

Welcome to the Chazen museum this evening to hear a talk by Dr Michael Ware which is related to the exhibition now on view in the Mayer gallery: the color of Iron. Generous support for this exhibition and its related programming has been provided by Hilldale Fund; Brittingham Fund, Inc.; Eugenie Mayer Bolz Family Foundation; and the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission with additional funds from the Endres Mfg. Company Foundation and the Overture Foundation; Northern Engraving Corporation, and Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

I am delighted to welcome Mike Ware back to the Chazen. He is a chemist and pursued an academic career, but alongside that part of his life he has been an ardent photographer. It is remarkable to me that he took up photography as a hobby in 1978, and only six years later receives an award from Kodak for his work on using noble metals in alternative printing processes. By 1992 he had assembled one-man exhibitions around England, and been in innumerable group exhibitions around the world. So when he took an early retirement that year from the world of academic chemistry to pursue his research into the art and science of photography, it was clearly to pursue what was already a real passion.

His work with photography has focused on what are called “alternative processes,” which used to mean those processes that do not use the usual silver-sensitized films and papers to fix images onto paper. He has made fascinating contributions to range of these alternative process, conducting experiments that bring to fruition Herschel’s attempts to create a chrysotype process, examples of which we now have in the Chazen’s collection. He has conducted workshops on alternative processes and on the conservation of photographs. He has written a thorough book on the cyanotype process, which, although it is out of print is never-the-less available in the museum’s shop. In general, he has brought a scientist’s process to bear on photographic processes, benefiting those who follow his footsteps by clarifying procedures, and where possible improve them.

Moreover, he has generously provided on-line a treasure-trove of information on his results on a web site for those interested in alternative processes, providing thorough instructions on alternative processes which incorporate his own observations and experiments. In addition, the website has a wonderful section of essays on historical aspects of the processes, on conservation issues, and thoughtful pieces on the nature of alternative processes.

In one of these essays he observes the real value of all of alternative processes, saying:

Lens-based picture-making with commercial materials, whether digital imaging or analogue photography, necessarily employs media that are designed to satisfy large markets. Inevitably, these media tend towards a homogeneity of appearance that dulls the edge of our appreciation of the photograph as an art-object.

I am sure his talk tonight will whet the edge of our appreciation. It is entitled  
Ironing Out the Blues  
A Spectrum of Ferric Fantasies

Please welcome Mike Ware