

Photograms and Experimental Images, by Allen Schill

These two sections consist of examples of small series, experiments, and one-of-a-kind works, mostly done years ago: photograms (in black-and-white and color, made with a variety of techniques), photoassemblages, palladium prints, figure studies, straight photographs, and a few other items. There is not much to say about them except that, as far as they may seem from the other bodies of work I am presenting on this site, the underlying impulses are much the same. They are here just to suggest a little of what I've done in what now seems like the remote past, things I rarely think about except in relation to what I'm doing now, things that didn't develop into major areas of activity but which I still thought worth showing.

Photograms and Cliché-Verre, the biggest group, were made variously from magazine pages made translucent with oil, carefully-burned transparencies, acetate sheets painted or applied with translucent color, textured plastic, patterns of ink and oil formed spontaneously on a glass surface, chemical crystals on glass, and glass and plastic objects. Some these last are quite like the classic photograms of old, others closer to the idea of my mandalas and other work that tends toward biomorphic suggestion, still others closer to my photographic work concerned with texture and pattern. One small group goes back to my youth, when I experimented with the controlled burning or melting of photographic slides, which I called pyrography, and which certainly owes something to certain manifestations of the 1960s, such as the film "Fantastic Voyage". A couple of other examples come from my wish to use color photographic paper to make non-photographic images using translucent plastic or dyes instead a negative – creating the printing negative by hand, effectively.

The second group, Experimental and Miscellaneous, is truly a mixed bag, so except in the figure studies as a group, don't expect much consistency here. It includes samples of work in photoassemblage, as well as 35mm-format photographs printed in palladium or other hand processes, and by conventional means as well (gelatin-silver, Type C, and Cibachrome).

Of the conventionally-printed, small-format images, I realize that the few examples here are scarcely coherent as a group. (Before taking my most important work into the studio with the view camera, I worked some 20 years mainly with a 35mm camera and made a few worthy images here and there.) However, they show – if seen in the right way – some of the same concerns that I have been addressing more recently by other means with the view camera, and in my continuing work with found or discovered images – spontaneous photography – recorded with a small-format digital camera. This type of photography, which involves me in the primal act of observation, was always an end in itself (as photography), but at the same time serves as a sort of sketchbook, a way to carry on a dialogue in my mind about what I am trying to create in my carefully-controlled and arranged studio photography. I have various ideas about what I might do with them, but even if I never take them further, but they serve their purpose.

It is odd but at the same time unsurprising that, when I look back at what I did when I was young (or even very young), and when I notice what I notice now, I realize that my most basic interests are still there, essentially unchanged, only deepened. In a way I have not had many new conceptions, I have just found ever more ways of working with ones most fundamental to me. This is not mere intransigence; in fact I have duly considered many more possibilities than I have (or could have) carried out, always choosing what seemed most worthwhile. I keep coming back, drawn irresistibly, to the same things, and I can not but recognize this attraction as authentic.

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Photograms and Cliché-Verre:
Experimental and Miscellaneous:

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