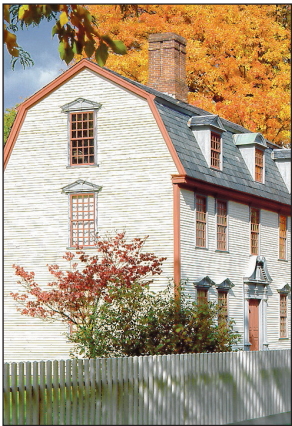


Free history
Friday!

Historic Deerfield
will not charge
admission Friday.

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Music for
the silver
screen

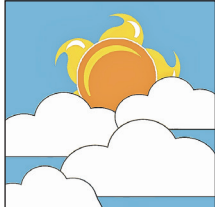
Concert will be
unique, interesting.

PAGE D4



Weekend Weather

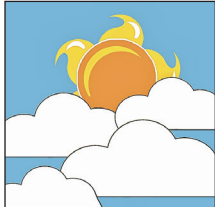
FRIDAY



85

Precipitation:
20% chance

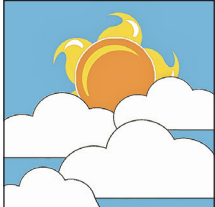
SATURDAY



86

Precipitation:
50% chance

SUNDAY



88

Precipitation:
10% chance

63

Detailed Pioneer Valley forecasts run daily in the A section

Arts AND

ENTERTAINMENT

THE RECORDER'S WEEKLY CALENDAR LISTING

AUGUST 13, 2015

The
Quality
of
Time

Labor-intensive
process reignites
thrill of photography
for Terri Cappucci

Story by Trish Crapo

Seated under the lightproof fabric that makes up the back of her portable “dark box,” Turners Falls photographer Terri Cappucci sensitizes a 4-by-5-inch aluminum plate in a silver nitrate bath for four minutes. She’s already poured liquid collodion — which is nitrated cotton, also called guncotton, mixed with alcohol and ether — over the plate while it was wet. Once it’s tacky, the collodion serves as a holding medium for the silver nitrate, creating a light-sensitive plate that Cappucci will load into her camera.

Nowadays we’re too often pushing a fast-forward button to jump ahead to the finished product, Cappucci says.

Because the entire wet plate collodion process — from sensitizing the plate to developing the final image — has to occur within roughly 15 minutes before the plate dries, Cappucci has already composed her shot, setting up her bulky 4x5 Graflex camera and focusing it on a sap bucket hanging on a maple tree in her backyard.

Cappucci invited me to look over her shoulder as she made a wet collodion plate back in April. We met again last week to finish our conversation.

Cappucci, who grew up in Bernardston, laughs as she says that she used shop skills and sewing skills gained during Pioneer Valley Regional School’s rotation classes to build her dark box. But she’s not kidding. Pioneer was also where she first studied photography seriously. When she was a senior, art teacher Bob Coy taught her black-and-white darkroom skills in order to fulfill the one credit she was missing for graduation.

Cappucci still remembers the thrill of seeing her first print begin to develop in the darkroom. She’s been hooked ever since.

Cappucci continued to study photography at Greenfield Community College and, after graduating in 1993, worked as an intern at The Recorder, and then at the Springfield Union-News. At The Recorder, Cappucci shot film and then developed it at the end of the day.

“We’d make actual 8x10 prints of everything,” she said, adding that she never ceased to be excited by the developing process.

But Cappucci entered the field at a pivotal point, when digital photography was fast replacing film techniques. She jumped onboard and in 1997, landed a position as a freelancer for The Boston Globe, covering western Massachusetts and southern Vermont and New

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Above: “Matthew” 4x5 wet plate on aluminum 2015. Terri Cappucci took this portrait of a 15-year-old boy in Hoover, Ala.

At left: Turners Falls photographer Terri Cappucci with her 1930s 5x7 Vageeswari field camera from India. Submitted photo

■ Time: Slowing down 'makes me think more carefully'

From Page D1

Hampshire. She also provided images for well-known clients such as The New York Times, The World Health Organization and Random House Publications.

And while she loved the work. “I wouldn’t have had it any other way,” Cappucci said. Over time, the fast pace began to wear on her. Even during what were supposed to be her lunch breaks, she would just grab something and eat quickly on her way to her next assignment. Living under the constant pressure of deadlines was beginning to bore Cappucci, and make her anxious. She knew that some of the stress was endemic to photojournalism, a job she loved, but working digitally seemed to accelerate the pace.

Cappucci decided to return to school to finish her bachelor’s degree and get a master of fine arts in photography from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. After graduating in 2003, she concentrated on teaching, working at Stoneleigh-Burnham School, Pioneer, and the Hallmark Institute of Photography. She continues to teach through the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and Sepela Field Programs, for which she leads summer workshops in South Africa. She has also traveled to South Africa 19 or 20 times since 1986, documenting important historical shifts as the country moved from apartheid toward democracy.

As a teacher, Cappucci noticed that digital technology was also affecting her students.

“When I was at GCC, we were given a roll of film to go out and shoot and make a contact sheet,” Cappucci said. “So that meant we had 36 images to work with and that was it. We would turn it in and we’d have the good, the bad and the ugly.”

In contrast, her students will shoot hundreds of digital images and want to turn in only their best, which Cappucci says makes it, “Harder to get inside their heads.”

Being able to see three or four images a student has taken in succession helps her to figure out the kinds of corrections he or she was trying to make.

“It’s really important to me to make sure people don’t think I’m anti-digital,” Cappucci says. “I love digital. I love it! But it has a different place in my life now. And everybody has to figure out where that works for them.”

The quality of time

Cappucci’s shift to working in the wet plate collodion process came in 2006, after her father, to whom she’d been very close, passed away.

“I just became so aware of time and so aware of the quality of time (spent) with people,” Cappucci said. “And I started thinking about the quality of everything that is quick. How everything is just so instantaneous now.”

She felt that she was “drowning in a vortex” where everything was happening too fast, Cappucci said.

“The only thing that really worked for me was when I would dive into my art because then I could lose myself. I could lose myself for days on end. I could lose myself in methods and techniques that I hadn’t known before.”

Cappucci said that her photojournalism training had almost programmed her to look for and take certain shots.

“I had to break that cycle,” she said.

Slowing it down

That day back in April, Cappucci was able to work with relative ease, taking only a few seconds to carry the wet plate inside its lightproof holder the short distance from her front yard to the dark box set up in her garage. Many photographers who work with the wet plate collo-



“Barn” 4x5 wet plate on aluminum 2014. Terri Cappucci photo. This is an image from “The Barn Collection” and was taken off of Routes 5 & 10 in Deerfield.

dion process take studio portraits, Cappucci said, because they can easily control the logistics of the shoot. But because of her documentary background, Cappucci likes to take the process into the field — sometimes quite literally, as in a series of old barns she’s been photographing in the Pioneer Valley.

That’s why she built the dark box to fit into the back of her car.

“I have to park close to where I’m shooting because I need to get the plate processed within minutes,” Cappucci said.

She recalls that once when she was shooting in downtown Turners Falls, someone came up to her as she was arranging materials in the back of her car and, assuming she was homeless, asked if she needed help.

What makes a modern photographer take up the cumbersome, time-consuming — not to mention expensive — methods of a process invented in the mid-1800s?

In answer, Cappucci reads from an artist statement she recently wrote for a group exhibit at Art Intersection in Gilbert, Ariz. The exhibit, “Depth of Field,” opens Sept. 8, and Cappucci is thrilled to have an image from her South African portfolio appear alongside photographers she has long admired, such as Tami Bone, Deb Young, Joanne Teasdale and Harold Feinstein.

In her statement, Cappucci compares the quality of “Mom’s homemade apple pie” to “a frozen one we can defrost in the microwave,” as a way of getting at why she has intentionally chosen to slow down her process.

“There is no comparison,” Cappucci writes. “She didn’t skip the steps. She took her time, she peeled those apples, she made her own crust, she cooked it slow in a conventional oven.”

In contrast, nowadays we’re too often pushing a fast-forward button to jump ahead to the finished product, Cappucci says.

Cappucci writes that slowing down, “Makes me have to think carefully about what I’m feeling, how I am framing a potential image, being very careful with exposure and feeling the excitement when I watch something develop right in front of me, right in my hand.”

In what we recognize as an ironic spin, Cappucci and I decide to use a modern technology — FaceTime — to contact Quinn Jacobson, a friend and colleague in Denver, to talk about the antiquated process they both love.

Giving meaning to materials

In addition to creating bodies of fine art work using the wet plate collodion process, Jacobson wrote the instructional book, “Chemical Pictures: The Wet Plate Collodion Book,” teaches workshops and has produced many videos demonstrating the process. While he’s per-



Terri Cappucci’s set-up for working in the wet plate collodion process includes, here, a 1930s 5x7 Vageeswari field camera (she also works with a 4x5 Graflex camera), her hand-built “dark box” and an array of chemicals for sensitizing and processing the aluminum plates. Cappucci is very careful about storage, use and disposal of all chemicals.



Inside her custom-built darkbox, Terri Cappucci pours developer on the plate. Once she begins to see the shadows emerge, she will transfer the plate to a water bath, then to a fixer bath.

fectly happy to detail the technical aspects of the process, he’s more eager to talk about “the philosophy” behind it.

“The bottom line is, as a country, and a people, and for me as an artist, I can look around and see that we don’t make anything,” Jacobson says. “We don’t make refrigerators, we don’t make cars. I just learned the other day not one cell phone is made in this country. And that hearkens back to this innate need, I believe, in us to give meaning to materials. We have this desire to work deeply, passionately — to make things.”

In the wet plate collodion process, “You’re cutting your own glass, or you’re cutting your own metal. You’re mixing your own chemistry and you’re handling that plate.

You’re all about making that — every piece of that, every step of that. It’s religious, it’s ceremonial,” Jacobson says. “There’s something deeply soul satisfying about going through this arduous process to make one tiny beautiful plate.”

Both Jacobson and Cappucci say that they love the imperfections such as fingerprints and other smudges that appear on their plates and point out that while collodion images printed on glass or metal have already lasted over a century and a half, a digital photograph is not truly archival.

“There’s nothing to hang onto,” Jacobson says, of a digital file. “We’ve lost that relationship to the artifact. So, as I hold an artifact in my



Cappucci pours the collodion over the aluminum plate to coat it, creating a base for the silver nitrate to adhere to. Once the collodion becomes tacky, Cappucci will sensitize the plate in silver nitrate. From this point, the plate goes directly into a plate holder while it’s still wet and then into the camera, where the image is exposed.



As Cappucci pours the collodion back off the plate, reserving it for future use. The collodian creates a rippled edge that holds imperfections such as fingerprints and smudges that are part of the aesthetic of the wet plate collodion process.



Cappucci examines the plate while it’s inside the fixer tank. The image of a sap bucket can be seen to emerge on the aluminum plate. “Here’s where you get to watch it come alive with me,” Cappucci said.

hand that was handmade by Terri or by Quinn — it adds great value.

“You ask why we do it. I think we do it for something much deeper than what’s apparent. We’re not gluttons for punishment, if that’s the question,” he said

“It seems that way,” he adds, laughing.

For Cappucci, the shift to the wet plate collodion process has reinvigorated her creative process. Once again, she feels the thrill of that first darkroom image materializing before her eyes.

“I feel that every time,” she says.

“I don’t know if I’d call myself a dream chaser but I know what it feels like to want

to make money,” Cappucci says. “And I did that and it wasn’t enough. Now, I just want to make art. It’s almost like purging my soul when I create something. And I’m happy. I’m far from rich at this point in my life. I survive. I take side jobs, I teach, I do what I have to do so I can afford to do this. That’s what it’s all about for me.”

Cappucci’s work can be seen at www.terrircappucci.com or on Facebook at Terri Cappucci Photographic Artist.

Trish Crapo is a writer and photographer who lives in Leyden. In addition to writing freelance stories for The Recorder, she writes two columns: Poets of Franklin County for the Saturday Book Page and ArtBeat, which runs every other week in the Arts & Entertainment section. She can be reached at tcrapo@me.com.