

technical notes about photo-collage

Three bodies of work on this web site - Florilegium, Collaborations and Illumitones - are made with an unusual technique that warrants an explanation. These are cameraless images. Rather than using a camera to record my subjects I use a flatbed scanner. When I started working with this technique ten years ago it was quite unheard of. Since then, many artists have begun to work this way and the genre is gaining acceptance and recognition as a new form of photography - often called scannography.

Why use a scanner instead of a camera, you might wonder. I made my first scans of 3-D objects as an experiment. I was immediately entranced by the images - the amount of information and detail they offer is similar to what I might expect if using an 8x10 view camera. The quality of light that a scanner produces is unusual, as well. Because the light source travels the entire bed of the scanner it wraps the subject with light, rather than lighting from a single, directional source like the sun or a studio light.

Most photographers working with scanners create a composition of a single scan and that becomes their finished image. My pieces are photo-collages made from multiple scans of original objects. The scans are my starting point, the building blocks of my final images which are composed of a number of scans or parts of scans; perhaps as many as a dozen or more. I keep thumbnails of the scans in a notebook - my sketchbook. When I'm ready to start working on a new composition I choose scans from the notebook that might work together and get started. I use Photoshop software to combine and layer the scans. This process allows me to create my own reality making compositions that move beyond the original scans as they interact with each other and I react to and guide their interactions.

The advent of digital photography has opened new doors and changed nearly every aspect of the way in which I work. Although I occasionally miss working in my wet darkroom, these are nostalgic sentiments rooted in attachments to process. As I have become accustomed to my new digital darkroom I have grown fond of the process and benefits it offers.

The hardest hurdles in my move to completely digital work are color management and sorting out the printing options available for my digital files. These are blessings and curses - while the control and flexibility I gain is exciting, the new information I must learn to fully and efficiently make use of the new technology is complicated and ever-changing.

I have had two concerns when exploring new printing options. First, it has been essential to find processes and papers that offer me the detail and saturation that I have always associated with fine traditional photographic printing methods. Second, I have paid attention to the archival permanence qualities of printing methods I use, making sure that they equal or surpass the archivalness of prints made in the darkroom. As materials and media are constantly changing and improving, I keep track of the latest offerings. It is likely that the method I choose to most accurately express my work ten years from now will be different than my current choice. I am now (2008) making prints in my studio on Epson 3800 and 7800 printers with K3 ink set and Legion's Moab Natural Entrada paper.