

# snap shots

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## Jessica Ferguson's Anthotypes: *New Work in "Green Photography"*



The anthotype (ancient Greek for "flower image") is considered an artistic process today, but the technique was invented in 1842 by the multi-talented British astronomer and chemist Sir John Herschel.

Like many artists today, Jessica Ferguson is deeply concerned about the ecological impact of her studio/darkroom. Since summer 2019, she has experimented with the anthotype, an early photographic method which uses only plants and the sun to produce images on artist's paper. Ephemeral and very time-consuming, this process was quickly abandoned after its invention but is currently experiencing a worldwide renaissance with artists seeking "green" ways to make images.

Ferguson lives and works in an artists' co-operative building, a 19<sup>th</sup> century warehouse converted to live-work space, located in downtown Boston, MA. The extremely sunny, flat roof of her building is ideal for producing anthotypes. Not only can she grow her plant materials on the roof, but she can also expose her anthotypes there as well.

Her current series, *Pages from a Night Album*, consists of 19<sup>th</sup> century images of the moon and nocturnal moths and birds printed as anthotypes. The ephemerality of the medium speaks to the ecological fragility of the night creatures depicted, and to the fleeting light of the moon. Nineteenth century scholars knew that to be preserved, unfixed photographs had to be protected from daylight. Therefore, they imagined "night albums": closed books with black pages, for storing photographs, only to be opened at night and viewed by moonlight.

She uses a 21<sup>st</sup> century workaround to preserve her

ephemeral anthotypes, scanning and printing them digitally, then storing the originals in the dark. She may rescan/reprint a year later to observe the fading process. Because she layers plant emulsions, her images fade at different rates, yielding varied effects. Some images have barely faded after a year, while others disappear within months of being printed. To make the anthotypes, She uses homegrown plant materials (the petals of geraniums, pansies, petunias, etc.) as well as vegetables (Swiss chard, spinach, etc.) from local markets.

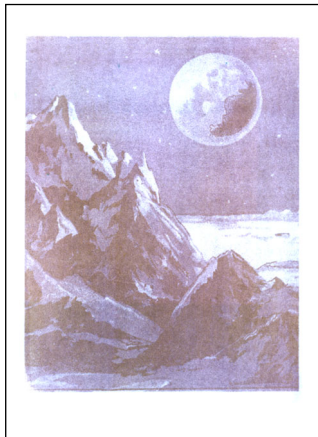
Jessica Ferguson is a Boston-based artist who works with photography and has experimented with pinhole cameras and various antiquarian photo processes since 1990. Her recent focus on plant-based photographic methods include chlorophyll prints as well as anthotypes.

Ferguson's work is in the permanent collections of more than twenty museums and libraries, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge, MA; the Museum of the History of Photography, Kraków, Poland; and the Fox Talbot Museum, Lacock Abbey, England. Her artistic and curatorial projects have been supported by Art Matters, Inc.; Trust for Mutual Understanding; MacDowell, LEF Foundation; and Engelhard Foundation.

Ferguson's images and photo-objects have been published in numerous books, catalogues, and articles on handmade photography in the US and abroad. She received her undergraduate degrees from Harvard University (AB, magna cum laude) and Massachusetts College of Art and Design (BFA), and her MFA from Tufts University (in conjunction with the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). An artist-educator, Ferguson has taught at Boston-area art schools including Massachusetts College of Art and Design and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University. For further information, please visit her website [www.museumofmemory.com](http://www.museumofmemory.com).



*Rosy Moths, 2023*



*Lunar Landscape 4, 2021*

## How I came to donate 55,000 photographs to UMass Amherst

For about 25 years, up to 2019, I collected one type of photograph where the picture is on a cardboard backer. I advertised that I would take any subject no matter the condition—except no portraits. I would pay \$10 for each, a sum that remained constant throughout. Pictures poured in, usually in boxes of 100, from all over the United States. The time period in this type of photograph ran from soon after the Civil War until the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The first problem was storage. I took over the children's room in the basement. First some cabinets, and then shelves five levels high. I put most of them in trays that could be pulled out easily. As time went by, five sets of shelves filled the room, and I began to fill up an adjacent room and finally spread into a third room. The most interesting views I put on shelves. These varied but notable were ones of Blacks, famous persons, dead persons, dramatic disasters, children at play, etc.

The second problem was sorting. I created obvious categories, like Church, Sports, Horse. But as the pictures piled up, I needed more and more subcategories. If I had 100 people working in a shop, or persons tenting, I would make some sort of subdivision, logical or not.

I took time to examine each picture under a magnifying glass, and would often notice something that would point to where to store it—for example out-houses. Often there would be multiple subjects in a

photo, and since this was hard copy storage and not digitized, I would select the most unusual subject.

I ended up with 3600 categories which presented problem three: keeping track of them on a computer program; that was not my field of expertise.



*This photo appeared in an article by Paul Rheingold in the 2014 Journal (<https://phsne.magcloud.com>)*

Finally when I was 85 I was overwhelmed, the trays were too heavy for me to lift out, and we had no more room. My wife said, either get rid of these or I will throw them in a dumpster when you pass.

So began the process of finding an institution that would take them. Most, if they responded at all, said they didn't have the space, or they only wanted pictures which were in very good condition.

Finally I was fortunate to find Rob Cox, then the Director of Special Collections at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He and his assistant, Annie Sollinger, came to visit. They would take it, in large part they said for the taxonomy. They would keep the collection in its 3600 categories.

The end process was for me to find someone to put a value on it so that I could make a charitable contribution. Then came the movement of the trays and boxes, which ended up with four moving van trips.

The basement is empty, and I only rarely miss them. But if I do, I can go see them where they are stored—as can you\*.

*~Story and photos by  
PHSNE member Paul Rheingold*

\*Contact at UMass is Annie Sollinger who can be reached at [annies@library.umass.edu](mailto:annies@library.umass.edu).

### PHSNE Membership

*New members are invited to join for half the rates for the first year.* Regular PHSNE membership (U.S. and Canada) is \$30 for students, \$50 for individuals and institutions, and \$55 for a family; foreign membership is \$60. Join or renew online at <https://phsne.org/join> or <https://phsne.org/renew>, or send a check in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar denominated international money order.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to PHSNE Membership Chair, 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453, email [membership-chair@phsne.org](mailto:membership-chair@phsne.org), or use the Web form at <https://phsne.org/application>.

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## Eho in Stereo—Dual Lens Cameras

The write-up of the Eho in *Cameras of the 1930's* (Compiled by Eugene H. Rifkind and the Delaware Photographic Collectors Association) opens with the statement that, “No truly-advanced photographer can lay claim to have experienced all of the finer delights of photography until he has plunged into the technique of *stereoscopic* photography.” It credits Emil Hofert (Eho-Kamera-Fabrik) with building the standard fixed-focus non-folding box camera.

Produced by Eho-Altissa of Dresden, the Eho Stereo Box camera, one in a line of Eho box cameras, was “perhaps most remarkable . . . [it] could produce either standard 6x6 cm pictures or 6x13 cm Stereopictures” ([http://camera-wiki.org/wiki/EHO\\_Box](http://camera-wiki.org/wiki/EHO_Box)).



Museo De La Imagen

The camera was constructed of light sheet metal covered in black leatherette. Its two-part body could be uncoupled by releasing the locking sliders to accommodate film loading.

McKeown's (1997/1998)

reports that the camera took either 5 stereo pairs, 6x13cm per pair, or 10 single 6x6cm exposures on 120 film. From the camera manual, a lever is pulled out to cover one lens for single image mode. Keeping track of advancing film for stereo requires alternating between two exposure number red windows. The manual is available at Butkus (<https://tinyurl.com/mwpeey6r>). A key winds the film. Both lenses are f11 Eho-Duplars; a metal slider accesses a smaller aperture to provide f22.

Some time after reviewing the Eho Stereo Box camera, the Delaware Valley Collectors Association looked at the Eho Altiflex Dual Lens camera (*Cameras of the 1930's*). “We have the dual-lens Eho Altiflex from the same manufacturer but, far from it, this model does not use two lenses to make two pictures for stereoscopic viewing. Instead, its two lenses permit of image viewing and picture making simultaneously, the Altiflex being a box-type dual-lens reflex.”

A roll of standard 8 exposure 2 1/4 x 3 1/4 inch film could produce 12 negatives size 2 3/16 x 2 3/16. “As with all such reflex cameras, *upper lens is for*



Camera-wiki.org

*viewing and focusing full picture-size image on the top-mounted ground glass screen, the lower lens [sic, has a] shutter for picture making.*” Instead of having the front panel move forward for focusing, the front elements rotate and link to a single focusing lever that ranges from infinity to three feet.

There were four different models of the

Altiflex produced from 1937 to 1949: the original Altiflex (shown above), the Altiflex Trojan, the Altiflex I, and Altiflex II.

Camera-wiki states that the Altiflex Trojan was “hardly a model in its own right,” noting that McKeown's listed it as identical to the original (<http://camera-wiki.org/wiki/Altiflex>). Camera-wiki speculated that a special nameplate may have been put on for particular customers.

The Altiflex I, introduced the same year as the original (1937), came with a greater variety of lenses in an un-named shutter. The red window with sliding cover was moved to the back of the camera.

Launched in 1938, the Altiflex II had “a ‘sports’ frame-finder built into the hood, as on many TLR cameras . . . also a double-exposure prevention mechanism.” The plastic advance knob was replaced with a metal version.

The 1997-1998 McKeown's lists and shows one model, probably the original Altiflex; there is no mention of subsequent models (*McKeown's Price Guide to Antique & Classic Cameras*). It was valued at the time from \$60 to \$100.

### **snap shots Since 1897?**

Well, not exactly. This publication doesn't go back quite that far. However, there was a publication of the same name, and a PHSNE member recently mailed us a copy of the April 1897 issue.



An article titled Fashions and Photography offers this advice, "However much a photographer may think of dressmaking and fashion as beneath his manly notice, he cannot overlook the fact that a large proportion of each plate he exposes on a portrait subject is composed of dress, and that to disregard costume would be as disastrous as to disregard the background."

Included in the issue is an article about lantern slides, one titled The Treatment of Over-exposed Prints, and another called Common Manipulations. There are many pages of advertisements.

### **PHSNE Meetings**

Meetings are usually held online on the first Sunday of each month, September to June.

### **Upcoming meetings:**

**December 1**—Holiday party

**January 5**—Crista Dix, Executive Director, Griffin Museum

### **Connect to PHSNE Online and by email:**

PHSNE's Web site is online at <https://phsne.org>. See <https://www.facebook.com/PHSNE/> for items of PHSNE interest. Comments are welcome, so join the discussion of photo history. Visit <https://snapshots.phsne.org> for *snap shots* issues Volume 11 (Sept 2005) to Volume 29 (June 2024).

Stay connected to PHSNE via our emails and show announcements. Sign up at <https://phsne.org/emails>.

### **Not Much Time Left**

The Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, MA hosts *Artificial Intelligence: Disinformation in a Post-Truth World* through October 28th. In his *Globe* review, Mark Feeney notes "Instead of seeing is believing, it's dedicated to a very different but fundamentally related proposition: Seeing is doubting (as if often should be)" (*Globe*, September 29, 2024). There's a fundamental contradiction: photography should record things reasonably objectively, yet there's an "inherently deceptive" element: "It takes four dimensions (time even more to the camera than height, width, and depth do) and presents them as two." Photoshop has made image manipulation commonplace, but generative Artificial Intelligence takes it many steps further.

Another exhibit with an even shorter window is *See How They Run: Mark Ostow's Political Portraits* at the Bridge Gallery in Boston through October 19th. In the second *Globe* review of September 29th, Mark Feeney wrote that the "near-impossibility of a single photograph or set of related photographs standing out in an image-glutted culture has a corollary: the near-impossibility of that photograph or set of related photographs lasting in memory." The exhibit consists of 34 black and white images, most of presidential candidates.

### **Correction**

Due to an editorial error, the image on p. 1 of the October *snap shots* was misattributed to Talbot. It was made by Nicephore Niepce. The first book illustrated with photographs was Anna Atkins' *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, 1843.