

“Delta in Blue”

The Arkansas Delta is a place I have been driving through my whole life but it took many years for it to become my destination. I had to become interested in its history before I could begin to appreciate its beauty. Long and lonesome highways are my solace, so the flat delta landscape infused with rich thoughts and private projections; the sorts that have inspired southern writers and musicians, cooks and artists through the ages have inspired me as well. I am thinking of writers, musicians and artists like Eudora Welty, Mark Twain, Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Carroll Cloar and Levon Helm. Earnest Hemingway wrote his masterpiece “Farewell to Arms” in an Arkansas Delta hideaway. The abundant natural world, the wide Mississippi River and the difficult, often tragic, history sifts and settles into a rich gumbo of nostalgia, inspiration and longing just as the large rivers emptying into the mighty Mississippi leave their deposits of deep, black soil that drives the economy. Hardship grows hope, strength and ingenuity and that is what the photographs in this show represent.

The imprint of my travels is made photographically. My process from exposure to print resonates the same respect for the past that the images do. I am devoted to making my photographic art with light, chemistry and water – it is all that will work for me; all that satisfies my art-making urge. The photograph is a living thing made with my energy. I use a camera and an enlarger in my process and nothing is digitized, the work is direct and each print is one of a kind in that no two prints from the same negative will ever be the same. The prints are cyanotypes, one of the earliest photographic processes, which are made when sensitized paper is exposed to ultraviolet light. It is simple and direct in execution. I strive for perfection at the beginning and embrace the imperfections that the process brings. The photographs are grid-like in that I create my negatives on six separate pieces of film and then piece them together for exposure. As I delve into the photographic art I have come to appreciate seeing the alchemy of light on chemistry, to not have things seamless, but to reveal the streaks and stains that are inherent to coating paper by hand, the uneven mix of chemicals, the fogs, the exposure and the fading power of the sun on the bright blue cyanotype stains. I have worked out a system that is unique. After enlarging my medium format negatives and coating the cotton rag paper with cyanotype chemistry, I move my process outdoors. It is on sunny summer days that I make the prints. Setting up my paper and negatives under a large sheet of plate glass perched on top of my garden wagon in the darkness of my garage, I roll it out into the sun for exposure and then develop and wash the final print in a large tray in my backyard with a garden hose. The simple tools and processes that I use to make the photographs reflect back on the type of ingenuity that I appreciate in the subjects of this delta imagery.

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