

Profile

Tina Maas

I was born in Hamburg, North Germany. I grew up in a picturesque suburb next to the wide river Elbe. Being the eldest of five siblings, our house was always full of children and full of life. We did not have a television (out of choice) so we played a lot of games. My mum would do many art and crafts projects with us; I loved drawing and knew from a young age that I wanted to become an artist. My dad is a radiologist and gave me my first camera when I was 15. It only occurred to me much later that he actually spent all his day working with images and in those days it was all film and chemistry. Maybe my mum nurtured my creativity and my dad's scientific mind pushed me to explore the boundaries of photography.

When did you start making artwork?

I have always loved drawing and painting and knew I wanted to study something creative. A family friend convinced me though to go for something "sensible, where you can actually get a job afterwards" so I chose graphic design. I came to London in 1996 to do a foundation course and went on to study graphic design at Camberwell College of Arts in South London. I never really liked working on the computer or the disciplined art of typography. I always saw myself as an image maker and did a lot of experimenting and rule-breaking. I finally fell in love with photography on a school exchange program to New York's Parsons School of Art in 1999 where I took a class about alternative processes with Jill Enfield. She showed me how unique photography could be and I was instantly attracted to processes that were handmade, experimental and were often prone to mistakes and failures; I have been hooked ever since. For my final degree show back in London, I used Liquid Light¹ on found objects. After traveling for a year and living in Israel with my boyfriend I came back to London to do my masters in photography. For two years I immersed myself in the study of alternative processes out of which the Ophelia series emerged.

¹Liquid Light is a silver-based sensitizer for applying on any surface, exposing by an enlarger, and processing in conventional chemistry.

Can you please describe in detail the process you used to create the Ophelia series and how you came to it?

I created the Ophelia Series during my two-year masters degree course at Central Saint Martins School of Art in London. We were encouraged to work on a personal project from early on in the course. After watching a film on the installation art of Christian Boltanski I had a dream of women's faces floating in water lit with a mysterious orange light from below. So I decided to experiment with putting liquid light emulsion onto wax plates so I could subsequently float the pieces in water. I have always admired the Pre-Raphaelite art movement in England, and especially Millais' famous "Ophelia" painting that I saw at the Tate Britain a few years previously; I instantly saw a connection and decided to name this body of work after it. The sad looking, beautiful and mysterious, eternally young women in Pre-Raphaelite paintings epitomize for me feminine beauty, symbolized by their long flowing hair. Boltanski deals a lot with death in his installations and I tried to integrate this aspect into my work through the evocative reminiscence of waxen death masks, whilst playing on the ambiguity of the former—the possibility of it simply being innocent sleep. I was drawn to the beauty in decay and death.

I took a lot of photographs of my female friends from all around the world, lying on the floor with their long hair spread out. From the digital files I printed large internegatives² onto acetate which I contact-printed onto the wax plates. To make the plates, I bought wax pellets, heated them up and poured the liquid wax onto a table coated with cooking oil (to lift the plates off afterwards without breaking) in several layers to create 5-7mm thick plates of wax. To help the emulsion stick to the wax I sprayed them with artist varnish before coating them with liquid light emulsion and exposing them under an enlarger. It is hard to get

²Internegative is a negative created directly from a color-reversal (positive) or black-white positive film. It is the negative copy of the camera original.



Ann-Louise #2 by Tina Maas

“I had a dream of women’s faces floating in water lit with a mysterious orange light from below”

the emulsion to stick, especially as the wax is temperature sensitive, which causes it to expand and contract unpredictably. Some days I would come back after leaving coated plates overnight to dry in the dark, only to find that the entire emulsion had separated and curled up. Sometimes the image would appear fine in the developer but by the time the plate was in the wash the entire emulsion had separated from the plate and had literally washed off. Even if I got perfect images after the wash, the emulsion would sometimes crack under the pressure of the wax expanding a few days later. But all this unpredictability is part of what I love about the process and what makes each plate so unique. It took me about ten plates to get one image I was happy with. After I had created the final wax pieces, I floated them in a tank of water and illuminated them with underwater lights to re-photograph them. Most of the original wax pieces continued to deteriorate and eventually disintegrated.

You mentioned Christian Boltanski and the Pre-Raphaelites, who or what else inspires you?

For inspiration I always love going to one of the many museums or art exhibitions here in London. The list of photographers whose work I admire and

that inspire me is long and includes, amongst others, Melanie Manchot's early emulsion works on canvas, Abelardo Morell's camera obscura work, the Starn Twins collage work, Connie Imboden's underwater illusions, Jill Enfield's alternative processes, Anne Arden MacDonald's self portraits, Mona Hatoum's installations, Sarah Moon's polaroids and Sally Mann's large format collodions. I also love discovering like-minded photographers on internet sites such as alternativephotography.com and I can spend hours browsing in good photography bookstores. Seeing other photographers' work in lectures and talks can be very inspiring for me also.

What aspects of photography come easier for you? How about more difficult?

When I switch into "photography mode" I become totally immersed in the moment and enjoy exploring a subject from many different angles; so shooting usually comes easy for me. I sometimes have difficulty getting started on a big project that I have been thinking about for ages. I am fearful that I will not be able to live up to my own expectations. Also, editing my work is hard and tiresome. But once I start in the darkroom I am very enthusiastic and even several misfortunes cannot



Line by Tina Maas

“...once I start in the dark-room I am very enthusiastic and even several misfortunes cannot dissuade me.”

dissuade me (it sort of makes the eventual success even sweeter). One aspect that is extremely difficult for me is self promotion. Advertising my work, networking with the right people and contacting galleries, magazines, publishers is not my cup of tea at all. I really hate bothering people and still like to think that if people liked my work they would contact me - a very naive attitude I am told.

What is one of the first lessons you teach your photography students?

First of all I tell my students to stop using their cameras on auto mode. I believe that being in full control of the camera is essential, and that experimenting and making mistakes are the best ways to learn. I usually start my courses with a revision of depth of field as I see it as a key tool for directing the viewers gaze, thereby giving my students more control in expressing their vision. Ultimately I like my students to develop personal projects, which I try to foster by encouraging them to look at other photographers work, participate in critical discussions, and also by going to see exhibitions, looking at relevant internet sites, films, etc, which all contribute to stimulating their creative awareness.

What is one of the best lessons you've learned?

This may sound cheesy but an essential lesson I have learned is never to give up—to keep believing in yourself and your abilities. If you do become disheartened, speak to other creative people in your field, from my experience they act as a wonderful support group and get you working again.

Any future or current projects of interest?

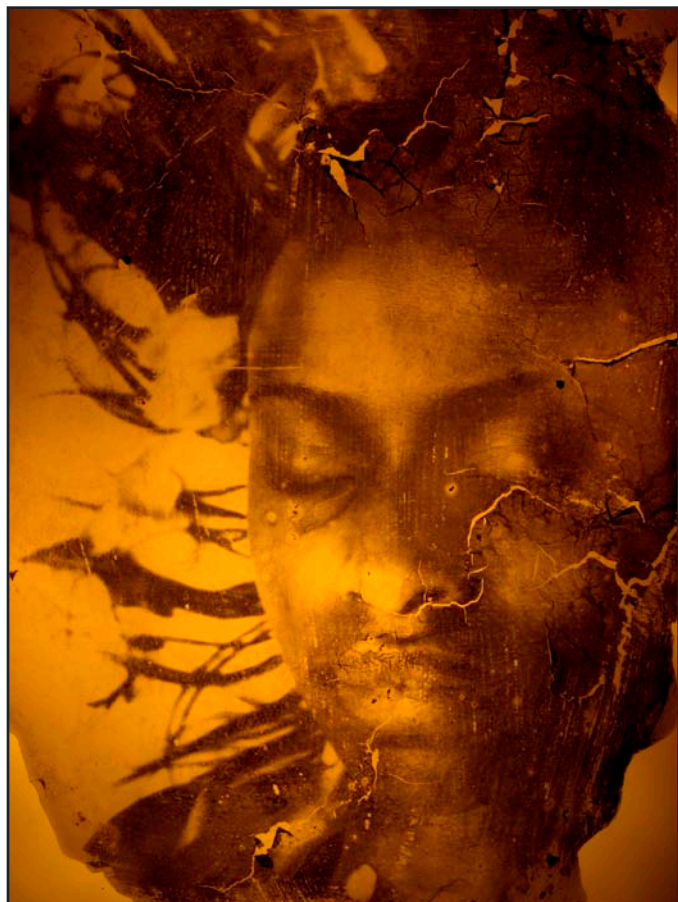
Too many to tell you about... actually, I am working on a new personal project that involves my wooden view camera (4x5) and the dry tintage process but it will be a while before the work is ready to show. At the moment I am simply enjoying the shooting. ♦

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Tina Mass is an alternative process artist, photographer and educator that lives in London, England. More of her work can be viewed at www.tinamaas.com.



Takayo by Tina Maas



Peninah by Tina Maas