

# Argentea Gallery

## **A Q&A between Joseph Minek & Jennie Anderson**

April 2020

**In this period of uncertainty, living through such a historic moment that Covid-19 has forced upon us, how are you finding life under lock down in Ohio? How has your usual daily routine changed?**

Well it has been a little over a month now, it took a bit of time to get used to all of this but I am getting through. Family and friends are safe and healthy at the moment. Ohio was one of the first states to put the stay at home order in place, so I haven't seen the effects of this first-hand yet, but Ohio is set to start opening May 1<sup>st</sup> which is worrisome. Luckily before the lockdown started, I was on spring break from teaching, so I was able to get into the studio and make a good amount of work.

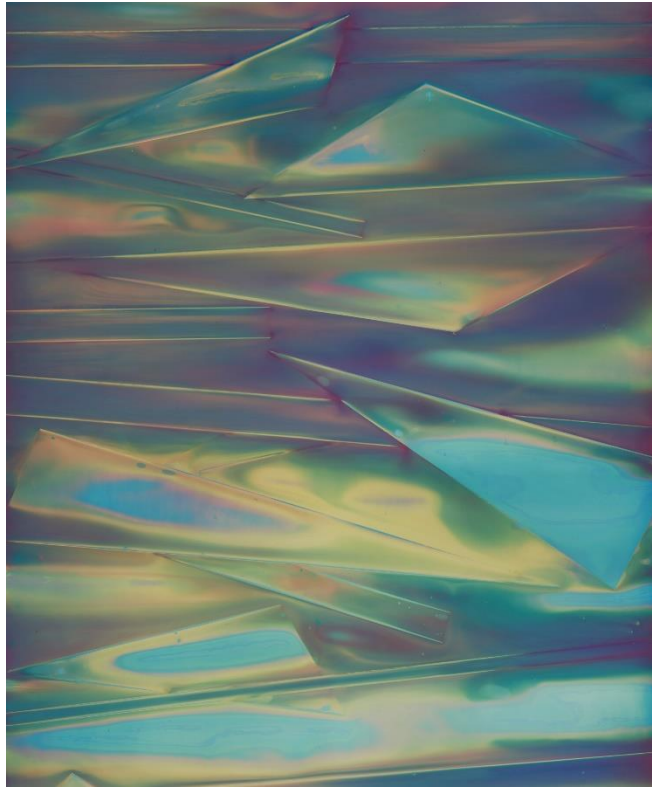
I have tried to keep my daily routine pretty close to what it was before, just with minor tweaks. Normally I wake up around 4am and go straight to the gym (now work out at home) and am at school or the studio by 7am (now my living room / second bedroom studio space). I can't make the work here so I have just been cleaning the studio space, sketching and thinking about ideas for new works after this is all over. I don't feel as if I have been productive at all during this time, but that is okay. Everyone needs down time and what better time than now?

**We all come to photography through a journey, refining what we choose to create. Tell us how you came into photography and how your practice has evolved?**

The journey started during high school taking my first photography class. I started taking photos of my friend when we would go out skateboarding and it just snowballed from there. I was lucky enough to have a teacher who saw my passion and kept me going. That was around 2004.

Once I was in undergrad, I started to experiment with different processes; it was something always in the back of my mind. In the summer of 2010 I was photographing using a toy camera and when I got back the slide film I noticed a frame that was completely blue (must of just taken an image of the sky). I took that slide and started to burn it. At this point I wasn't happy taking images and thought I hated photography. The chemical reactions to this action caught my attention far more than any photograph I had taken and this made me realise I was interested in how photography functions to speak about itself and its role.

I finished undergrad dipping my toes into this new way of working, which continued into my graduate studies from 2011-2013. During this time, I experimented with ways of deconstructing film and later photographic paper, creating one-of-a-kind pieces. Fast forward to 2015 where I started work on "Photographic Works".



**2020 (2020)**

**Tell us a little about your choice of process?**

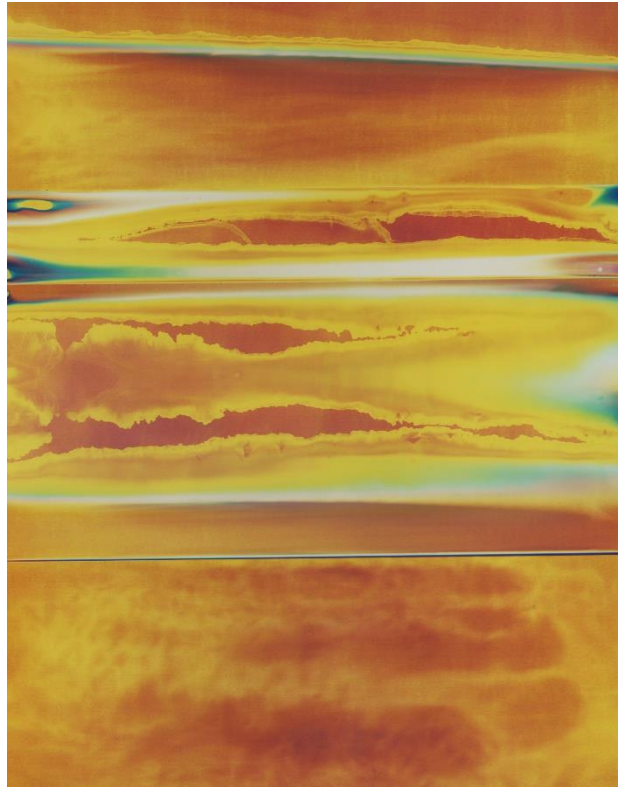
Photographic Works started from a desire to construct images and experiment with materials not being used at the school I teach at. This pushed me to think about how these materials could be used to form a photographic image, and the limits of what a photographic image can be.

I use RA-4 (color darkroom) paper, specifically Kodak Premier Endura Metallic Photo Paper and E6 (slide film) chemistry. When I first started this body of work I was using whatever was around, but through experimentation I found the greatest results with these.

**I've noticed your new works have brighter colours – yellows and golds – which is different from the usual blues, purples and greens. How do you achieve this? Do you know which chemicals will produce which colours or is it pure chance?**

About 5-10% is chance. It has taken years to figure out the color combinations and at this point I can say I have figured out every color. Only recently I figured out black, which I have been trying for almost 2 years to get.

The colors all depend on variables such as chemical dilution, time, temperature, how many pieces have gone through the chemistry, and the order in which the chemicals are applied. I only get blue, grey, and white from the chemicals I use, so it is all about the order they are applied.



**1855 (2019)**

**Your images are purely abstract and result from endless experimentation, but do you have a particular outcome in mind when making an image?**

I always have a particular outcome in mind. I start by lying the piece of paper out, at this point the paper cannot be used for traditional printing, then I use strips of paper to create a composition. Looking at the composition, I decide what colour combinations to use.

**What, to you, makes an image you've created successful? When are you happy with an image?**

That is a tough one. Sometimes I just know during the process that the image will be successful. But after I am done with making, I look over the pieces and put certain parameters onto them to determine if it is successful. For example, does the piece make me think about photography and or painting? Is the piece aesthetically pleasing? Is the piece saying what I want it to?



1719 (2019)

**What is your success rate in making your work? How many 'unsuccessful' images do you discard?**

Success rates varies. Some days every piece I make will turn out, other days none will. I have made over 2,000 in the past 5 years (includes tests) and I would say maybe 200 are successful. So around 10% or so, probably less.

**I've heard you speak about the early pioneers of photography and their experimentation with the photographic process. Is there anyone in particular who has influenced your work?**

There are many but mainly Henry Fox Talbot. Something that has stuck with me is the story when Talbot was corresponding with Hooker in 1839 about some photogenic drawings of lace. Hooker had showed them to some muslin manufacturers and asked if they thought they were a good representation of lace. The lace makers thought Hooker was trying to fool them and they believed it was actual lace and not a photograph. This stands out due to the idea of representation and truth / confusion in photography, which is something I strive for within the works.

**You've also spoken about pushing the photographic process to its limits as photography. Do you think it has reached its limits yet or is there more to be discovered?**

There is always more to be discovered. Every time I go into the studio to make work, I come across something I haven't seen or noticed before, which keeps it exciting. But with photography in general, it is interesting to see where it is going with regards to mobile imaging, AR / VR, digital lighting to name a few. Photography has always been driven by technology and I have been thinking about what photography is going to look like 5, 10, 20 years from now.

**As well as a working artist, you are also a lecturer in photography. Do you think your process has an influence on your students, encouraging them to broaden their methods of working?**

Yes and no, depending on the classes being taught. I mainly teach digital imaging (photoshop) classes. These are very technical classes and don't interact with the type of work I make in the slightest. I believe in order to break rules you need to understand them completely first and teaching hybrid approach classes does this as it shows how photography can be used to think about drawing, painting, collage and sculpture etc.

**Which contemporary artist/photographer do you admire?**

There are probably too many to name but I figured it would be good to share photographers whose work is different from mine.

Barry Underwood, is a close friend and mentor who I have been working with for almost a decade now. Although our practices are distinct, we are able to have in depth conversations about each other's work and I feel like he pushes me to become a better artist and teacher. The way Barry is able to look at a specific scene and figure out constructions in the space, along with the color theory, is quite impressive.

Tara Wray's project "Too Tired For Sunshine" (2018) deals with mental health and depression particularly within the artistic community. Her images have this great sense of loneliness mixed with a bit of dark humour. Tara started the "Too Tired" project as an initiative to help those suffering from mental health issues by offering a place for creative

expression. This work resonates to me mainly in terms of my students - being able to show them there are communities out there for them to be able to engage with.