PICTO Benelux

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Meeting 17/05/2026

FERROBLEND – René Smets

René, intrigued by what he heard and saw from Luc Tourwé about Ferroblend at previous meeting, decided to explore the process. He showed us some of his latest results. Assisted by Luc Tourwé, he gave a practical demo of his working procedure. Below, you'll find some of his prints, as well as his description of the way he worked through the process, which he also posted on Facebook. – JK.

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Ferroblend is a wonderful introduction to "alternative techniques" for those who do not have much experience in this field: the necessary materials are easy to find and inexpensive, the process is fairly simple, whilst allowing everyone the opportunity to achieve more personalised results by adjusting the choice and proportions of the products used, the processing times, and so on.. Basically, it is a standard cyanotype, 'processed' with a copper sulphate solution introducing some reddish-brown colour. The final result is a duotone print.

The required materials and chemicals are quite simple : watercolour paper (here I used Arches Aquarelle), some brushes (I used a flat, 6cm wide soft brush, and a foam brush of same width), 0,6mm thick PVC masking tape, a UV exposure unit (a simple face tanning device will do), a tray, a negative for contact printing, a printing frame, and some chemicals : Ferric ammonium citrate, Potassium ferricyanide Copper sulphate, and Potassium citrate

<u>The procedure – a quick overview</u>

1. Mark the negative's corners on the paper; this gives you the area to be coated.

2. Tape the paper onto a sheet of plexiglass and mask the margins with four PVC strips and some double-sided adhesive tape, so that no light-sensitive coating will reach this area which has to remain white.

3. Coat the image area with the cyanotype solution (see details below)

4. The paper is left to dry, flat for the first ten minutes, then hung for about an hour.

5. When dry, the paper is exposed under the negative in the printing frame

6. After exposure, the copper sulphate solution is brushed generously on the exposed image for a few minutes.

7. 8.9. The prints are rinsed, dried, and pressed flat.

The procedure – in more detail

Sensitizing the paper with cyanotype solutions

Solutions

Part A
Water ……..100 ml
Ferric ammonium citrate (FAC) ……..25 g

Part B
Water ……..100 ml
Potassium ferricyanide ……..20 g

Mix equal parts of these just before use

For a surface of 24 x 24 cm, 3 cl are required. Using a foam brush, spread the product as evenly as possible in all directions, removing any excess so that no puddles remain. To prevent any excess from running under the PVC, take up the excess liquide by moving your brush from the PVC strips towards the center of the image

Drying

Leave the paper to dry, flat for the first ten minutes, then vertically for an hour.

Exposure

Place the negative in contact with the light-sensitive paper in the printing frame and expose it under UV-light.
A face tanning lamp is OK, it might require a longer esposure than a specific UV exposure unit (the face tanner I used for the demo required a 12 minutes exposure, where my darkroom unit required a 6 minutes exposure (both at 20cm distance).

Processing the exposed print

The developer

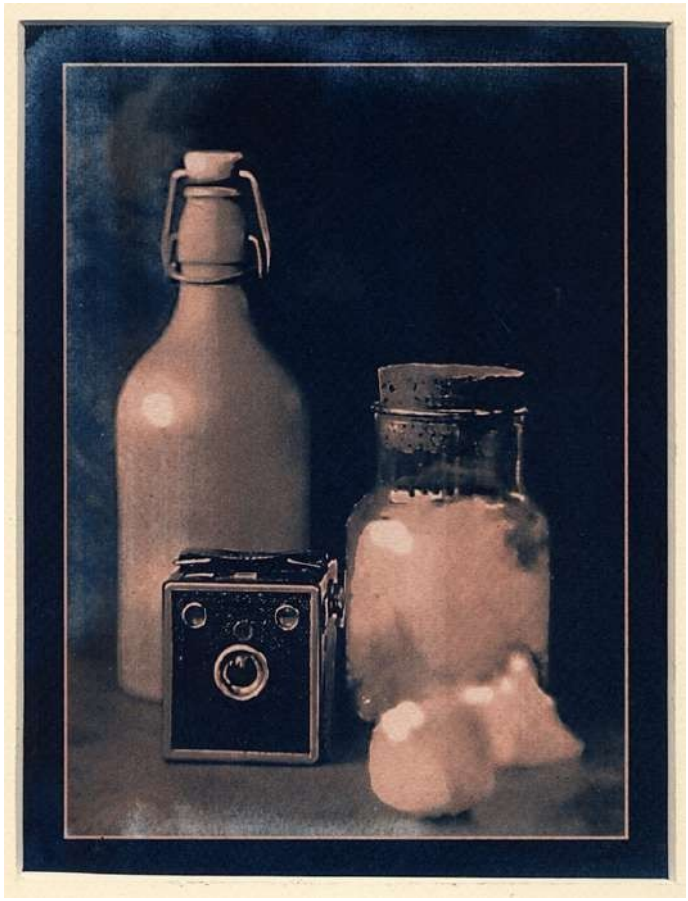
water 100 ml.
copper sulphate 2 g.
sodium (or potassium) citrate 10 g.

Apply the solution generously in all directions to the exposed image with a soft brush ; this takes a few minutes. Areas which didn't receive the developer will retain their traditional cyan blue colour, developed dark areas will turn very dark blue – almost black, while lighter areas will take on a lovely reddish-brown hue. The whitest areas will remain white.

Print finishing

Rinse the developed photographs under running water for a few minutes, the place them in a tray with clean water that will be changed four times during the next hour.
Leave the prints to dry
Dampen the back of the prints slightly and place them between sheets of blotting paper in a press or between two panels with a weight on top.

Some examples (see next page)



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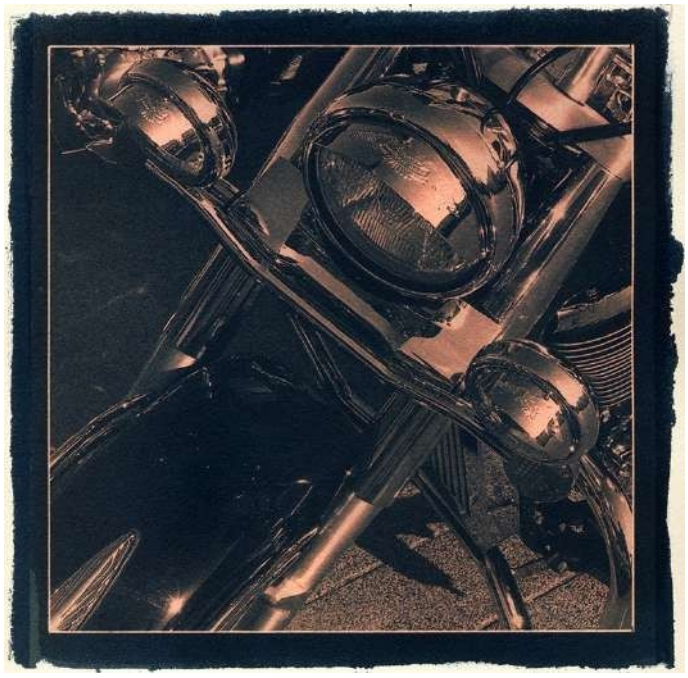

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