

(At the end of the text are listed a series of links to the pertinent parts of the website.)

## **Art Works Incorporating Dried Vegetation Within Paper Pulp or Acrylic Medium, by Allen Schill**

– This area of my work consists basically of two types. In one, dried plant parts – flowers, petals, seeds, florets, and so forth – are embedded in a medium of paper pulp, resulting in an array of the materials used within a support of dried paper pulp. In the other, the same sorts of dried vegetation are layered within many coats of clear acrylic medium. The former are meant to be viewed by reflected light, just as one would view any painting or print. The latter may be viewed by transmitted light (that is, mounted in a lightbox or suspended by a window), or they may be viewed by reflected light, with a suitably colored base to allow some sense of transparency or depth.

– These works, besides being meant to be experienced as objects, are also meant to be sources of photographic imagery. Once made, I photograph them with the view camera to produce images that can be printed by the usual (or by unusual) means. Some examples of the photographs may be seen on the website, in the last section of View Camera Photographs, “Surfaces and Textures”. (This is just after “Anthology and Rhythm”, the still-life photographs to which they are most closely related, those with natural materials arranged in rhythmic or patternistic ways.)

– When pulp is used, the dried material is arranged on a firm, flat, but somewhat porous surface, such as smooth, unvarnished hardwood. (I use an old tabletop about 4 centimeters or an inch and a half thick.) I produce the paper pulp from scraps of archival mat board, soaking them in water until they are softened, then running them through a food processor until I have a smooth pulp, saturated with water. Usually the pulp will be tinted various colors by mixing in watercolor pigments from tubes (first eliminating excess water). One may also add a small amount of acrylic medium for durability (but not so much as to cause the piece to become glued to the support – should this happen, one is obliged to first cover the support with plastic, which leaves the piece with a glossy surface and also retards drying). Then the pulp is applied by hand, little by little, on top of the vegetation, taking care not to disturb the arrangement.

– When everything is covered, the wet pulp is patted flat with the palm of the hand. Then a piece of plastic-coated, fiberglass mesh, like that used for window screens, is laid on top of the pulp. Absorbent towels are laid on top of the mesh, and a rolling pin is used to compress the wet pulp against the plant material and the board (gently at first), and to drive out as much moisture as possible. The pulp layer will have been compressed from 2 centimeters or so when saturated to around 3 millimeters when rolled flat. The towels and mesh are then removed, and the piece is allowed to dry thoroughly, which may take three to five days, depending on conditions of heat and humidity. Finally the piece is gently separated from the wooden base with the help of a spatula. The arrangement of dried flowers and leaves can now be seen.

– The pieces made with acrylic medium are begun by pinning or taping a sheet of plastic to a firm, flat base, then applying a generous coat of medium to the plastic. When it dries, another thick coat is applied, and before this one dries, plant matter is variously arranged on the layer of medium, becoming anchored in it as the medium dries. When thoroughly dry, another coat of medium is applied, and additional vegetation as well. This process is repeated several times, building up layers of plant matter within the clear acrylic medium, until the piece is thick as a piece of leather, and flexible like a roll of dried fruit.

– The compositional approach, such as it is, is essentially the same with both types of work. Although in some cases major forms will be arranged with clear orientations (such as vertical or opposed diagonals), in general the intent is to suggest a random distribution, such as one might find in a section of forest floor. The method I use to distribute the finer material comes at times close to a casual sprinkling. Just the same, very nonrandom care must usually be taken to create the impression of randomness. This interplay between order and disorder has always fascinated me; the nature of this dual aspect of the universe is an exciting part of recent work in particle physics and astrophysics.

– Although this work evolved directly out of an extended series of still-life photographs using the same sorts of dried flowers and plant material, arranged on a surface in the studio and photographed with a view camera, its roots go back to the very beginnings of my activities in visual art. Since my adolescence, a major theme of my photographic work has been the textures, patterns, and arrangements found in nature and where nature and the man-made interact. For me, such things bear witness to the laws of nature, which are of immense spiritual significance; that they are beautiful as well seems a matter of course. Growth, flux, and transformation, fertility and mortality – these realities are what I am trying to affirm and communicate to others, along with their importance, in this era which tends to limit our vision of life to the immediate, blinding us to that which is much greater than us, of which we are part (however small), and of which our awareness may be the most constant and reliable source of meaning and of our understanding of ourselves.

Allen Schill

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Links to the relevant sections of the website:

**View Camera Photos - Surfaces and Textures:**

<http://www.2you.it/levischill/slider.php?p=S1f>

**Paper Pulp Textural Pieces:**

<http://www.2you.it/levischill/slider.php?p=S4d>

**Acrylic Textural Pieces:**

<http://www.2you.it/levischill/slider.php?p=S4e>