, or even turn vibrant colors into black and white images, the best techniques alone will not turn a photograph that contains no thought or planning—and, hence, is poorly composed and without a story—into a piece you'd hang on your wall, let alone in a gallery or museum.

I'm often asked how I develop an idea for a body of work. Where does the spark come from that can carry me through several different pieces over many months?

One great example of finding that spark comes from my pre-digital days. I was attending a Peter Kater concert at the Chautauqua Auditorium in Boulder, Colorado. On that summer night, the old wooden structure engulfed the audience and blocked out all except for the intense performance. The music released my left brain and I found myself mentally painting and developing a completely new process.

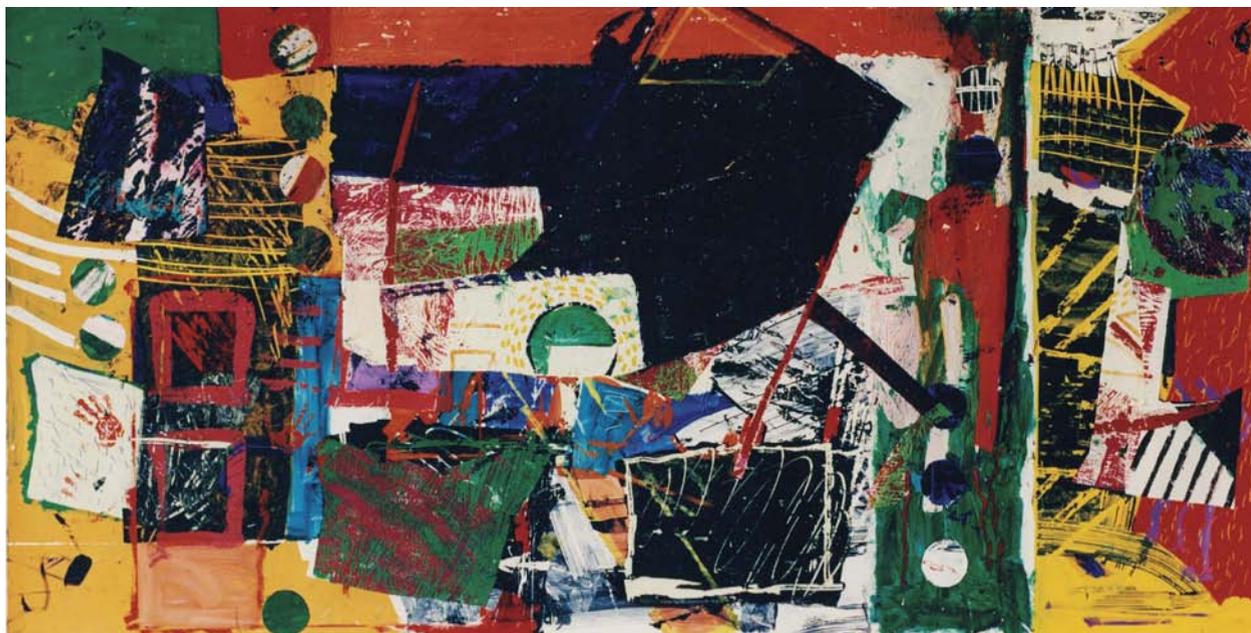


FIGURE 4.1 This 48" x 96" acrylic monographic transfer is titled *Fear Alley*.

It turns out that those imaginings had their roots in an experiment I'd done the month before: painting in reverse on a plastic plate and then pulling it off to reveal the work—layering in reverse. Something clicked that night and it all came together. I returned to my studio, put on the same music I heard that night, and was able to begin the process of creating more than 100 works based on the one experience, many of which are now in private and public collections (**Figure 4.1**).

By mentally storing all kinds of visual imagery, you program your internal computer and intuitive vocabulary with the necessary components for the spark to ignite. Those captured elements can be instantly recalled to consciousness when you're away from the computer and trigger the Aha moment that results in a compelling work. I find that if I rely too much on stored digital photographs, I spend time and

energy thinking about where I saw something rather than what I saw. As well, sometimes working with real materials helps me keep the focus on the work—and I'm not alone. I recall John Derry, who was one of the original authors of *Fractal Design Painter* (now *Corel Painter*), telling me in 1994 that he would go scrub a piece of chalk on paper to determine how the digital version should work and would then incorporate that visual imagery and feel into the product.

When I taught experimental painting techniques, I would tell my students that it's just fine to paint what you like. Even cliché subjects like daisies, mushrooms, dead trees, and Hawaiian sunsets can be made unique and compelling if you can find a creative way to use the subject. One of the masters of looking at ordinary things in new ways is Edward Weston (http://www.edward-weston.com/edward_weston_natural.htm). His images of peppers, toadstools, chard, and



FIGURE 4.2 This 2001 24" x 24" UV pigment on polycarbonate with a mirror is titled *Paper Doll*.



FIGURE 4.3 This 2005 24" x 30" inkjet pigment direct image to sand is titled *Bubble Dance*.

artichokes express beautiful simplicity in a way that reflects his own creative voice. For me, what it comes down to is you must be open to experimentation while drawing on experiences to fuel you. Those experiences you bring are what keep you prepared for the unexpected and new.

Practice

The best way to learn to do art is to *do* art. I read somewhere that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert in something. Now that doesn't mean that it takes 10,000 hours and then you produce your first good piece of art out of thin air—it's an evolution over time. It does help, though, to have basic techniques mastered first so that your voice comes through. I'm not sure that I'd want to hear



FIGURE 4.4 This 2006 24" x 30" transfer to fresco overlaid with a transfer to an old tablecloth is titled *Tea Time Ladies*.

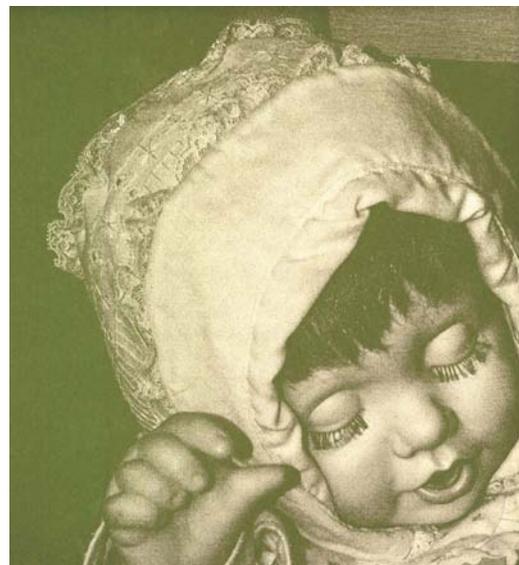


FIGURE 4.5 This 2012 34" x 48" anotype/UV pigment on metal is titled *Baby Doll (detail)*.

the first time Chip Davis played the drums as a child, but I've no doubt that the genius behind Mannheim Steamroller was there. You just couldn't hear it behind the immature technique!

So where to begin? The mastery of digital tools is an exhausting process, and a never-ending treadmill of change. I've found that it's best to learn things just as I need them to express my vision at that time. As I develop new content and ideas, I learn the computer skills to complete the work. I'm by no means a Photoshop expert, but in those things that I use I'm pretty good. A basic foundation is certainly required, but don't wait until you've finished the last chapter before starting to create; exploit what you know to its fullest, and then add more tools to your pallet as you grow.

Next, think about the statement you're trying to make with your art. You should have a reason for the subject matter and the techniques you use in your work. Remember, you're not going to be around to explain the image—you're a visual artist. While the artist's

statement has become a traditional attachment, the best works stand by themselves, without comment. Just make sure that the statement you're making isn't something like, "I just learned how to use the XXX plugin for Photoshop!" Your techniques may grow over time, and that might be part of the story, but it shouldn't be the whole story.

I have been creating a series of images of dolls over the past several years, adding one or two at a time (**Figures 4.2 through 4.5**). I think you can see the evolution of my voice and vision as well as the techniques and technology as you look across the body of work. You can see the full image of one of the "Girls" in Chapter 11; I'm sure you can see from its character the newness of it, as it uses chlorophyll light-sensitive emulsions that I've never explored before. The process conveys a sense of nostalgia to the image. For me, the materials influence the content and add to the visual feast.

Salvaging Photographs

BY CARRIE NEHER LHOTKA

WWW.CARRIELHOTKA.COM

A few years ago I was walking with my sister and my young niece at Chatfield State Park here in Colorado. There wasn't anything special about that day, no birthday or holiday to ensure that I brought a good camera along for the trip—just some time out of the house to walk with my niece and her dog. When my niece started skipping ahead, holding the dog's leash, her smile was so big you could almost see it from behind. The only thing I had to capture the moment was my old Motorola Razr phone camera. Rather than let it pass, I took the picture. When I got home, I realized I'd captured a precious moment: universal childhood joy. The composition was wonderful, yet the technical aspects were pretty poor—it was too small, of low quality, and really good only for a snapshot.

A couple of years later I came across it again, shortly after my mother-in-law, Bonny, invented the SuperSauce stone paper transfer, and it all came together.

I did some basic editing in Lightroom and Photoshop, converted it to black and white, flipped the image horizontal, and printed it out—at 20" x 30". The image on the film looked pretty grainy and I wasn't sure that it would actually work, but I decided to take a chance and transfer it to stone paper (**Figure 4.6**). It turned out wonderfully—Bonny's process let me save a poor photograph and turn it into a work that captured that moment, and allowed me to express my own creative voice.

So the next time you see something that touches you—a moment, a picture, a scene, or a smile—don't just wish you had a better camera. Take the picture with what you have. Then go back to your studio and think outside the box, salvage the picture, and share the moment.

FIGURE 4.6 These processes let you use images that would otherwise just be a file on a computer. This 20" x 30" stone paper transfer is titled *A Day in the Park*.



Body of Work

Digital photography has given us many wonderful options that we never had before, but some of these options can be a two-edged sword. There is no longer a cost associated with each shutter click, so we tend to capture without thought or purpose. There are uncounted snapshots for each artistic photograph, and if we're not careful we can lose the wheat amongst the chaff in our own digital libraries. Shoot,

but shoot with a purpose, and remember, it's always better to get it right (meaning close to your vision) in the camera than to rely on the computer later. There are exceptions, though (as you saw in Carrie's sidebar); it's better to capture a technically poor photograph than to miss a moment completely.

In the end, take your images—either captured on your smartphone on the spur of the moment or with

FIGURE 4.7 This 48" x 48" UV-cured pigment on acrylic is titled *Tree Farm*.



a Nikon DSLR after waiting hours in the rain for the right moment—back to the studio, bring them into your image library, and take a moment to reflect on your whole catalog. Do you have a group of photographs of a single subject like trees, hills, antiquity, ruins, joy, embers, sea walls, nature's fury, illusions, monoliths, snowscapes, relics, textures, solitude, food, sunsets, passages, or time? Does a story emerge? Grab

those images and bring them to a collection. There's a body of work.

Or perhaps it's the reverse. Has something inspired you recently, like a particular sunset, story, sermon, laugh, or vacation? Then go out and take a series of photographs that reflect the idea; I did that in my Illusions series (**Figures 4.7 and 4.8**), which you can also see on my website, www.lhotka.com. All of the



FIGURE 4.8 This 48" x 48" UV-cured pigment on acrylic is titled *Tree Farm Row Two*.



FIGURE 4.9 Processes are driven by artistic intent, not the other way around. A 30" x 40" pearloid image from my Foothills collection.

photographs were taken through distorted methods (wrinkled mirrored Mylar, water, window glass, fountains, or a handmade fluid filter). The distortion brought a commonality to the images that made the series work.

Another of my series is based on one two-hour experience while being caught in an ice and fog storm. Since it was too dangerous to drive, I pulled out my camera and started taking photos of what I thought was nothing but white shadows. Through the magic of digital manipulation I was able to pull images out of the fog, and the crystalline reality drove me to create the pearloid process I share in Section 4 (**Figure 4.9**).

Conclusion

As Garr Reynolds suggests in *Presentation Zen*:

“Being creative does not mean wearing a black turtleneck and hanging out in jazz cafés sipping cappuccinos. It means using your whole mind to find solutions. Creativity means not being paralyzed by your methods and knowledge, but being able to think outside the box (sometimes very quickly) to find solutions to unforeseen problems.”

You can become a very fine technical photographer by understanding the rules (exposure, focal length, and so on), but creativity comes in knowing when to break those rules, even if you’re not exactly sure why. When your creative voice says, “Wow, that’s an amazing waterfall,” don’t think, “Darn, it’s noon and it’s harsh, specular light, so there’s no point in taking a picture,” or, “Oops, I left the better lens back in the car.” Instead, listen to that voice. It sees something: something that may be technically wrong but artistically right. What if you take that waterfall and transfer it to mill finish aluminum so that the specular contrasts sparkle? Or an image of a haystack under gray skies then glows warm after you transfer it to canvas? Or a Halloween snapshot of a grandson becomes an affirmation of imagination in black and white when you transfer it to glass as a pearloid?

As my favorite Vulcan often said, “There are always possibilities.” Listen to your creative voice and learn to see them.

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Index

A

acrylic gels, 278
acrylic sheets, 187, 188, 241, 279, 280, 282
Adams, Ansel, 9
adhesives, 211, 247, 251, 254, 277, 279
Adobe
 Creative Suite, 23
 Photoshop (*See* Photoshop)
 Photoshop Lightroom (*See* Lightroom)
 RGB color space, 131, 135
aerosol sprays, 277–278
aged plates, 65–121
 cooking, 75–81
 direct imaging to, 66, 95–107
 distressing, 68
 gallery of work, 110–121
 making in batches, 82
 preparing, 67–69
 protecting, 66
 resources, 66
 samples, 66
 stacking, 70–74
 table of methods/materials, 82
 transfers to, 86–93
 variations in batches of, 66
 White Crackle Plate variation, 99–100
Akua inks, 161
alcohol products, 28–29, 49, 170
alignment boards, 44–45, 87, 89, 228, 233, 250
all-in-one printers, 35

Altered Nation (B. Lhotka), 223
aluminum foil, 70, 76, 216–218
anthotypes, 7, 55, 167, 181
Apple computers, 38
appliances, 43
aqueous inkjet printers, 19, 276. *See also* inkjet printers
archival copies, 34, 136, 179
artists. *See also* artwork
 combining fine art/photography, 225
 key challenge faced by, 51
 new printmaking techniques for, 7, 11, 65
 paintable precoats for, 20
 usage rights/permissions, 15
artist's statement, 55
artwork
 capturing images for, 52
 conservation issues, 14–15
 documenting materials used in, 14
 mastering techniques for creating, 54–55
 usage rights for, 15

B

Baby Doll (B. Lhotka), 55, 181
backlit panels, 280
backups, 34
Back Yard Cow (B. Lhotka), 120
Baltic birch, 16–17, 296
beauty foil, 216

birch, 16–17, 213, 296
birch box mixed media, 231–235, 270, 293
bite, 149
bitmap screens, 131, 134, 196
Black Bird Flight (B. Lhotka), 201
blenders, 43
Blending mode, 134–135
Blond Bob (B. Lhotka), 4, 5
blueberries, 171, 173
body of work, 52, 58–60
bonus chapter, 11, 68, 288
book's website, 11, 13
Boots (B. Lhotka), 200
brayers, 187, 188
Breeze (B. Lhotka), 297
Brown, Russell Preston, 86
brush marks, 46
Bubble Dance (B. Lhotka), 54
bubbles, 48, 77, 276
Burkholder, Dan, 139

C

calcium carbonate, 99, 106
calibration systems, 23
canned air, 104
canning jars, 47
canvas panels, 15
Capitol, The (B. Lhotka), 117
Carriage (B. Lhotka), 199
Cascade Complete, 79
chalk, 99, 106

chlorophyll emulsion process, 167–181
 coating paper, 172–173
 exposing paper, 177–179
 finishing work, 179
 materials/tools, 169
 overview, 168–169
 preparing digital file, 174–177
 preparing emulsion, 170–172
 sample images, 197, 199, 200, 201, 205
 and UV exposure, 280
cleaning pastes, 29–31
coating applicators, 46–47
coating rods, 98
coffee presses, 43
cold-water bath process, 77–78
collages, 114, 115, 211, 225
collagraphs, 7, 126, 148, 196
color calibration systems, 23
color management, 23, 155
commercial-grade gelatin, 25. *See also* gelatin
computer
 hardware considerations, 38–39
 vs. traditional darkroom techniques, 5
contact prints, 137, 138, 142
cookie trays, 43, 65
cooking plates, 75–82
coolers, 43, 75
Corel Painter, 53
Country Road (B. Lhotka), 113
County Cottonwood (B. Lhotka), 236
Cover Girl (B. Lhotka), 7
crackled surface, 99–100, 106, 211
crazed surface, 211
creative voice, 51, 61
CristalBond, 247, 251
crushed foil patterns, 70, 82
curve adjustment technique, 131–133, 140–141
cyanotypes, 7, 184

D

Dad, A (B. Lhotka), 205
daguerreotypes, 7, 245, 256
Daisy (B. Lhotka), 193
Daniel Smith fine art supplies, 27
Daniel Smith precipitated chalk, 30
darkroom techniques, 5, 9, 126, 136–137, 142
DASS
 Premium Transfer Film, 141
 SuperSauce, 21, 25–27
 Transfer Films, 21, 247
 Universal Precoat II, 20, 97, 105, 284
DataColor, 23
Day in the Park, A (C. Lhotka), 57
decimal/metric equivalents, 39
deckled edges, 18, 161
dehydrators, 43
denatured alcohol, 28
Derry, John, 53
desktop printers, 9, 35–36, 95
detergents, 75
Dibond, 280, 282, 285, 289–290, 292, 294–295
diffusion dither, 152, 153
Digital Alchemy (Lhotka), 9, 10, 11, 33, 90
digital artists, 5
Digital Atelier, 20
Digital Ground topcoats, 278
digital mixed-media processes, 10
digital negatives, 126, 131, 134–135, 139
digital photography, 58, 136–137
digital positives, 131–134
digital printers, 9
digital printing, 10, 15. *See also* printmaking
digital studios, 11, 65
digital tools, mastering, 55
dishwasher
 cooking method, 76–77
 stacking method, 70–71, 75

distortion, 60
distressing plates, 68
doll images, 55
drafting tape, 239
drop cloths, 43
duct tape, 47
Duganne, Jack, x–xii, 91
Durabrite inks, 21, 35
DVD-R, 34
dye-based inks, 34

E

Easy Wipe compound, 161
Econolite panels, 16, 112, 113
electric fry pans, 43
Ember (B. Lhotka), 269
encaustic wax, 277
Enchanted (B. Lhotka), 264
Enhanced Matte profile, 22, 249
enlargers, 142
Epson printers
 and direct printing, 95, 96
 and full-bleed prints, 100
 ink considerations, 21, 34–35
 large-format, 37
 and media thickness, 39
 Print options dialog box, 102
 profiles/setup, 22
 and rigid substrates, 36
 and thick substrates, 37–38
 and transfer film, 21, 35
equipment, 33–49
 alignment boards, 44–45
 appliances, 43
 for backups, 34
 coating applicators, 46–47
 computers, 38–39
 current/updated list of, 33
 printers, 34–38
 safety considerations, 48–49
 work surfaces, 43
Escape Hatch (B. Lhotka), 111

etching inks, 161
etching press, 147, 148, 149, 161
etchings, 7
ethanol, 28
Everclear, 29
Exponential Growth (Schminke), 296
external hard drives, 34
eye shields, 48

F

fabrics
 printing on, 17–18, 184–193
 transfer to silk process, 219–222
Fear Alley (B. Lhotka), 53
felt, 74, 121
Fiber Doll (B. Lhotka), 291
file formats, 34
fine art supplies, 27
fire extinguishers, 49
fire safes, 34
flammable materials, 49
flexible substrates, 211, 215–223
Flight (B. Lhotka), 145
flow blue fabric process, 183–193
 inspiration for, 183, 184
 making exposure, 189–191
 materials/tools, 185
 preparing for exposure, 185–188
 products/resources, 183
 sample images, 193, 202, 203
 and UV exposure, 280
flow blue plates, 183, 184
flow patterns, 72
foam brushes, 46–47
foil, transfer to, 216–218
fondue pots, 48
food dehydrators, 43
food processors, 43
Foothills collection, 60
Forest Floor (B. Lhotka), 289
Fractal Design Painter, 53

frame plates, 74
frames, 275, 280–284
Fredrix marble dust, 30
full-bleed prints, 100

G

gallery of work
 aged plates, 110–121
 creative substrates, 260–271
 new techniques, 288–297
 transformed by light, 196–205
Garden, The (B. Lhotka), 196
Garden Glass (B. Lhotka), 290
Garden Path (B. Lhotka), 257
Gaze, The (B. Lhotka), 8
gear pattern, 83
gelatin, 20, 21, 25, 245–255
gels, 278
gesso, 28, 226, 227
glass
 direct imaging on, 105
 low-iron, 126–127 (*See also*
 low-iron glass)
 optical-grade, 17
 pearloid transfer to, 245–257
 tempered, 17, 105, 127
 vs. UV-protective acrylic sheets,
 280
glass sandwich exposure unit,
 129–130
glass slides, 105
gloves, 49
GOLDEN
 Artist Colors, 27, 278, 279
 Digital Grounds products, 20
 MSA, 278–279
gold mica, 245. *See also* mica
grain alcohol, 28–29, 167, 169, 170
Granite (B. Lhotka), 293
Graphic Chemical & Ink, 161
Griffen etching press, 147

H

hair dryers, 48
Handcart (B. Lhotka), 14
hand-colored images, 92, 110
hard drives, 34
Haystack (Wood), 242
Herschel, William, 167
Hot Dog Stand (B. Lhotka), 165
hot-water bath process, 79–81
HP
 Backlit Film, 141
 Photo Negative program, 138,
 139
 printers, 21, 24, 34, 37, 39, 141
 Vivera pigment inks, 21
hybrid prints, 137, 143

I

ice chests, 77–80. *See also* coolers
Ice Storm (B. Lhotka), 292
Illusions series, 59
image file formats, 34
image layers, 5
ImageOnHD polymer plates, 163
image permanence, 14–15
images. *See also* photographs
 backing up, 34
 capturing, 52, 58–60
 creating matte surface for, 91
 dealing with imperfections in,
 85
 digitally combining substrate
 with, 40–41
 on fabric, 184–193
 framing, 275
 hand-colored, 92, 110
 layering, 210–211
 mounting, 280–284
 visualizing, 52

imaging. *See also* printing
to aged plates, 95–107
defined, 15
on glass, 105
software, 5, 33, 38–39, 55 (*See also* specific programs)
infrared thermometers, 47
inkjet coatings, 19, 20
inkjet precoats, 19–20
inkjet printers, 19, 276
inkjet transfers, 237, 269. *See also* monoprints
Inkodyne process, 184–192, 202
invisible paint, 192
iPhone, 52
iridescent powders, 27
IRIS prints, 14
isopropyl alcohol, 27, 28–29

J

Jacobson, Quinn, 6
junk patterns, 73, 82

K

K3 inks, 21, 35
Karsten Balsley Woodworking, 128
Kelby, Scott, 33, 40
Kitchen Sink (B. Lhotka), 118
Krause, Dot, 204
Krylon, 277–278

L

laminates, 278–279
large-format printers, 24, 37–38, 138, 149
laser engraving, 11
last layer. *See also* printing process; printmaking
defined, 5

equipment for working with, 33–49
leveraging to enhance creative works, 9
layers
mixed media, 210
oil- *vs.* water-based, 210–211
LED light pads, 280–281
Lhotka, Carrie Neher, 56, 121
light boxes, 127–129, 281
Light Frost (B. Lhotka), 267
light pads, 280–281
Lightroom, 5, 33, 38, 52, 56, 137
light-sensitive emulsion, 167, 183, 184. *See also* chlorophyll emulsion process
light-sensitive icon, 126, 149
light-sensitive images, 179
light sources, 127–130
liquid laminates, 278–279
Liquitex Gesso, 28, 226
low-iron glass
characteristics of, 17
and Inkodyne process, 185
and pearloid transfer process, 246, 260, 261, 263, 266, 267
and photosensitive processes, 127, 129

M

MacBook Pro, 38
Making Digital Negatives for Contact Printing (Burkholder), 139
manufactured inkjet coatings, 19
marble dust, 100
Marshall's Photo Oils, 92
masking tape, 47
master plate, 168
materials, 13–31
for aged plates transfer process, 87

alcohol products, 28–29
for chlorophyll emulsion process, 169
cleaning, 29–31
for cooking plates, 75
current/updated list of, 13
for direct imaging to aged plates, 96
documenting, 14–15
for flow blue fabric process, 185
for glass sandwich exposure unit, 129
heating, 47, 48
for mixed media layered transfers, 227
for pearloid transfer process, 247
for photopolymer plate process, 150
for photosensitive processes, 127
precoats, 19–20
for preparing aged plates, 67
safety considerations, 13, 27
for Solarplate process, 150
for stacking plates, 67
storing, 47
substrates, 15–18 (*See also* substrates)
transfer film, 21–24
transfer mediums, 25–27
for transfer to foil, 216–218
for transfer to silk, 219
Matte Black ink
and chlorophyll emulsion process, 169, 176
and desktop printers, 35
and digital negatives/positives, 131, 133
and Epson printers, 22, 35
and HP large-format printers, 24
and Inkodyne process, 185
and pearloid transfer process, 249
and printer profile/setup, 22

and Solarplate process, 154
and transfer to silk process, 220,
222
vs. Photo Black ink, 22

mattes, 82

matte surfaces, 91

Maxwell, Kathryn, xiii–xv

Mayer coating rods, 98

measuring cups, 47

measuring spoons, 47

media storage, 34

media thickness, 39, 100

Messec, Don, 163

metal, direct imaging on, 96, 97

metal panels, 282

metric/decimal equivalents, 39

mica, 27, 212, 245

microscopic slides, 17

microwaves, 43, 48

mill finish aluminum, 16, 29, 67

Mill Pond (B. Lhotka), 274

mixed junk patterns, 73

mixed media layered transfers,
225–235
materials/tools, 227
products/resources, 225
sample image, 230
stretching canvas for, 226

mixed media layers, 210

mixers, 43

Modern Day Antique, 282

moiré patterns, 132

monoprints, 237–243
creative edges for, 240
editions, 237
materials/tools, 239
products/resources, 237
sample images, 236, 243

monotypes, 7, 164

Moonrise (B. Lhotka), 266

Moon Rose (B. Lhotka), 295

Moss (B. Lhotka), 271

mounting images, 280–284

N

nail stoppers, 71–72, 82

natural fabrics, 17–18. *See also* fabrics

negatives
making digital, 134–135
printing on film, 141
for silver halide, 136–143

“New Technology and Future
Directions” bonus chapter, 11, 68,
288

Night Out (B. Lhotka), 116

O

Ocean Kale (B. Lhotka), 294

offsite file storage, 34

Old Boots (B. Lhotka), 230

open bite, 149

optical-grade glass, 17

orbital sanders, 48, 68

orotones, 11, 288

oval plates, 87

ovals, 74, 82

oval templates, 119

OxiClean, 77, 78, 118, 119

P

paintable inkjet coatings, 20

painter’s tape, 47, 239

painting techniques, 53

Pantone, 23

Paper Doll (B. Lhotka), 54

Party Girl (B. Lhotka), 263

patch charts, 138

patterns
crushed foil, 70
flow, 72
gear, 83
mixed junk, 73
moiré, 132
oval, 74
stencil, 68–69

Peachpit Press, 11, 23, 33, 68, 288

pearloid images, 17, 255, 257. *See also*
pearloid transfer process

pearloid transfer process, 245–257
applying pearl layer, 253–255
applying print, 250–253
defined, 209
final cleaning, 255
inspiration for, 245
materials/tools, 247
overview, 246–247
preparing materials, 248–250
products/resources, 245
sample images, 257, 260–261,
263, 266–267
shipping considerations, 255

Photo Black ink
and chlorophyll emulsion
process, 169
and desktop printers, 35
and digital negatives/positives,
131, 133
and direct imaging to aged
plates, 101
and Epson printers, 24, 35
and Inkodyne process, 185
and pearloid transfer process,
249
and printer profiles/setup, 22
and transfer to silk process, 220
vs. Matte Black ink, 22

photo booth images, 85, 90, 93

photo collages, 114, 115

photographers, 51

photographs. *See also* images
creativity in, 61
planning, 52
salvaging poor quality, 56

photogravure, 7

photopolymer plate process, 147–165
exposing/finishing plate, 160–161
how it works, 147, 148–150
materials/tools, 150

preparing digital file, 151–153
printing digital file to plate,
154–159
printing edition, 161–163
products/resources, 149
photosensitive emulsions, 17–18
photosensitive processes, 125–145
adjusting for inkjet printing,
138–141
creating/editing source file,
137–138
developing print, 142–143
light sources, 126–130
making digital negatives/
positives, 131–135
making final print, 142
materials, 127
overview, 126
printing negative on film, 141
products/resources, 125
Photoshop
applying color tints with, 86, 87
Channels panel, 140
combining image and substrate
with, 39–41
curve adjustment technique,
131–133, 140–141
Curves dialog box, 132
mastering, 55
Print Settings dialog box, 101,
103, 155
recommended books on, 23, 33
as tool for digital artist, 5
Pictorico
OHP, 141
Transparency Film, 185
pigment inks, 14, 21, 34, 35–36, 125
pigments, mica, 212, 245
pizza wheels, 36, 37
plant-based emulsion, 167. *See also*
chlorophyll emulsion process
Plant Life (B. Lhotka), 243
plaque mounting, 279

plastic coolers, 43
plastic sheets, 17, 43, 68, 187
platen gaps, 37–38, 101, 104, 154
plates. *See also* aged plates
cooking, 75–81
direct printing to, 95–107
making in batches, 82
preparing, 67–69
stacking, 70–74
Plexiglas, 14, 17, 187
Poached Kebab (Welden), 198
Polaroid, 7
polyurethane, 279
Pond Lily (B. Lhotka), 115
portraits, 85, 92, 93
postcoats, 275–280
powdered iridescent colors, 27
powdered mica pigments, 212
precoats, 19–20, 46–47, 97–98
PreScribe (Krause), 204
Presentation Zen (Reynolds), 61
Preserve Your Memories II, 278
pre-stretched canvas, 15, 226
printer cartridges, 34
printer profiles, 22, 24, 33, 101–102
printer resolution, 23
printers, 34–38. *See also* specific types
cost considerations, 35
hand-loading materials into, 36
ink considerations, 34–35
platen gaps in, 37–38
printing process. *See also* printmaking
equipment required for, 9
on fabric, 184–193
for imaging on glass, 105
for imaging to aged plates, 96–98
for printing on film, 141
quality considerations, 9
for stone paper monoprints,
237–241
turning over to local lab, 9
printmaking. *See also* printing process
materials, 13–31
traditional *vs.* digital, 5, 7, 237

profiles. *See* printer profiles
Pyrex dishes, 47

R

RAID array devices, 34
Rauschenberg, Robert, 225
razor knives, 47
Red Chair (B. Lhotka), 235
refrigerators, 48
registering book, 11, 68, 288
resins, 279
resolution, printer, 23
Rex (Jacobson), 6
Reynolds, Garr, 61
Rhoplex, 105, 282
Ripple (B. Lhotka), 270
roaster ovens, 43, 80–81
Rocket Blaster, 47, 48, 104
Rock Garden (B. Lhotka), 107
Rocking Horse (B. Lhotka), 114
Roland printers, 34
rubber brayers, 47
rubbing alcohol, 28–29

S

safety considerations, 13, 27, 48–49
safety glasses, 48–49, 127
Saffir, David, 131, 136–143
sanders, 48, 49, 68
sandpaper, 120
scales, 43
scarves, 222
Schminke, Karin, 282, 283, 296
Seeking Nectar (C. Lhotka), 121
sign shops, 11, 68
silk, transfer to, 219–222
Silver (B. Lhotka), 260
silver halide prints, 137
slip sheets, 35
smartphone revolution, 52

snapshots, 56, 58
Solarplate process, 147–165
 creator of, 147
 exposing/finishing plate, 160–161
 materials/tools, 150
 overview, 147–149
 preparing digital file, 151–153
 printing digital file to plate,
 154–159
 printing edition, 161–163
 products/resources, 149
 sample images, 163, 165, 196,
 198, 204
 and UV exposure, 280
sparkling additives, 27
spatulas, 47
spectrophotometer, 24
Stables, The (Wood), 242
stacking methods, 70–74
staples, 72, 82
star wheels, 36
steel wool, 47
stencils, 68–69
step-wedge charts, 138
stone paper, 18, 237–243, 268, 271,
 276. *See also* monoprints
storage devices, 34
strainers, 47
Street Fair (B. Lhotka), 288
studios, 11
Styrofoam coolers, 75
substrates
 aligning film to, 44–45
 applying precoats to, 46–47
 cleaning, 29–31
 creative, 209–213
 defined, 15
 digitally combining images with,
 40–41
 direct printing on, 49, 66, 96
 examples of, 5, 15–18
 flexible, 211, 215–223
 popping bubbles between image
 and, 48

 printing on thick, 37–38, 100
 using aged plates as, 66 (*See also*
 aged plates)
Super Moon (B. Lhotka), 285
SuperSauce Solution, 25–27, 29, 276
Sweet Dream (B. Lhotka), 225
synthetic fabrics, 17–18. *See also*
 fabrics
Synthrapol, 185, 189

T

tack cloth, 47
Tea Time Ladies (B. Lhotka), 55
tempered glass, 17, 105, 127
thermometers, 47
Tide Water (B. Lhotka), 265
timers, 48
Time Stops (B. Lhotka), 268
Tin Man (B. Lhotka), 110
tintypes, 7, 65, 70, 85, 282. *See also*
 aged plates
Together in Time (B. Lhotka), 213
Toy House (B. Lhotka), 197
transfer film
 aligning to substrate, 44–45
 importance of, 21
 inkjet coating on, 19
 printing on, 35, 141
 types of, 21
transfer mediums, 25–27
transfer process
 aged plates, 86–90
 birch box mixed media, 231–235
 flexible substrates, 215–223
 mixed media layers, 225–235
 monoprints, 237–243
 pearloid, 245–257
 silk, 219–222
TransferRite tape, 69
transfer tape, 68–69
Tree Farm (B. Lhotka), 58
Tree Farm Row Two (B. Lhotka), 58

Triangle CristalBond, 247, 251
Turkey Dinner (B. Lhotka), 202
Twitter (B. Lhotka), 262

U

Uelsmann, Jerry, 9
UltraChrome ink, 21, 35
Universal Precoat II, DASS, 20
usage rights, 15
UV acrylic sheets, 280. *See also* acrylic
 sheets
UV light, 127, 276
UV printers, 11, 106
UV-protective coatings, 14
UV-protective Plexiglas, 14
UV-protective safety glasses, 127

V

varnish, 276, 279
Veiled (B. Lhotka), 261
vintage tintypes transfer, 85–93
visual artists, 51, 55. *See also* artists
visual imagery, 53
Vivera pigment inks, 21
voice, creative, 51, 61

W

warming plates, 43
washing soda, 185
Watersong #1 (Schminke), 283
water stains, 70
wax, 255, 276, 277
websites
 Bonny Lhotka, 59
 Carrie Lhotka, 56
 Don Messec, 163
 Edward Weston, 53
 GOLDEN, 279
 Last Layer book, *see*
 www.thelastlayerbook.com

Modern Day Antique, 282
Peachpit Press, 33
Peachpit Press/Last Layer, 11, 68,
288
Solarplate, 148
Welden, Dan, 147, 148, 198
Weston, Edward, 53–54
wet collodion process, 6
wet plate photography, 70
What's the Point? (B. Lhotka), 83
white crackle surface, 99–100, 106
wide-format printers, 149. *See also*
large-format printers
Winter Ice (B. Lhotka), 119
wire brushes, 47
Wood, Virginia, 241, 242
wood substrates, 17
Woody (B. Lhotka), 203
wool felt, 74, 121
work gloves, 49
work surfaces, 43
www.thelastlayerbook.com, 11, 13, 33,
66, 85, 95, 125, 149, 169, 183, 209,
215, 225, 237, 245, 275

Y

Yard Scraps (B. Lhotka), 112