

FreestyleTM Photographic Supplies

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DISCUSSING... THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WET DARKROOM IN PHOTOGRAPHIC EDUCATION!

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Freestyle...The Educators' ResourceTM

Freestyle Photographic Supplies Presents:

Freestylin' A Quarterly Newsletter



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Lately, Freestyle has been getting urgent inquiries from photographic educators and administrators asking our opinion:

“Will black and white darkroom classes be a meaningful part of photographic education in the future?”

To those who have been reading our catalogs these past few months, it should be clear that Freestyle has drawn a line in the photographic sand, and that line is in a darkroom! We have staked our very identity on our firm belief in the value of traditional black and white photography. We aren't the only ones taking this firm stance. The members of our Advisory Board – respected photographers from all areas of the field – have weighed in on the issue as well, and throughout this catalog, we feature excerpts of their comments on this important subject.

Knowing that many of you are facing potential cuts to your darkroom programs, we offer the thoughts and experiences of these industry professionals in hopes that their comments will be useful to you in discussions with your school's administration. If you would like to see the full text of any of these thoughtful articles, they are available at:

<http://www.freestylephoto.biz/importanceofdarkroom.php>

Don't Miss Our Winter Catalog

The latest edition of the Freestyle Educators catalog will be arriving in your mailbox around January 2nd. You won't want to miss the latest offerings and information featured in this edition. If you can't wait, give us a call!

www.freestylephoto.biz

Freestyle Photographic Supplies Presents: **Freestylin'** A Quarterly Newsletter

Winter 2007

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DARKROOM

INTRODUCTION

Six years ago when the industry started to be dominated by digital products, we at Freestyle made a conscious decision to focus on darkroom photographic products. This was not a decision we made lightly, but we felt confident it was the correct one. We knew that just as there are people who still enjoy classical arts such as painting, drawing, sculpture, weaving, beading, etc., there would always be a market for traditional photographic products. Pulling from our already substantial position in this niche market we decided to take a leadership role. Your commitment to Freestyle and darkroom photography has saved these materials from disappearing altogether. Also, it has been proven throughout the country – and the world – that film and the darkroom is still an extremely important part of photo education.

Everyday we are asked the question, where will darkroom products be 10 years from now? The answer is “Right here, at Freestyle!”, as well as other companies that have chosen to continue to support these products. The key is to keep supporting these products. The bottom line is, as long as there is a demand, the products will remain available.

Manufacturers such as Bergger, Foma, Forte, Fotokemika, Fuji, Kentmere, Ilford and Rollei are all totally committed to keeping this product alive. Ultimately it is up to you.

The interviews and quotes appearing in this newsletter from our Advisory Board Members are just a small taste of the overwhelming opinions of educators and professional photographers all over the country. Darkroom is important! Darkroom is necessary! Digital is not easier, cheaper, better and faster as the industry marketing machine has tried to convince us. Digital is certainly a part of what we do but it should not take over all of what we do.

We hope that you enjoy the articles contained in this issue and that you use them to convince those in power to keep your darkroom programs in tact while adding digital to your curriculum.

ERIC JOSEPH –
Senior Vice President of Merchandising
and Product Development

“Every photographer I have ever spoken with remembers seeing his or her first print emerge in the developer tray.”



John Sexton
Fine Art Master Printer
Lecturer, Photographer

I will never forget the first time I saw a print emerge under the dim amber glow of a safelight in a friend's makeshift darkroom more than thirty years ago. It was an unforgettable experience, and one that I found intoxicating. I am still “addicted” to that experience today. In retrospect, I now understand how important that experience was in my photographic career. What I saw that evening, and continue to see today in my own darkroom, is indeed MAGIC! Every photographer I have ever spoken with remembers seeing his or her first print emerge in the developer tray. I think it is essential for photographic education to include instruction in “traditional” photographic processes, along with the newer and quickly-evolving digital technologies.

The word “photography” means “writing with light.” Having the opportunity to expose light sensitive silver emulsions - both in the camera and in the darkroom - gives one an understanding of the ethereal material light we use in creating our images.

A music student today learns on instruments from centuries ago; when they have built that foundation they can then apply those techniques to modern technology to produce sound. So too, the serious student of photography needs a solid foundation in the traditional methodologies of silver halide photography.

It should not be a situation of one or the other – “traditional or digital”; but, rather, photographic education today should be a blending of the two – something I've heard called “tradigital” photography. The most exciting work I have seen with new technologies has come from photographers whose experience is grounded in the traditional methodologies of silver halide image making. That sensitivity and creative potential can be transposed to the latest technologies, and in rare instances can create imagery that is inspirational and goes beyond the techniques or procedures chosen by the artist to produce it. Such a photograph - traditional or digital - can be an inspirational and unforgettable experience.

“The idea of replacing conventional training with digital training would be akin to putting the cart before the horse.”



Huntington Witherill
Fine Art Master Printer
Lecturer, Photographer

The importance of continuing education in traditional black and white, conventional darkroom-based photography processes can not be overemphasized. The advent of digital approaches to the medium should not be considered a replacement for what is acknowledged to be the historically important and conceptually vital basis of a well-rounded photographic education.

As a working photographer approaching nearly forty years experience, who now uses predominately digital methods, I can not overemphasize the importance of my initial training in the more conventional approaches to black and white photography. There is simply no substitute for what I refer to as my “classical” training in the art and craft of photography.

By way of explanation, I offer a comparative axiom which is both well understood and accepted within the related (but distinctly different) field of fine art music. It is widely understood and acknowledged that the greatest jazz musicians throughout the history of the medium (to include those working today) remain those individuals who had received extensive training in classical music prior to having adopted a more contemporary approach to the medium. To stick with the analogy, it is my firm belief that I would not have been able to achieve success with my contemporary approach to photography (the digital approach) without having previously had the benefit of a well-rounded education in the classical approach to the medium.

Of course, education based upon digital approaches to photography can be of great value and importance to any photographer in today's high-tech world. And I do recommend that anyone aspiring to become a working professional photographer will need to have at least a modicum of training and education in the digital approach. Yet, absent a well-rounded classical training which precedes the implementation of the more contemporary approach, the idea of replacing conventional training with digital training would be akin to putting the cart before the horse. Or worse yet, eliminating the horse entirely!

ALL QUALITY PHOTOGRAPHIC EDUCATION BEGINS IN THE DARKROOM...

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- > Do your students come to class unprepared due to the difficulty in finding the appropriate materials?



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† If you are a high school or middle school teacher, and have a local photo supplier that you would like to stock Freestyle products, please have them contact our Dealer Distribution Network at 800.292.6137 ext. 105

"I will stay with black and white photography as long as the materials are available."



Henry Gilpin

Fine Art Master Printer
Lecturer, Photographer

I have been printing black and white photographs from negatives since I was twelve years old. I'm sure the reason for performing such an operative for such an extended period of time is due to the excitement I get observing the image being formed in the developer tray. I have never stopped watching this process. Each print gives me a thrill. I enjoy the B&W process from exposing the film in the camera, processing the film and later creating a B&W photograph. I am satisfied and happy!

The new system for creating an image through the use of electronics leaves me cold. The print as it emerges from the electronic printer does not impress me. I don't get the feeling I enjoy.

I will stay with black and white photography as long as the materials are available.

"Traditional "wet" darkrooms have always been, and still are, the best place for beginning photographers to learn..."



Richard Garrod

Fine Art Master Printer
Instructor, Photographer

Traditional "wet" darkrooms have always been, and still are, the best place for beginning photographers to learn basic techniques for nurturing and producing elegant tonalities in black and white photography. It provides a direct, hands-on experience for the photographer when, after making his decisions for exposing and developing his images, he can see the immediate results in the trays of chemistry. The necessary exposure and development modifications that may be required to meet the image's ultimate objectives can then be more clearly observed through further adjustments of the chemical process.

As photographers continue with their studies, they will have an opportunity to learn a number of techniques for controlling print tonalities. Besides the customary dodging and burning, they can use contrast reduction masks, dodge and burn masks, chemistry modifications, and many other techniques.

The time in the darkroom is an intense process, much like the alchemical processes of old, where the ultimate goal was a combination of both product & change in the alchemist and, in this case, the B&W darkroom artist.

In this age of technology, where we are constantly staring at monitors, work in the darkroom with a hands-on process can be a pleasant relief for many people.

"As educators we cannot – must not – fail to learn the lessons of history."



Tim Rudman

Fine Art Master Printer
Lecturer, Photographer

In education, one should never underestimate the importance of drawing on the past in order to prepare students for the present and the future.

The temptation to discard the old in favour of the new should be tempered by an appreciation of the wisdom and perspective that is to be gained by both understanding and experiencing the older technologies and processes that led to the newer ones.

This is particularly important where art and craft are involved, as is the case with silver-based black and white photographic printing. Silver halide technology will no more be replaced by digital technology than black and white was by colour, or painting was by photography. Both these predictions were famously made in the past and, as history tells us, both were famously wrong. As educators we cannot – must not – fail to learn the lessons of history.

Nobody would deny that digital technology is changing the world of photography at an unprecedented rate. It offers amazing opportunities, and of course challenges too. It will undoubtedly dominate many areas of photography completely. Historically, photography did much the same with painting, particularly with regard to portraiture for the man in the street, for example. It did not, however, relegate painting to history; fortunately for Art, painting skills were retained, passed on, refined and developed.

Black and White has always had a special place in photographic fine art and it always will. The making of a fine print with silver is not the same as making a print on a computer. Both have a place of course, but should never be considered mutually exclusive. Silver-based printing has a vital craft element which can be really important to the artist. Fine art printing may involve many stages of processing; manually handling a print through these stages keeps the artist physically in touch with the work, crafting it bit-by-bit, starting with a blank sheet and finishing when the artist is finally satisfied. This physical contact provides an essential tactile and emotional engagement for the photographic artist that working on a 'virtual' image on a computer does not.

Our students will develop their photographic pursuits according to their own motivations. Some will move into areas that will be totally digital. Some will certainly move into fine art and print with silver. Others may pursue it as a hobby; and, of these some will welcome a manual craft after working in front of a computer screen all day at work. We may not know which path they will take. As educators we have a duty to make both digital and analogue processes available for our students to experience, as many of them will also not know what their future direction will be – and this cannot be determined by just reading about it in old books. It must be experienced.

"Is your school willing to lose 50% of the departments full time enrolled students?"



Brent Wood

Department Chair
Victor Valley College

The Victor Valley College Art Department is intimately knowledgeable of what happens when an overzealous administrator looks for ways to "save money". The Art Department building was reconstructed to abate asbestos in 2001. The administrator decided to save money by not building the darkrooms; in his words "film is dead". No amount of documentation from industry would change his mind. After the darkrooms were removed and computers put in their place the student enrollment fell by 50%. Next, the serious students transferred to our competition; the local community colleges.

A small darkroom has been replaced; after beginning photo the students have the ability to choose whether they want to be digital or conventional. 90% of all students chose to be film-based. Most of the film students also want to learn digital; however few students would be in the program for digital-only curriculum.

The computers only attracted fine art students, not photography students. The fine art students only take beginning photo; they do not move through the photo program like the film-based photography students would. This means the photo certificate program and the degree program is completely dead. Because of the small darkrooms we are just beginning to recover; however our retention rate, student success rate, and number of transfer/certificate/degree students are at an all time low.

A college is a business; students are our customers. Our customers have spoken. No darkroom, no students. We were the first in the state to go completely digital; the department almost collapsed. Digital is here to stay, and we should all be teaching it, but film is not dead. The photo industry is still using film for any number of reasons; film is still the highest quality capture medium. Any college should fight to the death for their darkrooms. Student success, retention, and number of enrolled students depend on a wet-based curriculum.

If the administration is attempting to save money by closing the darkroom, then I would ask one simple question: Is your school willing to lose 50% of the departments full time enrolled students? The true cost of Victor Valley College's darkroom removal is still being calculated. Once again, our students have spoken loud and clear: they absolutely want to learn wet based photography. Our current administration has listened and is attempting to honor our customers' needs and desires. We have built a small darkroom; we are working on a much larger one. Yes, in this day of instant gratification we are spending large sums of money on enlargers, sinks, and a room to keep the dark in.

"At the Art Institute of Chicago, introductory classes expose students to digital, silver and color equally."



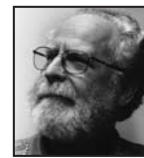
Kirk Gittings

Instructor Art Institute
of Chicago

In my 36 years in photography, much has changed in terms of both technique and aesthetics. I "grew up" photographically in academia, when I started seriously studying photography at the University of New Mexico in 1970. UNM at that time was a center for the emerging genre of fine art photography and its faculty included such luminaries as Van Deuren Coke and Beaumont Newhall. Enlarged black and white silver gelatin prints were virtually all anyone did. Beaumont Newhall's history of photography classes were virtually a history of the straight black and white photographic print. Everything else was a mere curiosity. "Alternative non-silver processes" were a radical new idea (even though some of the processes were already over a century old). Color was neither accepted as archival or as art and did not come into its own as a fine art medium for a few more years.

The following four decades have witnessed an explosion of new and resurrected historic processes and the relegation in academia of "straight" B&W silver photography to the dusty category of "traditional work". But traditional silver printing has not and will not go away, as it is the heart and soul of the history and technological understanding of the medium.

At the Art Institute of Chicago (where I am teaching in the summers these days) introductory classes expose new students to digital, silver and color processes on equal footing. From there students can move to specific beginning classes in the different processes. As my fellow professor Alan Labb says "photographers don't get rid of old processes, they just add new ones." Silver will remain at the core of the teaching of photography.



Donald Anderson

Photographer, Instructor

I had an ex-student who used to visit the B&W photography lab periodically after he took my beginning class. He told me the reason he kept coming back was to get his chemical "fix." He needed the occasional smell of photographic chemistry to make his life complete. While I think this student reduced his interest in B&W photography to its lowest common denominator, I believe he was also saying that he missed the magic found in those odorous trays of solution. We should all experience that mysterious and thrilling emergence of an image as it appears from nowhere in a tray of developer. I've seen the rush of seeing that first print appear lead to careers in photography - teaching, fine art, commercial, photojournalism, museum curating. Translating the world through a camera lens with intelligence and imagination - and completing that translation with the magic of the darkroom - is a process still worthy of our attention.

THE ULTIMATE DEVELOPING CHART FROM FREESTYLE!

Freestyle is proud to announce our Ultimate Developing Chart. It's simple to use and easy to read. Pick your favorite film; match it to your favorite developer; and instantly see the recommended start-point developing time.

The developing chart even lets you choose multiple films at once and see the times for several developers.

Many of the films listed can not be found on other charts, like Arista.EDU Ultra® 100 or Arista-II®, and many of the films are linked to downloadable versions of their manufacturer's data sheet.

The Ultimate Developing Chart works perfectly with your Supply List Online. Both you and your students can be sure to get the right developer and film for your needs.

You can find the Freestyle Ultimate Developing Chart in our online tech tips: <http://www.freestylephoto.biz/techtips.php>

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