

“The Platinum image has a physical presence unmatched in photographic processes”

-Arnold Gassen

PLATINUM/PALLADIUM PRINTING

Some Notes By Tom Millea

Platinum is “the medium that will best, most innocently, and completely render the negative’s subtle tones and gradations.” So Frederick Evans states in 1910, and still nearly 100 years later this statement remains accurate.

The Platinum print is the most permanent photographic process yet discovered. All photosensitive chemistry washes out of the print, leaving the precious Platinum/ Palladium metals in its place. The print will last as long as the paper base itself.

I do not use commercially made paper. All materials must be made from scratch. Basically the methods I use to make a print are very simple. Platinum printing is a contact printing process; the finished print is the exact size of the negative used to make the print. A single piece of 100% rag paper is coated by hand, using a brush, with the platinum/Palladium solution. The paper is dried and together with the negative, placed in a contact print frame and exposed to the sun or another ultraviolet light source.

Exposure takes anywhere from five minutes to two days depending on the density of the negative and the intensity of the ultraviolet light that day. It is then taken into the darkroom and developed. There is little or no manipulation of the print and when the paper is put into the developer, the image develops within seconds. This is why Evans called the process “innocent”. The print is then placed in three baths of hydrochloric acid and all photosensitive materials wash out of the paper, leaving only the Platinum and Palladium metals in the paper.

Also, the modern gelatin negative is not designed to be placed in the hot sun for long periods of time. I have seen negatives melt in this kind of heat.

This is one reason so few prints are made from any one of my negatives. Repeatability becomes much more difficult, each print being a handmade object and a unique experience. Another reason is the cost. The price of Platinum and Palladium has risen a hundred times in recent years. Today the cost is over 1,500 dollars and ounce! I enjoy the way I work and it ensures the number of prints from any negative will be limited, and the quality will remain exceptional.

