



Everyday Alchemy

Natalie Blom

Rockingham Arts Centre

24 May - 18th June

Film soak, or 'film soup' as it is sometimes referred to, is an alternative film photography method. The process involves taking photos on analogue film and then soaking the whole canister in a mixture of liquids to cause disruptions to the chemical layer on the surface of the film. The liquids I used in the soak process are commonplace items: lemon juice, vinegar, hair developer, beer. The very commonality of the ingredients used inspired the name of the series: Everyday Alchemy.

Traditionally, Alchemy was philosophical and largely experimental with aims to transmute elements and cure human conditions. The film soak method here is largely experimental, and its variable outcomes and the pictorial results transmute reality through the elements reacting with the photographic images. Even the solitary nature of the alchemist's work is mirrored in the photographer's darkroom.

Part observation of nature and part industrial fever dream, these images range from the easily discernible to the completely abstracted; dependant on the severity of the soak solution and its impact on the film emulsion.

Central to the process is the relinquishing of control, requiring an amount of trust in the process, trial and error, and the need for repetition. Alchemists are experimenters and observers: attempt, observe, analyse, reattempt; with much of the work being methodical observation of each stage and the outcomes.

Including many 2D photographic prints hung in a salon style linking back to the meandering nature of process-lead art making, the exhibition also includes a number of short video works and a sculptural installation, which is a nod to the mystical aspects of alchemy. The video works in particular exemplify the

chaotic nature of the film soak method, revealing the diversity of results across a single roll of film.

In this second iteration of this series, the expanded works include a series of portraits, initiated by a request from a fellow artist upon seeing the first showing of this work. During our portrait sitting, our conversation touched on a range of things: the trials of being an adult and her love of tequila which inspired the liquids I chose to soak her films in: cleaning products and coffee, the ingredients of a tequila slammer. Continuing along this vein, I have included some portraits of some loved ones who have aided me in this project, plus a cheeky self-portrait.

The installation was created as an extension from the wish to include the tools used in the process, which evolved into an improvised altar, tying back into the alchemical aesthetic. Many of the items present have direct connection with the soak process, while other found items are implied symbols and tools of alchemy. The overall assemblage is a playful acknowledgement of the improvised ritual that the creation of this work became.

I wish to extend my grateful thanks to Silver Halide Studios in Boorloo who have not only enabled, but actively encouraged this madness; and to Halide Express in Naarm who have also accepted my rather crusty, sometimes smelly films.

Artist Bio

Natalie Blom is a Western Australian photomedia artist currently residing in Naarm/Melbourne, Victoria. Blom completed an Advanced Diploma of Photography at Central Institute of Technology in Perth in 2010. Since graduating, her work has been exhibited locally, nationally and internationally. Blom's practice investigates personal histories through connection with place, utilising analogue photographic processes and experimental means of production. Blom's recent focus is in self-published zines as a mode of communicating her images and concepts.

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The artist acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was created and shown – the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation and the Wurunjeri and Bunwurrong peoples of the Kulan Nation. Always was always will be Aboriginal land.