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MEDIOBROME "My way"

René Smets

My thanks go to Hubert who was the first to demonstrate this technique at one of our meetings, and also to Jacques who found many texts about this process.

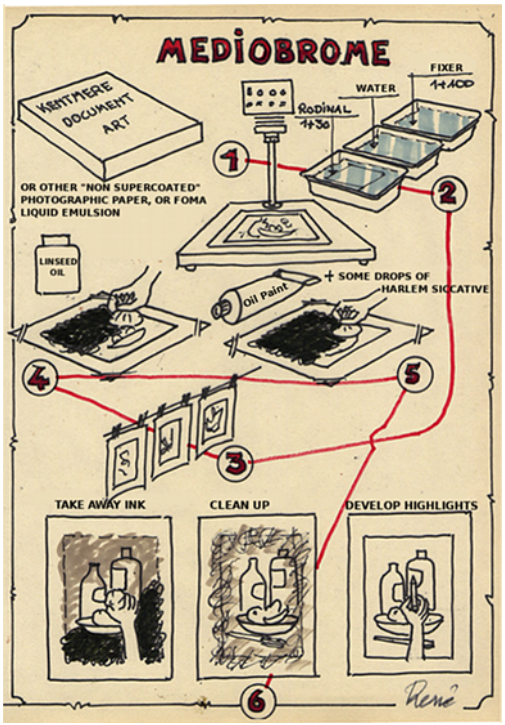
It is a photographic printing technique developed by Léonard Misonne.

Shortly after Hubert's demonstration, I had the opportunity to visit the Museum of Photography in Charleroi with Jacques, Wim and Gérard, where we were able to hold original Misonne prints in our hands and examine them closely.

I still doubt that the descriptions found here and there are providing Misonne's actual working procedure. The word "mediobrome" seems to refer to a "half-bromide": does this mean that the picture was half bleached before inking, or was the image not bleached at all?

We'll probably never know.

Seeing the beautiful results Hubert obtained, I wanted to try it myself, and here is a description of what I did.



After a lot of experimentation, I gained some understanding of what actually happens in the different operations, but again, I'm really not sure that this is how Misonne proceeded.

On the right, you'll find a few sketches summarizing the operations that I will explain in more detail below.

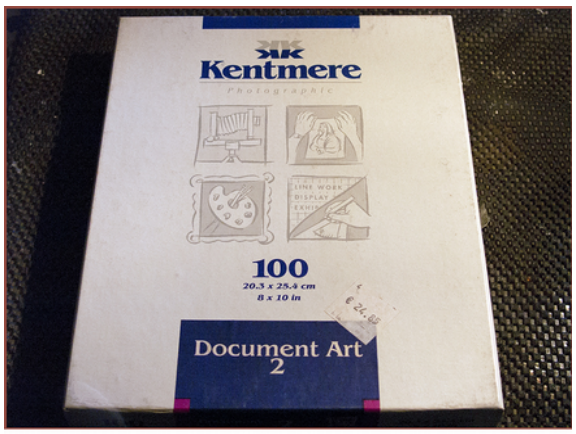
A picture printed on "non-supercoated" photographic paper is coated on its entire surface with linseed oil until the top layer is saturated, then the entire surface is completely covered with ink/oil paint. This paint is then selectively removed and the photo becomes visible again. The art consists in obtaining some white parts that are truly white again, while obtaining at the same time the desired density for the other grey and black tones. Here is a more detailed description.

Supplies:

- Photographic paper
- Enlarger
- Developer and fixer
- Adhesive tape

- Cotton pads
- Cotton rags
- Cotton buds
- Kneedable gum
- Glass or ceramic tile (palette)
- painters knife
- Linseed oil
- Turpentine
- Harlem Siccative Medium
- Paint : etching ink, oil paint or letterpress ink

Procedure :



Picture 1

I still have quite a lot of Kentmere Document Art paper in stock; it was very suitable for bromoil printing. See picture 1.

The gelatine (top layer) has aged and hardened and is therefore unusable for bromoil.

Fortunately this paper is very usable for Mediobrome; who knows, Misonne may have been in the same case and might have had to invented the process out of necessity... Other non-supercoated photographic papers, or the Foma emulsion, are also suitable.

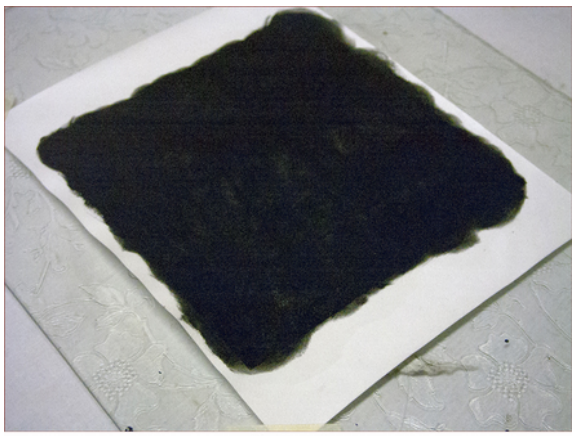
I make a normal enlarged print, making sure that there are still some white areas in it. The print is processed as usual for a bromoil print, but without bleaching or second fixing. Then the paper is dried.

I tape the dry picture on a glass plate; then with a cotton wool pad in a cotton cloth, I coat the whole photo with linseed oil until the top layer is saturated. See pictures 2-3-4


Picture 2


Picture 3


Picture 4



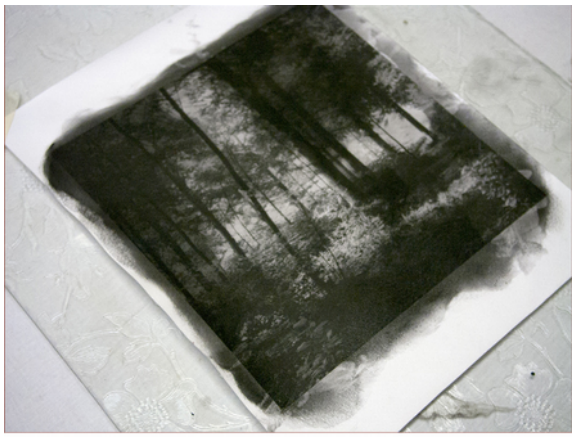
Picture 5

Then I redo the same thing, but now with ink (paint): the image disappears completely under the layer.

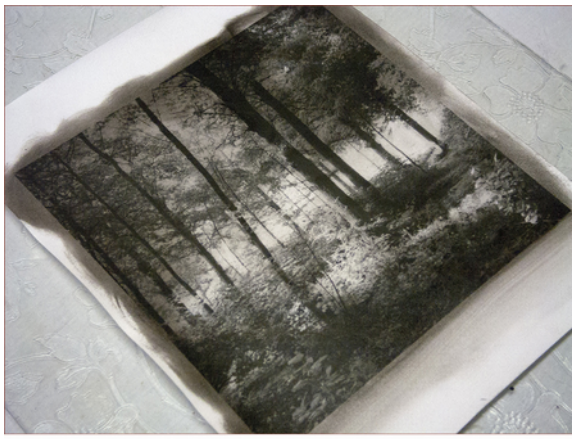
see picture 5

Now I remove the ink with a clean cotton ball. The image becomes visible again. The whole art consists in removing the ink in such a way that the whites still have some structure, while the blacks are darkened by the layer of ink that covers them.

see pictures 6 & 7



Picture 6



Picture 7

Finally the light accents can be completely brightened with a kneedable eraser, tape and pencil-eraser for fine details; whites will only be obtained if they were already present in the original picture.

Now you can see that the image has much more contrast than the original and looks different due to the ink/paint covering it.

See picture 8

After drying, there are glossy and matt areas of ink on the paper, which can be made invisible by spraying the picture with fixative. (Talens).

Photo 8

HOW DOES THIS WORK ??

This is only my personal opinion, based on my experiments.

The unhardened top layer of the paper is saturated with linseed oil; this layer is completely covered with a thick layer of ink/paint. By now selectively removing the ink until the correct light grey parts are obtained, some ink is still present

on the whites, and the blacks are deeper. If you now completely remove the ink from most white parts, the layer remaining on the rest of the print increases the contrast and produces the visible effect on the image.

I would like to repeat that I am not at all sure that this is how Misonne actually proceeded, but I know that retouching the photo in this way gives a different, more artistic look ... and that I can use my old photographic paper!

Photo 9

Photo 10

Above you can see some more results (see photos 9-10). Print 10 is made with Foma's liquid emulsion as a base.

27/03/2020

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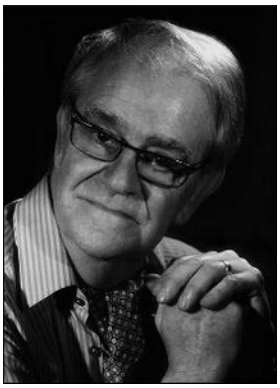

Translation : Jacques Kevers