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Wednesday, 04 December 2019

The Luminous Landscape Videos



Michael Reichmann of The Luminous Landscape interviewing Ctein in 2004

Well this is a nice surprise. Josh Reichmann, son of our late friend Michael of [The Luminous Landscape](#), has given us permission to make available the two videos of MR's visit to Ctein's San Francisco area darkroom fifteen years ago. This is especially generous of him as L-L is now behind a paywall.

[Here's the interview](#). The part about dye transfer begins about 23:50 of the 32-minute video if you want to skip right to it.

[The second one](#) is really the priceless one—it's the only video we know of that shows a dye transfer print actually being made. The first fifteen minutes are somewhat simulated (you can't film in total darkness), but the later part is real-time documentary, showing Ctein making an actual matrix and a print, from start to finish. You really should watch this—it's quite fascinating even if you never set foot in a darkroom or never will again. And it's now a valuable historical record, at least in photo-tech history. Finally, it certainly shows you how involved a process it was to make the rare print or prints you've bought in our sale!

Speaking of which, there are now less than two days left. The basic information is [here](#) and you can browse the available images [here](#).

Many and most sincere thanks to Josh. I found it emotional to see and hear his father again—I knew MR for many years. It's the first time I've rewatched one of his videos since his passing. He was a pioneer of photography online and is greatly missed in our little corner of the universe.

Enjoy!

Mike
(Thanks to JR)

(To see all the comments, click on the "Comments" link below.)

Featured Comments from:

Sid: "Fascinating, even spellbinding, videos!"

Rob de Loe: "Best quotation from the second video: 'now we know why not that many people do this anymore.' Yeesh. What an incredible amount of work to make one print. I had no idea. Thanks for posting this Mike."

Mike replies: *Incredible, isn't it? Now you can see why I think dye transfer is one of the most amazing processes in photography's history. But unlike some things that are purely difficult, there was a reason for going through all that work: the results were inimitable, especially as regards maximum black and color purity.*

However, my second most favorite color process is pigment inkjet. A well-made pigment inkjet print can be really beautiful. It is a wonderful medium too.

...And not quite as difficult, either. :-) But one of the salient comments Ctein made in the video is when he talked about the prejudice people have that inkjet printing is just "pressing a button and letting the computer do it." He's right that that's the same prejudice that people leveled against photography itself in the beginning. Inkjet printing is a skill too, and takes knowledge as well as judgement.

As an aside, note also in the videos that Ctein doesn't use junk words and fillers when he speaks. You won't hear him say "um" and "ahh" very often, if at all. And he doesn't use filler phrases like "you know" (unless he really means it) or "know what I'm saying" or "like" or "stuff like that"...or stuff like that. Sometimes he will pause and actually sigh, but he's silent—he doesn't fill his silences with junk. Very unusual manner of speaking these days. No wonder he dictates instead of typing.

Kenneth G James: "Wow! Watched the videos, they are great! Thanks Mike, Thanks Josh."

Kenneth Tanaka: "I actually have a DVD of that second video (from a former LuLa subscription purchase) that I keep near my desk as a greatest-hits reference. I've not only watched several times myself but I've played it for others. Several years ago I even played it for a lunchtime group of photo curators and conservation interns at a major museum. It's a wonderfully educational video, a genuine classic."

Mike replies: *Genuine classic...I thought the very same thing, Ken, rewatching it last night.*

[A different] **Mike:** "As amazing as the process is to watch—and it really is—it's even wilder to think about how the idea came to be in the first place. Wow."

MHMG: "Some fifteen years later, I listen with interest to Ctein's comments and concerns about print permanence in the first video. Ctein is entirely spot on with some of his concerns about accelerated aging test methods as it was practiced at the time. We have now learned something about modern inkjet prints that weren't predicted by those accelerated aging methods practiced at that time. A new understanding of inkjet print longevity has indeed been determined both by refinements in accelerated test methods and actual observations in real world anecdotal reports at this point in time now that inkjet printing is a much more mature print process. I take comfort that both 'real world' anecdotal evidence of aging issues with modern media and more recent accelerated testing protocols with improved methodologies for these media are now leading to a better understanding of print permanence. The role of optical brighteners and titanium dioxide whitening pigments in modern media, for example, play a more significant role than we knew at the time Michael Reichmann interviewed Ctein in the these videos. Progress is progress!"

David Lee: "Thanks for the videos Mike. I watched the printing process three times already and shared it twice."

Eamon Hickey: "An incredible treat to watch these videos, especially the printing demo. Thanks to all who thought to make it and now made it available for us to see. In addition to being a master printer, Ctein is a master explainer, a skill that is probably as rare and valuable (in the benefit-to-the-rest-of-us sense) as his darkroom skills. A real pleasure to hear and see him describe his work."

Posted on Wednesday, 04 December 2019 at 03:35 PM in [Ctein](#), [Photo-tech](#), [Print Offers](#), [Printers and Printers](#) | [Permalink](#)

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Comments

Fantastic! Thank you for sharing this.

Posted by: Hank | [Wednesday, 04 December 2019 at 07:18 PM](#)

I had the pleasure of interacting with Michael during one of his photo safaris,to Bosque del Apache, NM in 2003 where we photographed tens of thousand of birds in their yearly dance. It was the beginning of my transition from hack to photographer (your call) using the Canon D30 (not 30D). I subscribed to his video DVDs and at least parts of this were the focus of one of them. Thomas Knoll, a participant, spent almost all of his down time writing code as far as I could tell.

Posted by: [Nature Lover](#) | [Wednesday, 04 December 2019 at 08:31 PM](#)

If you aren't precious about prints there's this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cofAtjZDJHs>

Posted by: [Dave Lumb](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 05:30 AM](#)

So cool. Thanks for posting. I still have some of the DVDs of the LL Video Journal around the house somewhere and actually watch them now and again. LL was a fantastic site in the day.

Posted by: [Mark O'Shaughnessy](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 06:12 AM](#)

Echoing what others have said, I had no idea. What a pleasure to watch.
If you go over to youtube and search the terms "handmade BBC" or "mastercrafts BBC" you'll be presented with a series of programs about precisely this kind of craftsmanship, albeit in different realms, piano making, porcelain, masonry, etc.

Posted by: [Robert Rould](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 10:41 AM](#)

Very interesting observation* that Ctein "doesn't fill his silences with junk. Very unusual manner of speaking these days. No wonder he dictates instead of typing."
Of course we know from his comments signature here that he has been using Dragon dictate for a long time so have you considered the software may have trained him rather than the other way round ;-) ?

He is a very clear speaker, as was Michael Reichmann. I've been having difficulty with my hearing lately and I noticed I listened to both videos on my iPad without resort to hearing aids.

*Not as interesting as the content of course.

Posted by: [Richard Parkin](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 10:27 AM](#)

As an adjunct to Ctein's process video, and in response to "Mike"s featured comment, TOP readers might also enjoy watching the George Eastman Museum's brief (4+ min.) [overview video of the dye sub and Technicolor printing process](#) as it related to motion picture film production. It's older than you may think.

Posted by: [Kenneth Tanaka](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 10:56 AM](#)

Thanks Mike for posting these and Josh for making them available. I'm glad Josh is working hard to keep Luminous Landscape going. His dad was irreplaceable but I think he would like to see the work continue.

Posted by: [Sharon](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 11:21 AM](#)

I remember reading somewhere that Eliot Porter used dye transfer to make his black-and-white prints as well as his much more well-known color prints. I've been trying to verify this by looking at museum collection data but haven't been able to find a Porter b/w in a major collection. Perhaps someone else knows...

Posted by: [Greg Heins](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 01:01 PM](#)

Back in the late 80's I worked at 2 photo labs in Boston area that did Dye Transfer printing for clients like National Geographic. Although I worked in the other print departments (C-printing and Ciba printing) I was always fascinated, watching the Dye Transfer prints being rolled out and the usual automated rocking table with the trays of dye. Thanks so much for posting these incredible videos!

Posted by: [Jeff](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 01:30 PM](#)

@ Greg Heins: We have [about 90 Porter prints](#) in the permanent collection at the Art Institute of Chicago. The overwhelming majority are (color) dye transfers, although some can appear nearly monochrome due to the scene. The few of his actual b&w prints we have are conventional gelatin silver.

Generally speaking, the very concept of a b&w dye transfer print makes no sense, eh?

Posted by: [Kenneth Tanaka](#) | [Thursday, 05 December 2019 at 06:28 PM](#)

That was magnificent - thanks for the priceless education!

"The World Is A Carousel Of Color..."

Posted by: [Lance Saint Paul](#) | [Friday, 06 December 2019 at 01:15 PM](#)

Thanks for posting the videos. BTW, although Lula is behind a paywall, it's an exceptionally low wall. The monthly cost is less than a single cup of what gas stations sell under the pretense that it's coffee.

Posted by: [Bill Tyler](#) | [Friday, 06 December 2019 at 05:05 PM](#)

The video of Ctein showing the dye transfer print process is nothing short of amazing. This work is on another level of genius.

Posted by: [Gary Nylander](#) | [Friday, 06 December 2019 at 05:51 PM](#)

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