

Abstractions
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I have been printing black and white photographs in the traditional manner (liquid chemistry in trays) for nearly 50 years. As a result, I've become deeply attuned to the infinite subtleties of grey tones that can be coaxed out of light sensitive photographic materials, ranging from the deepest, darkest tones to the lightest, barely visible highlight tones. For many years I printed in the traditional way -- by projecting the enlarger's light through a negative onto photographic paper. I loved working with the reversal process of translating grey tones in a negative to those in a black and white print. I became a master black and white printer. For several years I made my living by printing for other photographers, including Robert Mapplethorpe, Berenice Abbott, Petah Coyne and Roni Horn. This was very demanding and very exacting work. Throughout these years I also did my own work, often experimenting with alternative, camera-less approaches. Working in this way was incredibly refreshing and freeing. As part of this exploration, I began cutting and folding the surface of the paper and letting the liquid chemicals drip, splash and flow over the paper.

Some of these abstractions are made by very carefully, very delicately scoring gelatin silver photographic paper on alternate sides and folding it in a fan shape. Sometimes I use Ilford Matte Fiber Base Multigrade paper. Other times I work with a warm toned Fomatone paper (produced in the Czech Republic). I expose the folded paper in various ways under the enlarging light using a number of contrast filters. After the exposures, I place the paper into the liquid developer in a variety of positions so that it hits the paper's surface in numerous locations. Then I slowly pull the paper up out of the developer tray and let the chemistry run down its surface. A myriad of different effects occur depending on exactly how the paper is scored and folded, how it is exposed, how it is placed in the developer and how it is pulled out.

There is an intriguing interaction between the rigid, straight lines of the scored, folded paper and the way they interrupt the loose flowing rivulets of the liquid developer as it cascades down the cut surface of the paper. The scoring and folding is absolutely controlled. The flowing liquid is by contrast, quite unpredictable. I love the mix of the controlled and the spontaneous.

Sometimes instead of scoring the paper, I simply fold it by hand so the folds are less mechanical, less straight, more organic. This approach causes the emulsion's surface to crack. In addition I often roll up the paper in different directions and crush it by pressing and rolling a round wooden cylinder over its surface causing a different sort of folded and cracked surface.

I've been making these abstractions for ten years. They record the breathtaking moment the light sensitive paper makes visible the flowing movement of liquid chemistry over its scored, folded, and crushed surface.

