

The Platinum / Palladium Process

This is an alternative photographic process, pursued by such artists / photographers as Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston during the early 20th Century. More recently, both Robert Mapplethorpe and Irving Penn - among others - have also worked with this process.

When utilizing this technique, the freedom and control of this medium gives the photographer endless possibilities to craft the image. In addition, this technique allows the opportunity to combine both the power and precision of modern technologies with the charm and passion contained in the oldest photographic processes.

While considered the apex of the many alternative processes, the « Platinotype » is a photographic printing process patented by William Willis in 1873. This was preceded by a succession of experiments by various photographers and scientists, commencing around 1830. During World War I, platinum prices soared due to their function as a catalyst in explosives. As a result, photographers needed to investigate other photographic processes - gelatin silver among them. Soon, ready-coated platinum papers disappeared from the marketplace. When rediscovered around the 1960's, « Platinotype » was once again embraced because of the immense tonal range this technique allowed each photograph. A primary advantage of this technique is the impregnation of finely divided platinum / palladium salts into the paper's fibers - allowing the image to be as long-sustaining as the fine paper the image is printed on. The platinum / palladium process is an extremely slow print-by-contact method requiring very strong UV light, and requiring that the negative be the same size as the desired print.

Artist's paper is sensitized by brush-coating a mixed solution of ferric salts (UV light sensitive) and chloroplatinite and / or chloropalladite salts. Once dry, the paper is exposed to UV light in tight contact with the negative. Processed after development in a solution of potassium oxalate, ammonium citrate or other developers suitable for the Pt/Pd print, the photograph is composed of platinum (and or palladium), lending the image a subtle tonality that can vary from cold metallic to warm red tone, depending on the noble metals used in the mixture preparation.

As of today, platinum and palladium prints are increasingly sought after by galleries, museum curators and fine-art collectors, who appreciate them for their stability and their unrivalled beauty.