

New Prints

The five photographers in this portfolio are experienced photographers as well as printers. In recent years, they have also become acquainted with the *new photograph*. The term refers to a process where digital image files materialise as pigment ink prints. It is a new method of art printmaking that results in prints that are at least as enduring as traditional prints.

For 160 years, photography was based on the use of silver or other precious metals in films and photo papers. To make the print, the photographer locked him/herself in a darkroom lit by a dim red light. The room was filled with the rippling sound of running water and the smells of chemicals. There, in isolation from the outside world, the photographer was alone and at peace, in a state that combined concentration and a sense of freedom. The magic moment was when the image slowly appeared on the exposed paper in the developing tray. First, scarcely discernible grey tones emerged, then growing stronger and changing into deeper blacks. The print was carefully moved from one tray to another, while a clock counted the time that the process required. Finally the white light could be turned on and the print scrutinised. Usually the conclusion was that the light had to be turned off again. A new paper had to be taken out and the procedure had to be repeated. After a day's — or a night's — work one had, with luck, a few good prints that still satisfied the quality requirements after having been toned and dried.

Everyone of the photographers who partici-

pated in the making of this portfolio became in his/her youth part of this culture that developed in the 19th century. Much of the old culture has survived, but what has truly changed in the era of the new photograph?

The photographer has stepped out from the darkroom, squinting his/her eyes in the light, and sat down in front of the computer to make his/her photograph. The job resembles much of today's work. The photographer sits in front of a screen just as the bank clerk, the air traffic controller or the composer. The working environment, the tool, even the working position are basically the same. Has the magic of photography consequently disappeared?

The health and ecological benefits of the new working habits are, however, obvious. When the artist wishes to print a photograph's subtle tone changes and minute details onto the paper, there are flexible tools to create the new photograph. Attaining a high-quality result still requires a profound understanding of the profession. The criteria for professional skill have not changed significantly.

A photographer, who wants to create something other than flickering images on a screen (one who wants to make prints of art that have permanent value) is still connected to the artisan's attitude and way of thinking. The stance of a craftsman is the same, although the tools have changed. The most important thing is a hungry eye and the ability to use the photographer's perception with maximum precision.