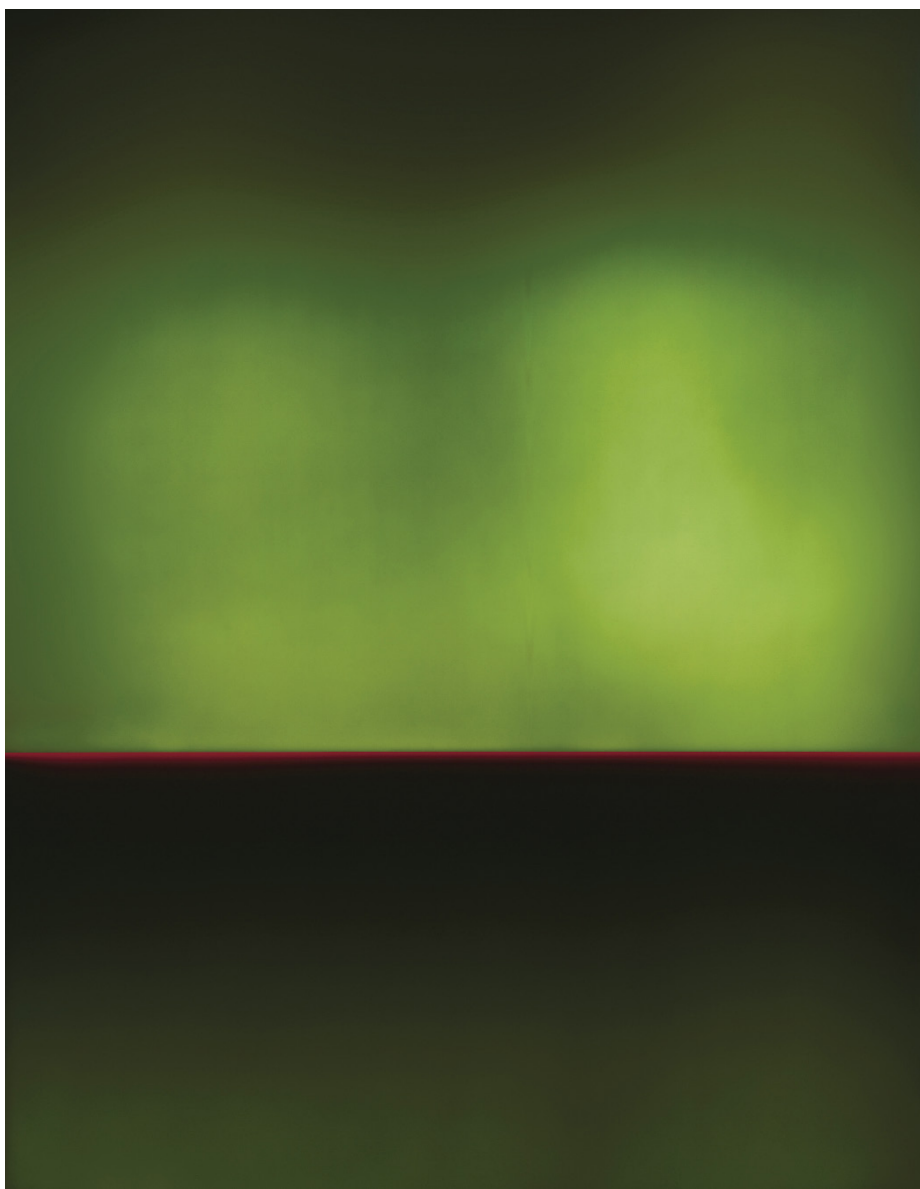


HOLDEN LUNTZ GALLERY PRESENTS:
DIALOGUES WITH GREAT PHOTOGRAPHERS



GARRY FABIAN MILLER

Garry Fabian Miller



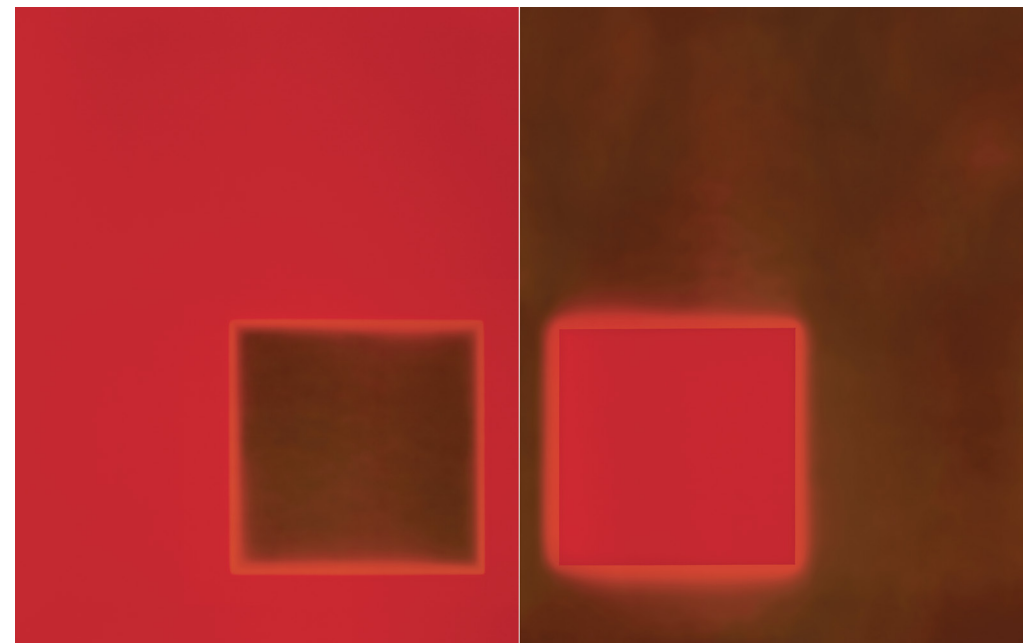
As a unique artist at the forefront of experimental photography, Garry Fabian Miller's 'camera-less' creations expand the possibilities of the medium; working meticulously from his darkroom, Fabian Miller creates immersive, transcendent compositions that appear to glow and palpitate in place, captivating by their luminescence and rich chromatic values.

Garry Fabian Miller was born in Bristol, England in 1957. Since the mid-1980s, he has used Dartmoor as inspiration, an ancient moorland in south Devon, known for a myriad of myths and legends of English folklore. Working from his darkroom in Dartmoor, Fabian Miller started producing photographs by passing light through diaphanous objects and liquids onto light-sensitive paper, pushing the chromatic potential of his materials while exploring both his meditations on the region's ambiance and the vivid palette of nature.

Pisani - Your introduction to photography came very early since your parents owned a photography studio. Did this aspect of your upbringing help you feel comfortable working with photography or did it influence you to try different mediums?

GFM - I think the key thing is, from my early teens I was exposed to a darkroom and what a darkroom is and the things which happen in it; the magical process of images merging into the world through your actions. Obviously, this was a darkroom where photography was determined by a camera and a negative from which prints were made but nevertheless, you still had a sense of light touching a piece of paper, leaving its presence, which then became visible through the use of chemistry. So, I think it suggested to me that this was an incredibly significant medium and the one that I should consider working with.

Pisani - You have been working in Dartmoor for many years, what is your connection or history with the landscape? How important is it for you to be out and experience the moorland?



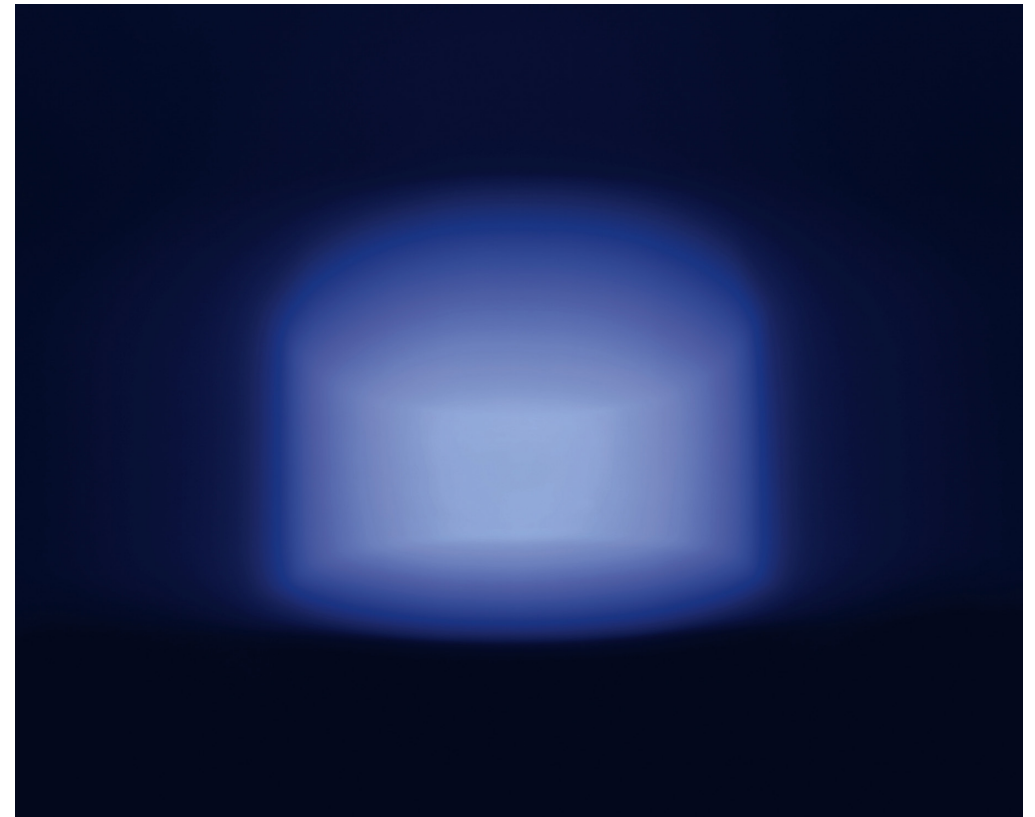
Joy and Gravitation, 2016, Light, Water, Lambda C-print from Dye Destruction Print

GFM - Since my teenage years I've been drawn to places away from cities, densely populated locations, seeking to understand myself through being in a landscape, often by the coast, and by walking. So early in my life, I knew that that was a pattern I wished to follow.

I have built a life around getting to know a particular place intimately, an area of woodland as a teenager, and during this time I began to see the work of artists who worked with the land - the land art movement. I saw work that suggested that there was a way, particularly in the English examples, where photography and the experience of being within the landscape could come together and communicate feelings. I began living on the sea overlooking the Severn Estuary and made the series of pictures, *Sections of England*, *Sea Horizons* in 1975' -76' and other pictures with a camera. I then moved to a remote county of England, called Lincolnshire, and I lived there for eight years, made a garden, and made work within that tough, intensively farmed agricultural landscape. For the last 30 years, I've lived and worked on Dartmoor and developed a way of life based around walking daily in a series of repeating walks, across times of the day and seasons of the year. Initially, I was working using a camera-less photography method, which involved gathering plant material from the landscape and then printing from that, so in the early years on Dartmoor, it was very much a relationship with the trees and plants that surrounded me. As I walked myself into the landscape, it became an experience of the sky space, the changing weather systems, the deep-thinking space, and that is how I think the work evolved from a kind of narrative, figurative based practice around trees and plants and nature into an abstracted sky, light space.

Pisani - There is an established presence of British artists working with the elements and the landscape in an interactive and integrative way. Popularly known as Land Art or Earthworks, artists like Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy epitomized this movement. You have exhibited with these artists before, helping to shape the movement. Do you feel your work still belongs to this discourse?

GFM - I think perhaps not, but those, the land art group, I was part of a survey show in Britain (British Land art), 1969 to 1979. Andy Goldsworthy and I began to work at the end of that period, and our work made as teenagers closed that curated idea of a movement, and both of us were influenced by the



In Blake's Room, 1999 - 2015, Light, Water, Lambda C-print from Dye Destruction Print

generation before us. In Andy Goldsworthy's case, David Nash. In my case, Roger Ackling, Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, and then a group of lesser-known women artists, such as Marie Yates. These artists had a big influence on me when I was a teenager, but I was always a tangential member because my artistic practice was based around the darkroom and the experiences I carried into that place from the landscape. I think as that period has passed, it has dispersed in different ways. My practice still belongs within that kind of historical approach, but it has developed in a very different way which is perhaps to do with understanding a much larger abstracted space in which



Voyage to the Blue Edge, 2013, Oil, Light, Water, Lambda C-Print From Dye Destruction Print

an interest in nature feeds a kind of sense of well-being that comes through a relationship to the life cycle of a tree, for example, and the effect it has on the viewer in an affirmative way. I think I became increasingly interested in what is the energy contained in the tree which is generating those associations and feelings. I have made pictures about the photosynthesis cycle of a tree, the production of chlorophyll, and its relationship to the sun; the way the tree and I were sharing the same breath. I increasingly became interested in trying to understand what the energy of light is and how through touching me, it transforms my being.

Pisani - Do you think of your pieces as purely photographs or could you categorize them differently? You have been using light to “paint” surfaces in a controlled and malleable way; hence the possibilities for the work to be interpreted as more than just photography.

GFM - I think the essence of that question is, what is a pure photograph? I think I see the photograph as a thing of purity and I think photographic paper and the chemistry which activates it is a miraculous thing and if used correctly should engender the same respect that one feels for a painting or a carving. The question is, how do you understand the medium and use it, so it contains the same characteristics and quality, the resolution of a resolved artwork, the modernist notion of truth to materials. And so, for me, I knew photography was a relationship between light and light-sensitive materials. Initially, I tried to work with light as seen through a camera, but then I removed the camera and chose to seek ways to work directly with light onto the light-sensitive materials, the paper's surface, and the chemistry. That's where pure origins, the truth in photography exists. For most people, photography is a medium seen through a camera, a way of describing the world and then the materials are used in a secondary way.

Pisani - I read in your monograph, *Illumine*, that you experienced loss just as your photographs first became recognized. Considering the kind of foundation-shaking experience events like this can create, do you think this personal event affected the manner in which you developed as an artist?

GFM - That question is about the purpose of being an artist and the relationship between your work and your life. The making of art should be a way of life, and you should seek a way to live an integrated life in which the pictures and how you live your life come together in a way which feeds each other in a good and healthy way. I've tried to create a working life like that where my family, my home, the making of pictures, all have some parity and have equal value and one isn't at the cost of any other. As events happen in your life, of course, you must respond to them and change the way you live your life.

So you refer to these losses, I've had two significant losses. The first was the death of my mother in a car crash just after I made the *Sea Horizon* pictures when I was 20. These pictures were the subject of my first exhibition. I decided I had to dedicate my life to making art that I believed in and not worrying where that belonged in the world, so you could say that tragic events clarify your purpose. The second event you refer to in *Illumine* was around the time

I was seeking to stop working with plant-based material and seek a more direct way of working with light. Our second son died. He lived one day. His death was because he had a genetic disorder, Edwards syndrome, and that was traumatic. What could come out of that of any value, was for me to look more deeply into the purpose of pictures and the way they can transform my life and potentially that of the viewer.

Pisani - Would you consider your work more conceptually driven or more based on nature?

GFM - I think the work inhabits both those places. In the past, I described my abstracted geometric work, the preoccupation with the line, the square, the rectangle as being thought. I think that I saw as the mind, conceptual ideas, the human intellect. Then I described the circular based work as nature and I still think that's the case and I feel that I am made up of both those things. At times the nature, circular based images become prominent, at other times the more thought-based images come to the fore.

Pisani - In distinction to Walter Benjamin's theory, which states that photographs do not contain an "aura" or an intrinsic authenticity in comparison to the uniqueness of painting, your photographs seem to capture some of the "aura" of the translucent ephemera you use in your creations. If this is the case, your work can be considered very progressive within a photographic discourse; what are your thoughts on your work having an "aura" or the essence of the materials you use?

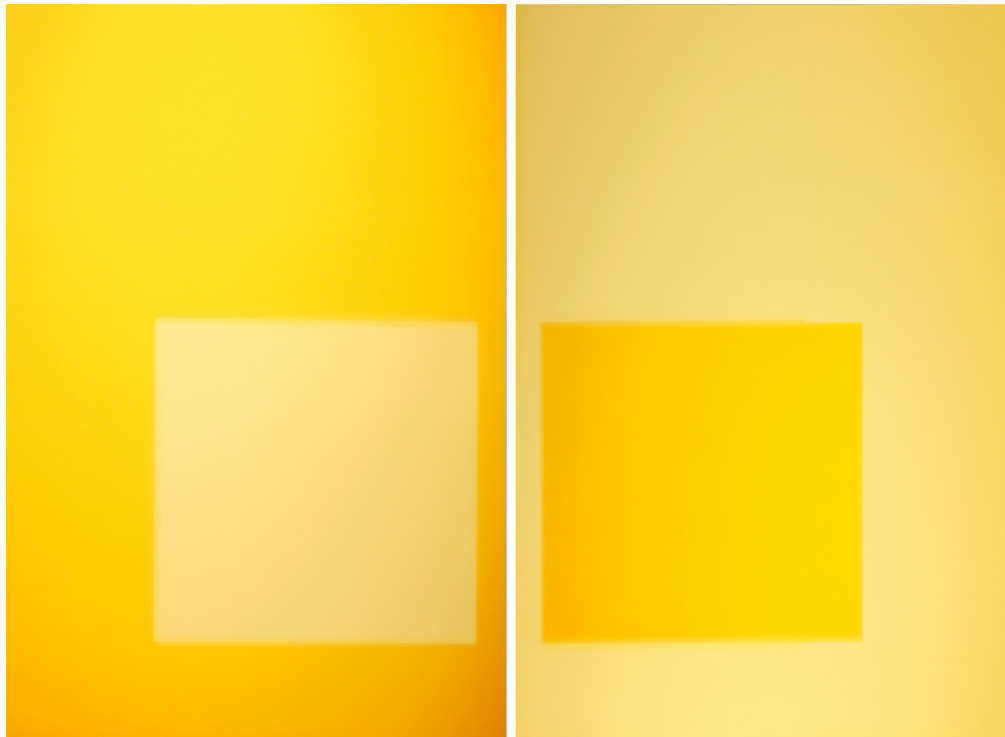
GFM - I believe photographs should contain the presence, a spirit, an aura, if that's the word you wish to use, and within the substance of the material should exist the substance of light and it should be an active living force. In many of my pictures, I'm trying to create an experience of the light sitting on the surface of the paper as if still alive and present in the world. It might be thought that the image is a fossil, but an active light deposit, not something which has died on the surface of the paper.

Pisani - Your photographs emit a contemplative and transfixing nature, reminiscent of a spiritual, reflective experience. There is a presence of light emanating from within your pictures, perhaps referencing Quaker metaphors of the inward light, what degree of influence do you believe this has in your work?



The Middle Place, Golden, 2013, Oil, Water, Light, Lambda C-print from Dye Destruction Print

GFM - I think that's the aspiration of the work, the things you ask in that question. I became involved with the English Quaker movement in my late teens, and that was another kind of home place where a group of people met seeking an understanding of what light might be, and a belief in the purpose of being. The words you use such as contemplative and spiritual are things one should commit one's life towards rather than other values. They're the things that have given me solace and helped me in my life.



Silicate 11-12 April, 2007, Oil, Light, Lambda C-print from Dye Destruction Print

Pisani - There is an aesthetic and spiritual nuance in Color Field paintings that resemble some of your photographs. Have you ever been influenced or contemplated the work of painters like Mark Rothko or other artists from the Color Field school?

GFM - Of course, I have. You know that's the nature of life, and as you grow up from a teenager, you become aware of this work and then as your life unfolds you come into contact with it through exhibitions, publications, reproductions, reading the correspondence and the thoughts of these people. So yes, they have mattered a lot, and you know they feel as a part of the larger family.

Pisani - Your precise and meticulous curation of light, using paper cutouts inside of the darkroom reveal a level of dedicated craftsmanship to your work. What is your thought process when deciding the form, composition, or color of an image?

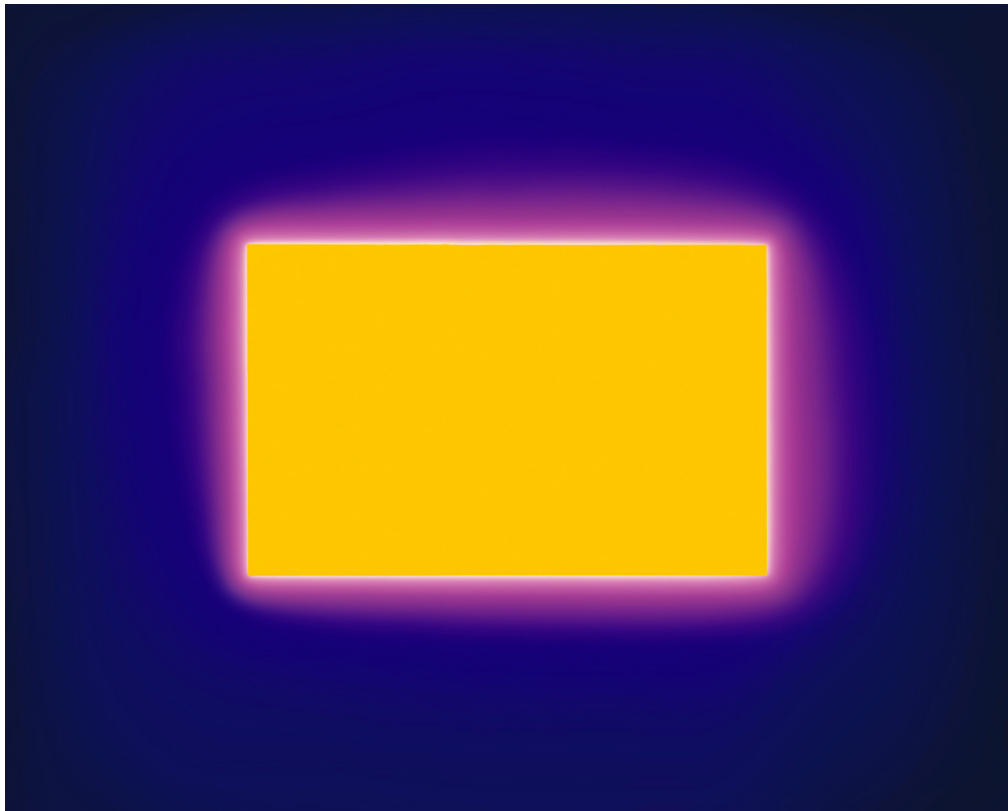
GFM - That's an evolving process. Once there was a time when I hadn't made any work beyond that with a plant and a beam of light, following that I had to embark on a period of intuitive investigation, exploration, and trust. Then over the years, I began to build a method, a means, a language, to make and understand how I can work with light and the materials and time and exposure and composition. It's been a slowly evolving process over 30 years, and I would guess for the last seven or eight years I've known my materials and my language and the potential of these in a very real way. That enables me to consider experiences and ideas and how I can organize the materials to make these appear visible in the world from my actions in the darkroom.

Pisani - Do the forms in your work have any other historical references?

GFM - I guess you're thinking about Dartmoor, which is a very ancient landscape. People have inhabited this space for a very long time. We're talking of going back thousands of years when lives were brutal and tough, but with a close relationship to the cycles of the sun, the night sky, nature, and how a human being might relate to that. I feel their presence when I'm in the landscape. But equally, I walk in the footsteps of others that went before me, fellow travelers, people like Charles Darwin, William Blake, a whole group of English painters, a smaller group of photographers. I'm particularly interested in the early photographers, the community around Fox Talbot that was trying to bring photography into the world. Those Victorian figures, I also feel very close to.

Pisani - Your evolution as a photographer is a beautiful, comprehensive path towards abstraction, resembling a clarity akin to Mondrian's abstraction of painting. With this in mind, have you felt any urge towards moving in a new direction with your work?

GFM - Well I think that's a very beautiful thing to have said and I'd like to hope that might be the case. I feel I'm living at a moment when chemical photography is reaching its final days. In my case, its Cibachrome, the dye destruction print that is almost gone and I'm navigating my way to concluding my use of this medium. I am one of a handful of people left in the world doing that, and that is the focus of my darkroom activity; to bring that to a good, honest, and true end, and to show the potential of this wonderful thing that we've made. Until that's resolved, I'm holding back on new directions, but there are many.



Cobalt 1, 2010, Oil, Water, Light, Lambda C-print from Dye Destruction Print

Pisani - To finalize this interview, you recently created a film and worked on a collaboration with Oliver Coates for the Victoria & Albert Museum, as well as creating large tapestries. What other outlets interest you?

GFM - Well that's all part of the evolving future. For the last few years, I've increasingly been collaborating with people to understand how I can take my archive of exposures and the ones still to be made into a different place. They continue to inhabit the exhibition space, the gallery, and the museum but I want to reach out into other places, so they reach other people. So that is the next stage of the enterprise, but collaboration is key.

I've been working with John Bodkin, who is a color profile expert, to build large edition works that I've made from the Cibachromes. Since 2009, nearly a hundred pictures have been completed. Oliver Coates, the composer and cellist is an example of composers, musicians, poets, and dancers that I would like to find ways to work with using my work transformed into moving image, so that's begun with the film, *Last Evenings*, made for the opening of the V&A's Photography Centre. I hope these events could exist in festivals of poetry, literature festivals, classical music programs but also pop music festivals. I want to find as broad an audience as possible.

I also feel the future is contained in the birth of photography and the community around Henry Fox Talbot, John Herschel, the early explorers. I think one has to go back to that chemical moment when the light-sensitive paper and the chemistry were explored, and images first became visible. I think in the roots is the future.

I have to spend time back in that historical moment. I am planning to begin a project with the Fox Talbot archive and catalogue raisonné at the Bodleian library in Oxford.

I'm hoping that spending time with that material will suggest that a new kind of chemical photography could still be made. I've also, as you mentioned, made tapestries. I'm very interested in a group of weavers in Britain in the early 20th century who were trying to find ways to make color from natural materials and then equally, the chemical companies that were trying to extend the color palette of natural dyes. I've been interested in the lives of Ethel Mairet and Elizabeth Peacock, two important weavers in this country (England) who revived weaving practice and the mixing of color to make cloth and tapestries. I think somewhere in that primitive color exploration there may be something which could be brought to the Fox Talbot chemical life, language, records, so I'm going to explore that.

As one of the most forward-thinking artists currently working in 'camera-less' photography; drawing historical references from Henry Fox Talbot and J. M. W. Turner to Hamish Fulton, in turn creating abstract, contemplative, and immersive photographs, Garry Fabian Miller is a powerful and profound iteration of contemporary photography today. It is a privilege to conduct this interview with him, and we thank him for participating in the thirty-third edition of our "Dialogues with Great Photographers."



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Interview date: January 2019
Interviewer: Mario Lopez Pisani