

Critique

Jo Holland

When William Henry Fox Talbot and Anna Atkins first made delicate photograms of lace and ferns, they initiated a field of photography that has developed and endured to this day. These apparently simple images, created by placing objects onto photo-sensitive surfaces, are particularly arresting because they suggest the object itself, rather than being a representation of it; as in photography.

Eschewing the camera, Jo Holland continues this direct relationship between light, the object and the image. Using organic materials, her alchemical artistic practice is far removed from traditional photography. Sections of animal tissue and vegetation are used as the negative in a process that transforms the object into an abstraction, bearing little resemblance to its source. Yet, the resulting images suggest their origins. Evoking stellar activity or visceral sex, they can be seen as metaphors for the Creation – or apocalyptic destruction – appearing as religious/sexual portals transmitting revelatory light. This interweaving of the scientific, chemical elements of making the pictures with the artistic and philosophical imagination brings the works into close alignment with renaissance thought. At the same time the craft of picture making – each photogram is unique – stem from a more artisanal method of production. In respect, Holland's art is closer to painting or sculpture than photography.

The idea that light, or illumination acts as a metaphor for understanding has direct parallels with the work of Adam Fuss, who also utilises organic materials in his picture making. His 'Details of Love' (1992) series use rabbits' entrails. Laid on the surface of the photographic paper, the chemicals interact, leaving vividly coloured imprints. Abstract and mystifying, they are a contradiction; death and decay becoming a thing of aesthetic beauty. This contradiction is at the heart of Holland's work. Objects caught in moments of suspended animation, immediately prior to decomposition are transformed by light into things of transcendental beauty.

Greg Hobson – Curator of Photographs

National Media Museum, BRADFORD

January 2006