

Where Darkness and Light are Blue and White



“In the cyanotypes you arrive in this world
where darkness and light are blue and white...”
– Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

The cyanotype process is one of the earliest photographic methods, invented in 1842 by English scientist John Herschel. Easy to use and more affordable than other techniques of the time, his process relied on light-sensitive chemicals, sunlight, and water to produce vivid blue photographs. Although Herschel initially envisioned the cyanotype as a method to image drawings or manuscripts, it was his friend, botanist Anna Atkins, who popularized the process by using it to create camera-less impressions of plants. Her carefully composed blueprints transcended the limitations of hand-drawn illustrations, highlighting the dual nature of the new photographic medium, which combined scientific usefulness with artistic beauty.

This exhibition showcases contemporary artists who, like Atkins nearly two centuries ago, continue to use the process to create camera-less imprints of nature. From a mother and daughter tending their garden in Ohio, to an artist exploring their backyard in Queens during the pandemic, to a scientist studying river patterns in New Zealand, each artist uses the process to forge a tangible connection to their specific place and time. Rather than relying on the precision of modern digital tools, these artists embrace the delicate unpredictability of the cyanotype, allowing the elements to influence their work, resulting in pieces that are both thoughtfully crafted and serendipitous.

Complementing these works, and carefully arranged on the back windows of the gallery, are cyanotypes created by OSU Mansfield students and community members within our 600-acre woodlands. In an era increasingly shaped by virtual experiences, it has been refreshing to work alongside these individuals under the sun, capturing the fleeting shadows of leaves, twigs, and the occasional critter. I invite you to revisit the gallery throughout the semester, as the seasons change beyond each carefully crafted impression, forever preserved in blue and white.

-Kate Shannon, Associate Professor of Art, Ohio State Mansfield