

DANZIGER

On Madison

SUSAN DERGES

The River Taw “Restored”.

July 27 - August 9.

Twenty-two years ago Susan Derges turned the world of cameraless photography upside down with her photograms made in the River Taw, one of Devon’s largest rivers. I’m presuming readers know what a photogram is but to reiterate: a photogram is a photographic image made without a camera usually by placing objects directly onto the surface of photographic paper and then exposing it to light. When developed, the finished piece is a unique record of whatever happened to the paper.

Where the River Taw runs closest to Susan’s studio, the foliage by the banks of the river often floated near the surface, a euphonious encyclopedia of British plant life – Rowan, Holly, Blackthorn, Ivy, Hawthorn, Hazel, Willow, and more. Susan, who had been experimenting with photograms and images of water had the idea of submerging large five and a half by two feet pieces of color photographic paper into the river at night and then flashing the paper with a strobe to capture the shape of the branches, leaves, and swirls and eddies of water in the fraction of a second that they were illuminated and exposed by the flash.

I’m not sure if prior to the first attempt Susan expected them to be quite as strong and beautiful as they were, but I know when I first saw them I was dazzled and fell instantly in love with them. As I wrote when we first showed them, “Each is its own unique record of event, color, shape, season, and time. Each has its own reality and metaphor. Some remind me of Tiffany stained-glass panels, some bring to mind nineteenth century Japanese art, and yet at the same time they are relentlessly and unequivocally photographic.”

We sold every single piece we exhibited and more. The work was acquired and shown in major museums around the world. And then there were none - except the few where a stone has skipped across the paper scratching the emulsion, or where

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the water had not quite settled on the paper evenly, or where some mishap occurred in the processing of the delicate cibachrome paper. Kept and stored in Susan's studio, every time I would visit we would look at them to see if they could be cropped or saved in some way or if Susan was ready to let them go as they were. And then came digital. With high resolution scanning and photoshop retouching, it was possible to save and perfect these images. But Susan is not one to make hasty decisions.

However, after contemplating the idea for several years, Susan was finally ready to test the technology and as there was now a digital file these previously unseen works could be printed out and editioned to make one last foray into the world. So the images illustrated above, once damaged and orphaned, are now restored and ready to find new homes.

As someone who has lived with a Susan Derges "River Taw" photogram in my living room for twenty years – through moves, children growing up, and with dogs and children's friends crashing on the couch underneath the picture – I can vouch for the durability of a properly framed piece and more importantly the beauty, serenity and meditative quality such work brings.

I hope you will be as lucky as I have been.

James Danziger.

The River Taw "Restored" pieces are editions of two. Prices are \$14,000 for the 67 x 24 inch pictures and \$12,000 for the 51 x 24 inch pictures.