

CYANOTYPE

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

The cyanotype process - also known as the blueprint, is one of the earliest and easiest historical photographic processes. Invented in 1842 by Sir John Herschel, it's a simple method for beginners to learn and an exciting technique for more experienced artists to explore. It's economical, permanent, non-toxic and extremely versatile with lots of room to play. Here's an easy guide to get started.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Ferric ammonium citrate (A)
- Potassium Ferricyanide (B)
- OR
- Premixed cyanotype chemicals kit
- Distilled water
- Weighing scales
- 3 non-metallic jugs for mixing
- Non metallic spoons
- Newspaper
- Apron
- Clean brushes or foam applicator
- Paper, preferably watercolour paper
- Clothes pegs or clip
- (Optional) glass panel
- (Optional) white vinegar

01

- Weigh out 100g Ferric Ammonium citrate (A) and 40g Potassium ferricyanide (B)
- Dissolve the chemicals separately, in 500ml distilled water each and in separate jugs.
- The chemical solutions must be stored separately in dark bottles in cool temperatures. They should keep indefinitely if stored correctly.
- It's best if you can now leave them to settle for 24 hours.
- If you have a kit follow the instructions provided.
- Measure out an equal amount of each chemical into a 3rd jug or bowl and mix thoroughly.
- Once mixed together the chemicals don't last long so don't mix more than you need. I generally mix about 10ml of each at a time to make 20ml of working solution, it should be a clear yellow green colour. If you are starting out you may want to mix less to begin with.
- Keep your workspace protected with newspaper, wear an apron and gloves as the chemicals stain will stain your clothes and hands!

02

- Decide on the size you want your print to be, and cut your paper.
- IN DIM LIGHT use a brush, hake brush or foam applicator to evenly coat the solution (sensitiser) onto the paper.
- Allow the paper to dry in the dark. If you wish you can coat a second layer of sensitiser and allow to dry in the dark.

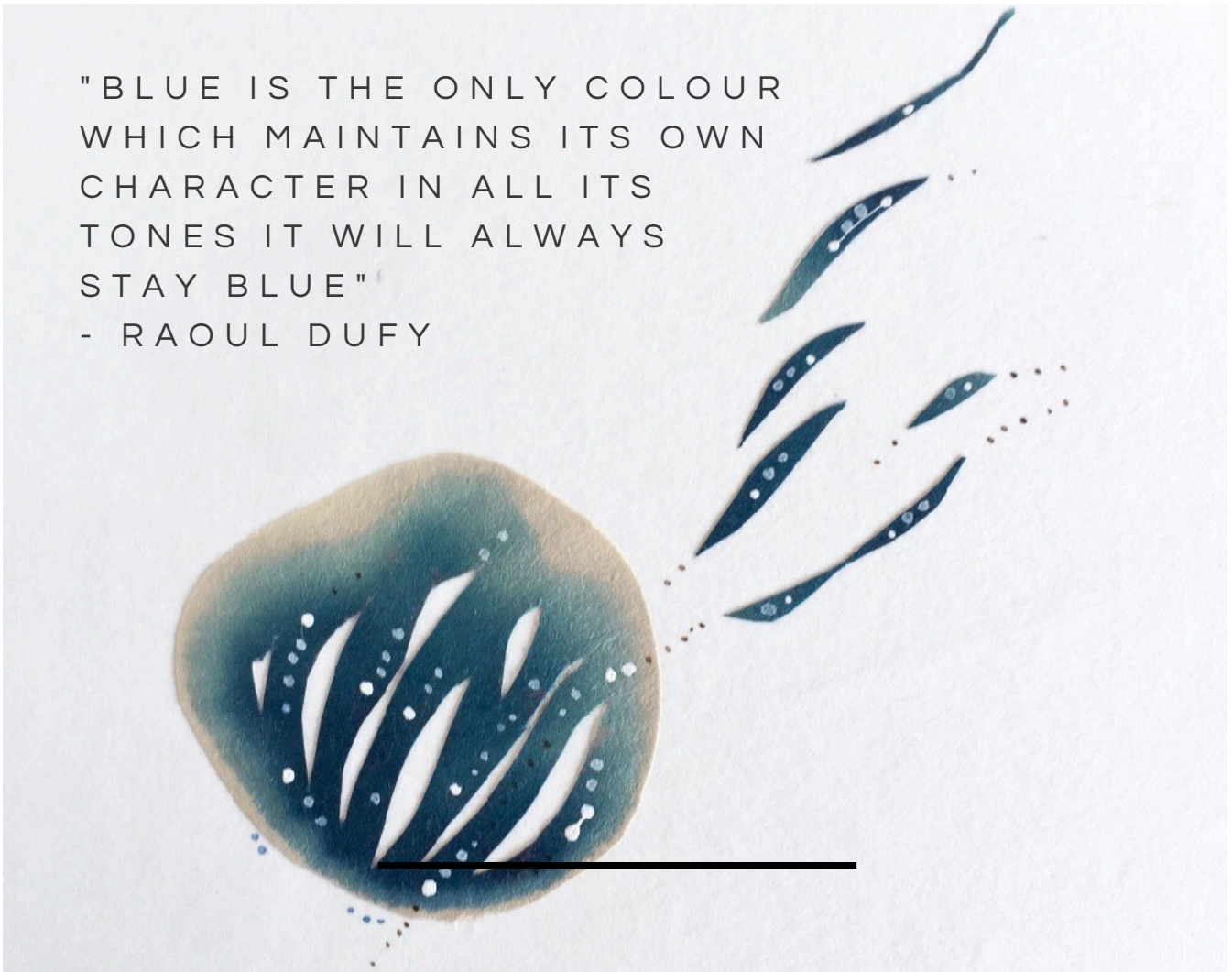
03

- Print your cyanotype by placing your object - plant, leaf, feather or decorative item you choose onto the paper.
- If you have a flat object such as a leaf and you wish to have a very crisp silhouette, then place the paper and object under glass to flatten it and increase areas of contact.
- Otherwise, place the objects directly on the paper as you wish to create interesting shapes, nuance and texture.
- If there's a breeze you may want to weigh lighter objects down or use sticky tack to hold in place.
- Place it outside in direct sunlight. Exposure times can vary from a few minutes to several hours, depending on the strength of the uv light, season, time of day. You may wish to try some test exposures first.
- I generally expose for longer with my final print to increase contrast, and washing the print can cause a little fading.

04

- Once you are happy with your exposure time, process your print by rinsing it in running water.
- Wash for at least 5-15 minutes, until all chemicals are removed and you can no longer see any yellow in the whites.
- At this point I fill a shallow tray with water and a splash of white vinegar to help clear the whites, enhance mid tones and to bring out the blues.
- Hang your print up to dry. In 24 hours the blues should have oxidised fully and darkened to a rich Prussian blue.

"BLUE IS THE ONLY COLOUR
WHICH MAINTAINS ITS OWN
CHARACTER IN ALL ITS
TONES IT WILL ALWAYS
STAY BLUE"
- RAOUL DUFY



I encourage you to experiment - it often yields happy accidents and exciting results. Test out various papers, ways of applying the chemicals, trying wet paper or using a spray bottle or even undried chemicals - wet cyanotypes can make for really interesting results. Try using different objects, ways of placing them and exposure times, all are a great place to start.

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