

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

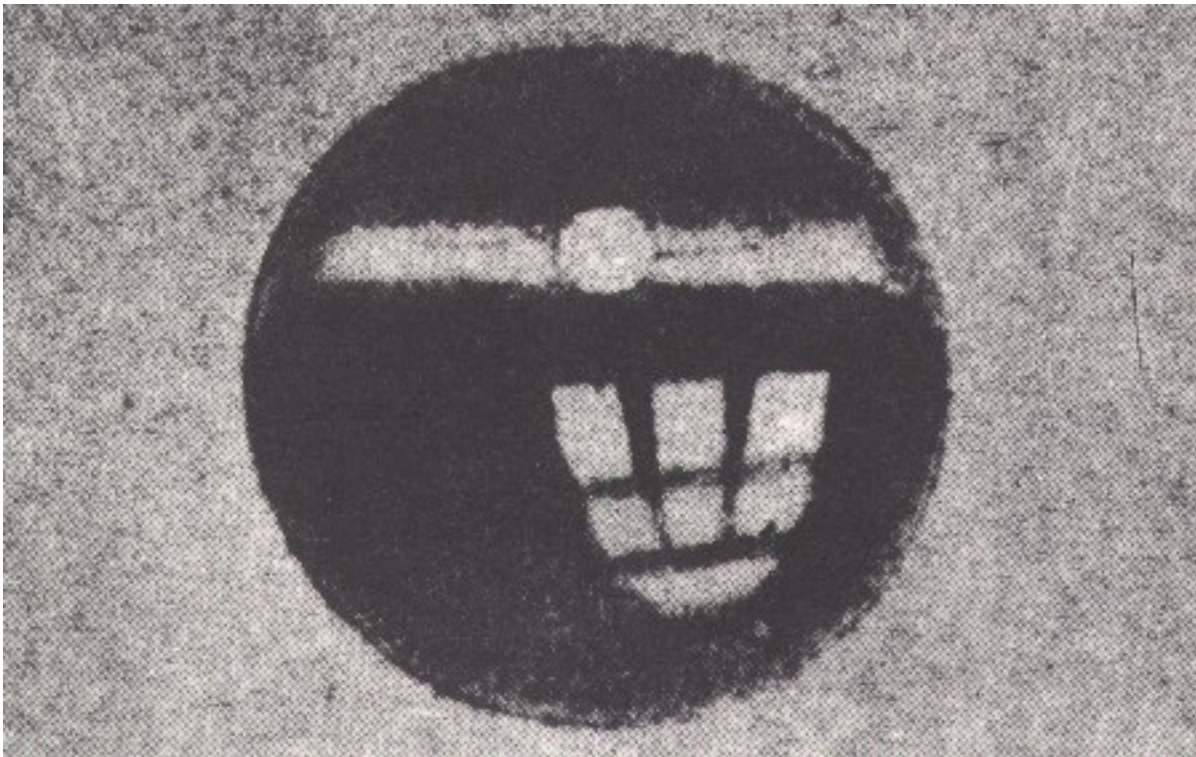
July 23, 2007

Now that's what I call an alternative process

Filed under: circles n\` bunnies — alecsothblog @ 9:57 pm

The German physiologist Wilhelm Friedrich Kühne (1837–1900) coined the term rhodopsin for the pigment that is responsible for both the formation of the photoreceptor cells and the first events in the perception of light.

In 1878 he did a fascinating experiment. He covered a rabbit's head to allow the rhodopsin to accumulate in the rods. Then it was uncovered and positioned toward a barred window. After a three-minute exposure, the animal was decapitated and the eyeball removed. He then 'fixed' the retina with a solution to prevent it from being resynthesized. The next day, Kühne was able to see a picture of the window and bars printed upon the retina:



Retinal Photograph, drawn by Willy Kühne, 1878

20 Comments

1. Dude. I used to have a rabbit. That's fucked up—I wish I thought of it.

Comment by Tim Briner — July 23, 2007 @ 10:36 pm

2. I'm alternately fascinated and horrified. Mostly horrified. No, fascinated. Argh! I believe they call this cognitive dissonance.

Comment by Patti Hallock — July 23, 2007 @ 10:53 pm

3. Wow. I mean, wow. That, my friend, is awesome.

Wow.

Comment by Meica. — July 23, 2007 @ 11:15 pm

4. Man, talk about Schadenfreude. Interesting that the retinal photograph was "drawn" by Willy Kuehn. Brings up all kinds of references to the historical relationship between painting and photography, not to mention more contemporary themes of authorship or even appropriation (yikes). Maybe I'm reading too much into this, but is that a latticed window?

Comment by danden — July 23, 2007 @ 11:33 pm

5. That's some serious stuff...

Digital vs. Analog INDEED!

Comment by jaime — July 24, 2007 @ 1:43 am

6. There was, in Victorian times if I recall correctly, the belief that the last thing a person saw was recorded on the retina. I believe that, and the story may well be apocryphal as I can, in a quick check of sources, not find confirmation, that one of the women who was a victim of Jack the Ripper had her retina's photographed to see if anything could be found.

Interesting to see there is some basis to the belief.

And as danden has said, interesting it is a latticed window.....

Comment by David Boyce — July 24, 2007 @ 3:47 am

7. Maybe not the best for sports photography.

Comment by Joni Karanka — July 24, 2007 @ 6:31 am

8. Yeah, but it'd have been so much better if he'd washed the rabbit's head in coffee.

Comment by Dan Sumption — July 24, 2007 @ 6:35 am

9. well, kuehne did the same experience with a man sentenced to death.. the result is what is called an optograph, the last image inprinted on the retina of a dead person.

Comment by daniel blaufuks — July 24, 2007 @ 7:48 am

10. wasn't that part of the 'plot' for that will smith movie wild wild west?

Comment by k kwok — July 24, 2007 @ 7:54 am

11. Bill Jay's article "In the Eyes of the Dead: Retinal Photography in the 19th Century" is available to be downloaded on his website here:
<http://www.billjayonphotography.com/writings.html>

Comment by Stuart Alexander — July 24, 2007 @ 9:16 am

12. i wonder if it's possible with human eyes.. i wonder if the germans wondered too

Comment by dacian — July 24, 2007 @ 10:17 am

13. ot - but are there ansel adams pictures on this site ? - i heard something had been done with them and would quite like to see them, cheers.

Comment by steven — July 24, 2007 @ 10:27 am

14. Better hope some collector (does Dr. Evil collect photography?) doesn't decide he wants he first and last "Alec Soth Retinagraph". (Would this be an edition of 2, or 2 Artist Proofs?)

Comment by Paul Shambroom — July 24, 2007 @ 10:29 am

15. Paul, I only have eyes for you.

Dacian, Christian already covered this here.

Here is an example of Large Format:

Comment by Alec Soth — July 24, 2007 @ 10:34 am

16. Alec, if this has anything to do with the print swap we've been talking about, you can just forget it. Keep your eyes to yourself, thank you.
(actually, I wouldn't mind having Alec's eyes for a few days....)
BTW, I've remembered that Dr. Evil does, indeed, collect photographs. I think my former dealer sold him some of mine.

Comment by Paul Shambroom — July 24, 2007 @ 2:57 pm

17. Wow indeed! Even as fiction this would be amazing. Since the image looks like a drawing, is there still an original somewhere?
A bit off topic, but interesting, is this:
4800-Year-Old Artificial Eyeball Discovered in Burnt City
<http://www.cais-soas.com/News/2006/December2006/11-12.htm>

Comment by christoph — July 24, 2007 @ 4:45 pm

18. Alec Soth advocates rabbit murder! I'm shocked and horrified!

Comment by Jeremias — July 24, 2007 @ 9:16 pm

19. phew!! its good to be here for a moment...
mad scientist...dipped in coffee...German chocalate eyeballs...

Comment by w robert angell — July 25, 2007 @ 1:33 am

20. There was a great X Files episode titled "Unruhe" about a murderer who was able to capture a victim's last sight on a previsualized Polaroid. Almost nabbed Scully.

This is prime Bill Jay territory being charted here.

Comment by Gilbert Subrosa — September 27, 2007 @ 12:28 pm