



COOKING

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STORIES

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“We are the stories we tell each other.” So claims Diana Orero, specialist in identity narrative, who also insists that “we are moved by stories, not by ideas.” There are three types of stories, she argues: The ones we tell ourselves about the world, the ones we tell ourselves about others, and the ones we tell ourselves about ourselves. They don’t change reality per se, but the perception of reality; by changing perception, we change; and by changing ourselves, reality changes in some way.

An Irish tradition called “potatoes with a moon” half cooked with a raw middle; a Galician farmer who strongly believes the potatoes are “from here”; the central role of the potato in traditional Andean society and the conquerors’ refusal to use it as a food crop; the commonalities shared between humans and potatoes; the popular uprising in Amsterdam in 1917 known as Potato Riot, the ancient ‘lazy bed’ planting technique of potatoes used by Irish farmers and by the Incas, the use of potato starch in the first color photographic process, the tradition of calling the potato “the perfect migrant” due to its ability to adapt to the existing food culture as well as the soil; the development of a research project on the possible cultivation of potatoes on Mars...

All of these are stories about what the potato can tell us; about us, and the complex processes by which we construe, understand and make sense of ourselves, individually and as collectivities. The potato that embodies, and is embodied in, these stories, is revealed to be viscerally, painfully, poignantly, and triumphantly planted in our memories and histories, as meanings are constructed by the different traditions and social practices of cooking, cultivating, celebrating, storytelling.

Through this playful confrontation of different voices and the collision of perspectives herein, I invite you to immerse yourself in the complex system of meanings and narratives around the potato. This harvesting of stories is, itself, evidence of how narratives can give or take away power, and how the ideologies and subjectivities behind narratives are embedded in historical memory and encapsulated in local ideas; even while it also seeks to construct new meanings out of these encounters. If we are to be moved by stories, then let’s choose the ones by which we want to be moved!

Each of us creates our own identity through a continuous process of construction, a dynamic configuration and reconfiguration in which the collection of particular stories, and the voices of diverse subjects, are revealed to be crucial.

Stories are an important element of how we as individuals make sense of the world around them and integrate new ideas into our imaginaries. These imaginaries condition the relationship between the psyche and the social, acting in and within us. They hold the fantasies, strong emotions and intense belief systems that configure our own worlds. The imaginary, or more precisely, each imaginary, is a real and complex set of mental images that is socially produced, largely independent of the scientific criteria of truth, from relatively conscious inheritances, creations and transfers; making use of aesthetic, literary, moral, political, scientific productions, as well as other forms of collective memory and social practice that are thus caused to survive and be transmitted.

Each set, or imaginary, works in different ways at different times, and can transform into multiplicities of rhythms. So, what happens if we try to transform these sets of stories? Can new narratives break down the logic behind the mental images of which they are comprised?

The mental images that make up an imaginary can arguably be changed more easily than the mental attitudes that make up “a mentality.” While the image can be rationalized, and so pass into the realm of ideas and ideologies, a mental attitude is rooted in sensibilities—and these resist change. Here a bridge has been built with potatoes, allowing us to move from Latin America to Europe, to encounter some different perspectives, to challenge some social imaginaries, and establish some common ground.

This photographic series is based on the idea of photography as a mechanism through which we can live with different symbolic-cultural and even contradictory schemes. On the one hand, I have specially constructed pictures with materials taken from the symbolic background to generate an impact on the mentalities and behaviors because of the ability of the imaginary to penetrate our individual and collective practices and sensibilities.

On the other, playing with the symbolic enhances a sense of belonging of feelings and thoughts that allow each viewer to trace their own route through the story.

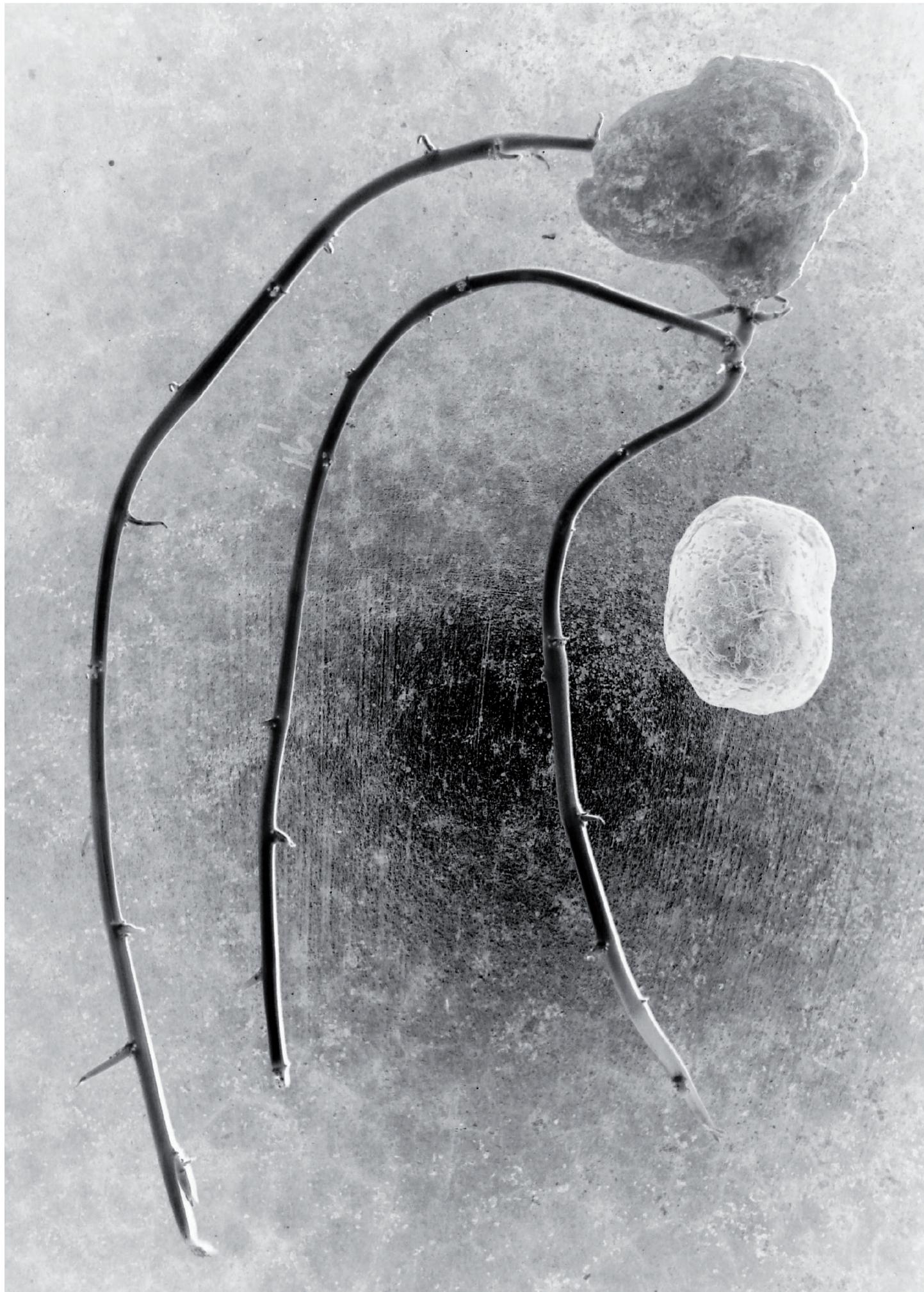
These images correspond to a visual representation of my own tangle of potato narratives, in both their historical and cultural aspects, as well as the more personal and situational. The aim is to set off, in the audience, a search for narratives of their own. To this end, this group of images has been intentionally configured in a scattered way, leaving gaps to be filled by the viewer, facilitating the design of their own story.

Our imaginaries are always a hybrid between the social and the personal, a real and complex set of images that appear to cause different senses. In this way, I aim to use photography to open new dialogue, and generate new relationships between members of society; to promote alternative knowledge movement between Latin America and Europe that allows us to connect to personal and collective imagination. Pictures here are the ingredients of some knowledge recipes I have prepared, some new potato narratives that call into question how we see ourselves and others. They are a means to find ourselves, face-to-face with the political, social, emotional and historical relationships we have with our roots, that persist in conditioning our personal and cultural imaginaries.

What can a potato tell us about ourselves? What does it say about the construction of national identity? What role can new narratives about the potato play in creating expanded social imaginaries? How can trans-local stories and food cultures be connected as an inroad to address forgotten colonial legacies and the wider context of political, social, and emotional relationships?

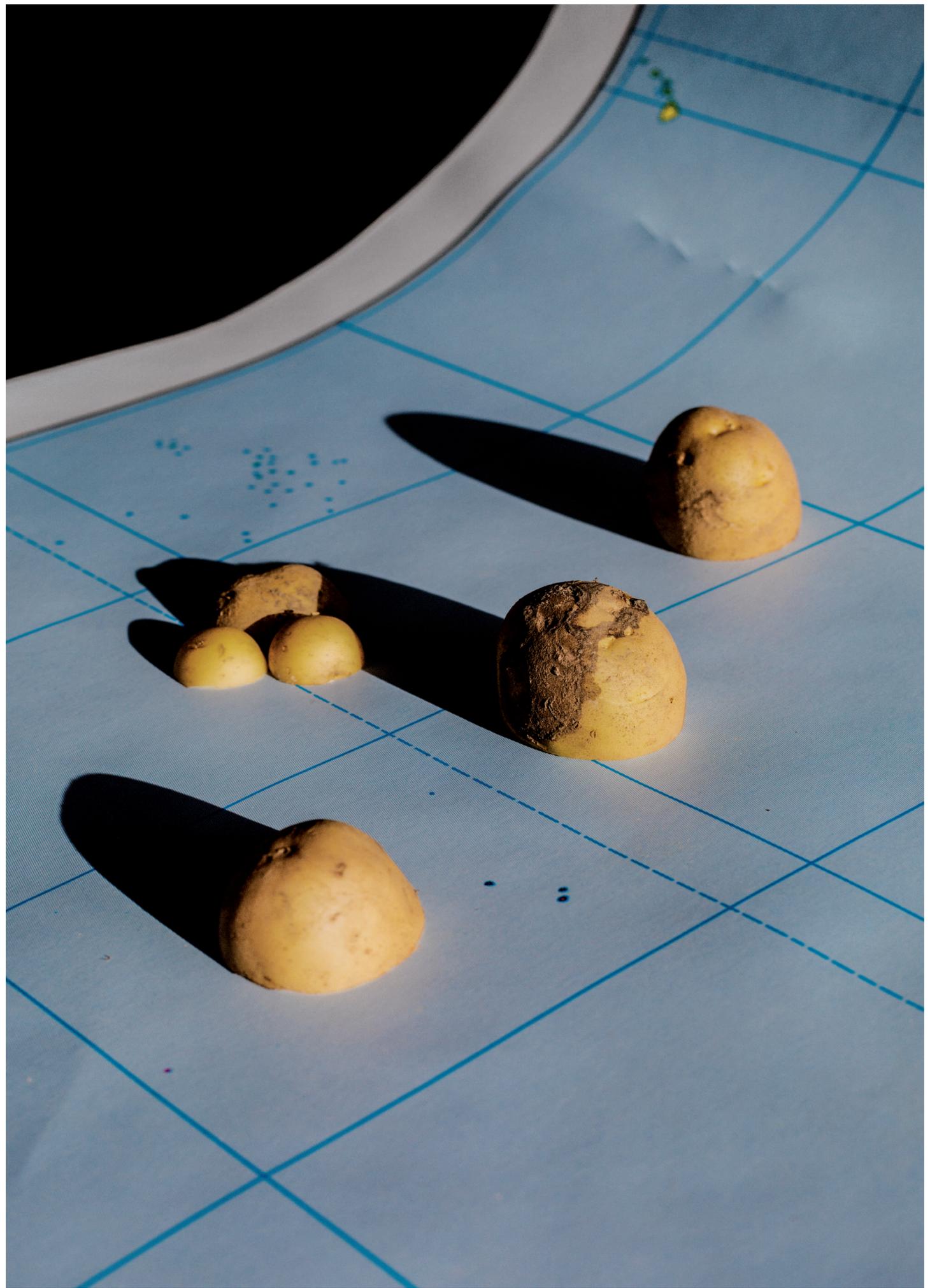
Next time you pick up a potato and look it in the eyes, I hope you might be able to answer.

Ana Núñez Rodríguez









A home recipe for Autochrome

Ingredients:

- 3 Cups of potato starch
- Red, green and blue dyes
 - 1 Piece of glass
 - Latex adhesive
- Laquer of nitrocellulose
 - Damar gum
 - Rainwater
- 1 oz. of gelatin
- Nitrate of silver
- Potash of bromide
 - Ammonia
 - Erythosine
- Orthochrome-T
 - Ethyl violet
 - Pyrogallic acid
- Dichromate of potash
 - Oil of vitriol

Instructions:

Take 3 cups of sorted potato starch, and set them into 3 separate mixing bowls. Apply red, green and blue dyes to each bowl, along with some water, and stir vigorously under a gentle heat. Strain each colour, and allow it to dry completely. At this point, one should pour the contents of all three bowls into one large mixing bowl, and thoroughly whisk until the colour is homogenous.

On a separate cutting board, set one piece of glass, and apply a latex adhesive, ensuring the layer is thin and free of bubbles. Stand vertical to dry. When the glue is no longer aromatic with that of toluene, a quantity of starch should be gently brushed with a soft makeup brush, ensuring full coverage of the plate. A thin layer will form, and any excess is gently removed. Applying a large downward pressure, flatten the starch with a large roller. A small quantity of lampblack is also brushed onto the plate, before flowing it with a lacquer of nitrocellulose and damar gum. Set to dry. Repeat this process for as many heliochromes as one desires to make.

Under subdued light, heat two cups of rainwater and 1 oz of gelatin to 120F. Apply equimolar amounts of nitrate of silver, and potash of bromide. Add ammonia to taste. Stir for 10 minutes, then remove from heat and allow the gelatin to set. Shred, wash, and reheat to 130F. Add small portions of erythosine, orthochrome-T and ethyl violet until sufficiently panchromatic. Still in diminished light, add 1 tsp of emulsion to each heliochrome plate, and allow to dry.

When placed in a camera, these plates therein will resolve objects in their natural colour. They may be developed in a bath of pyrogallic acid, or perhaps that one of metol, hydroquinone and ammonia. Bleach with a solution of dichromate of potash and oil of vitriol, and redevelop as is done with a typical reversal process.











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