MAKING THE PLATINUM/PALLADIUM PRINT

There is nothing mystical about the platinum/palladium process. Just like silver gelatin printing: it takes you three hours to learn . . . and three lifetimes to get really good! And, like every other photographic process, there is an incredible array of variables and approaches.

Monkey Falling in Well, Nepal ©1995

There are a few steps that are fundamental to the process:

- Coating the Paper with Sensitizer
- Drying the Coating
- Exposing the Print
- Developing the Print
- Clearing the Print
- Washing the Print
- Drying, Flattening and Presenting the Finished Print

Coating the Paper with Sensitizer

The object is to get a smooth, even coating onto the paper. Brushes and rods (glass or acrylic) are both used; it's a matter of personal working style. Remember that paper is delicate; over–working the surface can abrade it!

Drying the Paper

Drying is critical. Dry too soon and you risk having the sensitizer float off your paper when you go into the developer (the sensitizer needs to get embedded into the paper fibers). Dry too late and you may get muddy dark tones (the sensitizer has gone too far into the paper base). When to dry depends on the paper you're using (how's that for nebulous?). One rule of thumb is to start drying with the hair dryer when the sensitizer coating is not glossy wet, but has assumed a *satin* look. And remember, if your sensitizer coating isn't dry, it can **ruin** your negative!

Exposing the Print

Platinum and palladium are sensitive to Ultra Violet light. Common sources are the sun, U.V. fluorescent lamps, and mercury vapor plate burners. As with everything else in life, each has its advantages and disadvantages. Much has been made of the visible latent image in platinum/palladium printing. I've found this visible-after-exposure-but-before-development image interesting, but of little use in determining exposure times.

Developing the Print

There are a number of developers for your prints. The two most common are Ammonium Citrate (included with the Bostick and Sullivan kits) and Potassium Oxalate. The former is safer to use and the later will give warmer image tones. Most workers leave their print in the developer for about a minute, without agitation.

Clearing the Print

After the print is developed, there are still light sensitive iron compounds in the paper. It's the Clearing Bath's job to remove these iron compounds. EDTA (in your Bostick and Sullivan Kits), Hydrochloric Acid, Phosphoric Acid and other compounds are used for clearing. The EDTA is the safest of the bunch, but may not clear depending on your sensitizer make–up, your developer and your water quality. General practice is to clear in three sequential baths for at least five minutes each, dumping the first when it looks like lemonade. (A two-minute water rinse after developing will extend your clearing bath's life.)

Washing the Print

The good news is that—unlike fixer in a silver print—the clearing agent is very water soluble. A one hour wash is usually sufficient. Make sure your prints don't rub against each other in the wash. The surface is very delicate when wet.

Drying, Flattening and Presentation

Blot the print with acid–free blotter paper and dry image-up on screens. Mildly heat the print in a mount press and flatten under a special flattening plate or a sheet of glass.Spot with pencil or watercolor. Don't dry mount your print. Mat with paper hinges or corners.