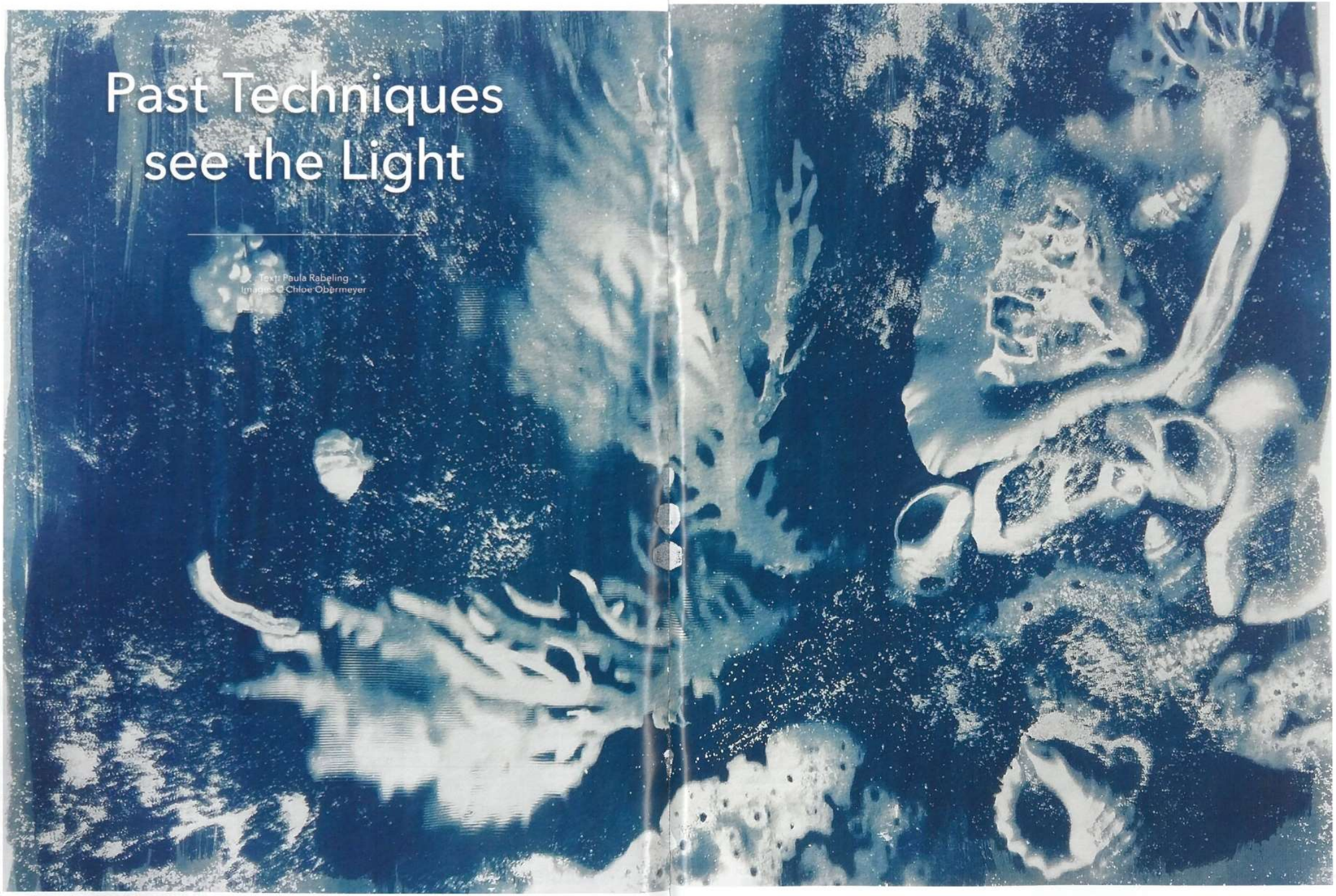
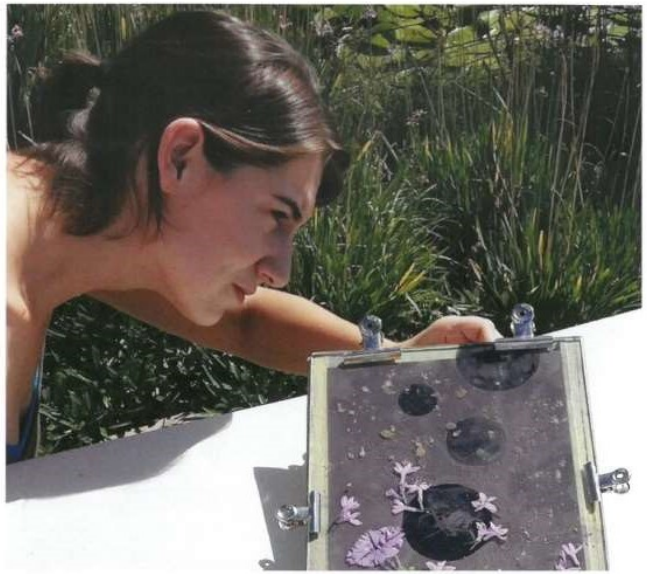
Past Techniques see the Light

Text: Paula Rabeling
Images © Chloe Obermeyer



ARTIST CHLOE OBERMEYER



Making use of a centuries-old photographic technique, South African artist, Chloe Obermeyer, has enveloped the local art scene with her works depicting nature, with the ocean being a favourite subject for the 25-year-old.

PREMIER spoke with Obermeyer (C.O) about how she discovered the style of Cyanotype, what inspires her art, and what she hopes to communicate to viewers of her works.

PREMIER: Why did you decide to study art?

C.O: Even when I was very young, I can remember wanting to be an artist. Once I left high school, I originally started studying graphic design, but quickly realised it was not for me. Michaelis School of Fine Art was not far from where I was doing graphic design, and I guess walking past it on a regular basis planted the seed to actually take the leap and apply to study Fine Art.

PREMIER: Why did you go into photography specifically?

C.O: I was always curious about photography. I guess what I was exposed to in art school, such as alternative and historical photographic techniques and pinhole photography, heightened this curiosity.

PREMIER: What is the aspect about photography you love the most?

C.O: With the way I work, it is the element of chance and surprise that I love. I also love the endless amounts of experimentation that can come alongside working within this kind of photography. Experimentation is key to my way of working.

PREMIER: What is Cyanotype?

C.O: It is a historical photographic technique that dates back to around the mid-1800s. It basically makes use of the chemicals potassium ferricyanide and ammonium ferric citrate to create a light sensitive liquid that can be applied to surfaces, such as paper. These surfaces are then exposed to UV light. One does this by taking a sheet coated in the light sensitive solution and placing an object or negative above it. The "shadows", so to speak, of the object or negative are then imprinted onto the paper when it is exposed to UV light. What is unique about this technique are the shades of blue that this process produces – it is actually where the term "blueprint" originates from.

PREMIER: How did you get into producing art by using the Cyanotype technique?

C.O: In my third year, I took a Historical Photographic Processes elective and that is how I was introduced to camera-less photography. I was intrigued by the element of chance that these mediums provided and how flexible they can be.

PREMIER: How would you describe your style of art?

C.O: This is a bit of a tricky one, but I guess I would describe it as a visual fusion of painterly and photographic.

PREMIER: What is your artistic process?

C.O: Experimentation is key to my process. I spend lots of time playing and experimenting. From these, certain discoveries lead to techniques that I use repeatedly in my works. I think the medium drives my process very much. Lots of my works start with the thought: "I wonder what would happen if ..."

PREMIER: What do you hope to communicate to the viewers of your art?

C.O: I am completely fascinated by nature and the natural world, particularly the ocean. I hope my works effectively convey this wonder and intrigue to viewers of my works.

PREMIER: What inspires you?

C.O: The medium of Cyanotype itself inspires me regularly – just how I am able to push the boundaries of the technique often drives me to create works. Again, my fascination with the natural world is a big driving force behind all of my work. I am very interested in ideas surrounding discovery and wonder in relation to nature.

PREMIER: What does the future hold for you as an artist?

C.O: Much more experimentation. I am very curious and want to expand my knowledge of the Cyanotype medium as well as other alternative photographic mediums. Apart from creating and selling works, I am also becoming very interested in the idea of somehow helping to expand the Cyanotype community within South Africa.

PREMIER: What is your next project going to be about?

C.O: At the moment, I find myself looking at landscapes, especially seascapes and beachscapes, quite often. In the past, I often focused on one feature within a work. Perhaps the broader settings of where these come from will filter into my new works.

Finding inspiration in the past, this artist seems to have a bright future ahead of her.

For more info, visit www.chloeobermeyer.com. ■

In With the New

Chloe Obermeyer's work is available through The Gallery in Riebeek Kasteel. Obermeyer is also participating in a current exhibition at The Gallery entitled *In With the New*, which sees artists putting their own contemporary spin on classic artworks. The exhibition runs until the end of September.

For more information, please visit www.galleryriebeek.co.za or contact Astrid McLeod on +27 83 653 3697.