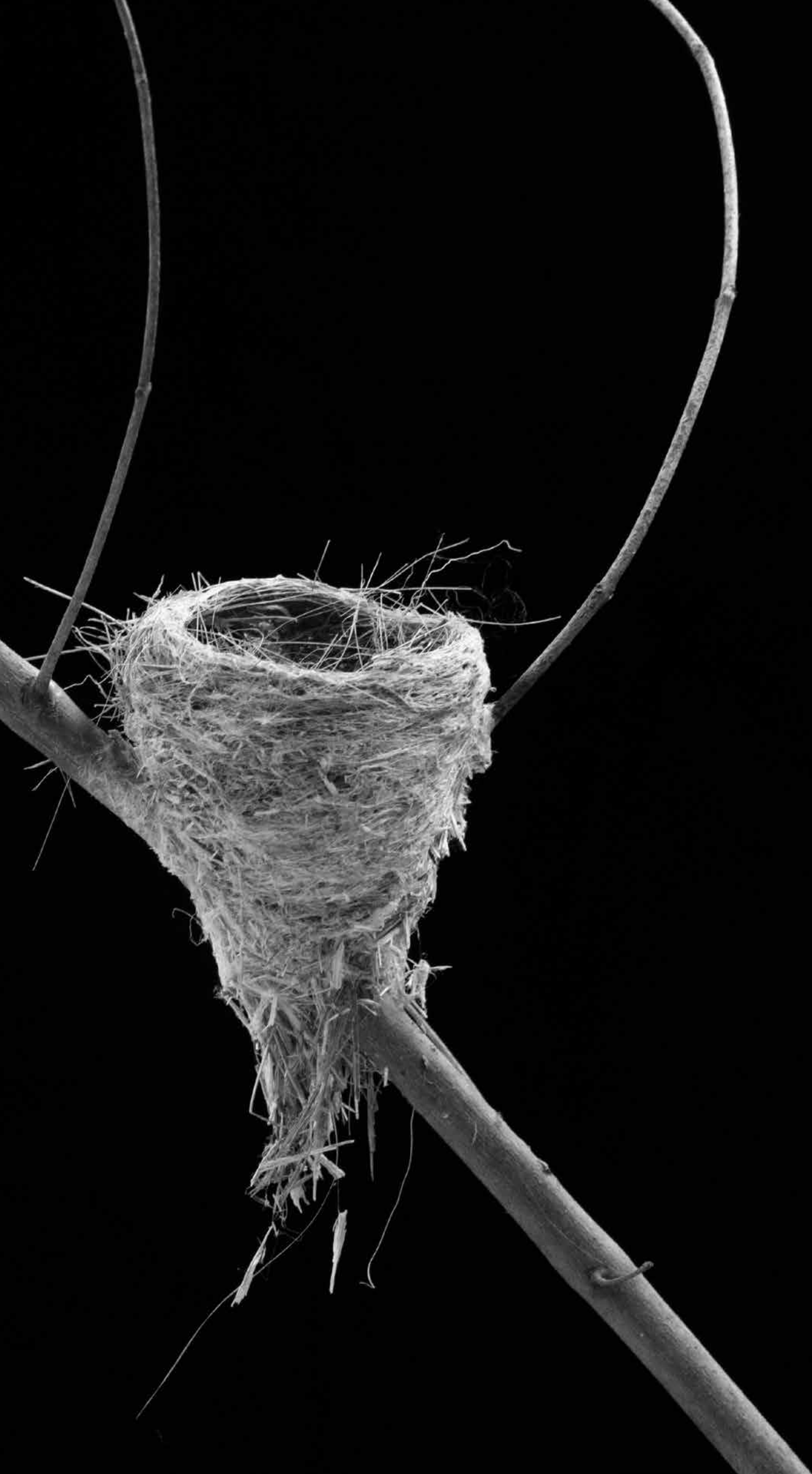




Natural alternatives

RETIRED MEDICAL PHOTOGRAPHER DANIELLE EDWARDS COMBINES
MODERN TECHNOLOGY WITH PRINTING PROCESSES THAT DATE
BACK MORE THAN A CENTURY TO EXPRESS HER FEELINGS ABOUT THE
NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

Steve Packer



When you retired five years ago after 29 years as a medical photographer, switching to art photography and old-fashioned alternative printing processes must have been a big change.

My initial photographic studies were in fine art, so I've always enjoyed creative photography outside of work. Initially for myself as relaxation during holidays, and I was in a group that did large-format photography. Then I got into using infrared [commonly used in medical photography because it can image beneath the skin] in a creative way.

My two favourite types of photography are infrared and photomacrography [extreme close-up], and I've always liked alternative printing processes since I did a fine art photography degree at RMIT in the mid 1980s.

How did you get from completing a fine art degree to working in scientific photography?

After RMIT, I worked at a wedding photography studio for a short duration, I decided it wasn't for me and applied for a job as an assistant medical photographer at a Melbourne hospital. I didn't really know what medical photography was, but I got the job and was promoted after a few months.

It was at a teaching and research hospital that treated veterans from the two world wars – amputees, facial prosthetics and the like. We'd make images for documentation, comparison and study. We'd also make prints of x-rays for journals, make posters for conferences, document veteran commemorative

services and public relations. I also worked with physiotherapists to demonstrate different exercises to their clients. I did almost everything – except weddings!

Did it take a little while to get used to the confronting aspect of medical photography?

It did. But at the same time as getting the job, I started an applied science degree in scientific photography at RMIT, so I was studying part-time in the subject as well. Over the years I found that you're always dealing with the whole person in front of you and need to be sensitive to their needs. You learn to apply the technical aspect quite naturally, and it's really the human relationships you're dealing with. At times it can be more confronting when you see the images later.

Is it true to say there's no scope for creativity or artistic considerations in medical photography?

That's right. It's purely about accuracy and repeatability. For one thing, when you're photographing patients over time, there are scales and measurements you need to adhere to so medical staff can understand and interpret the images for good patient care.

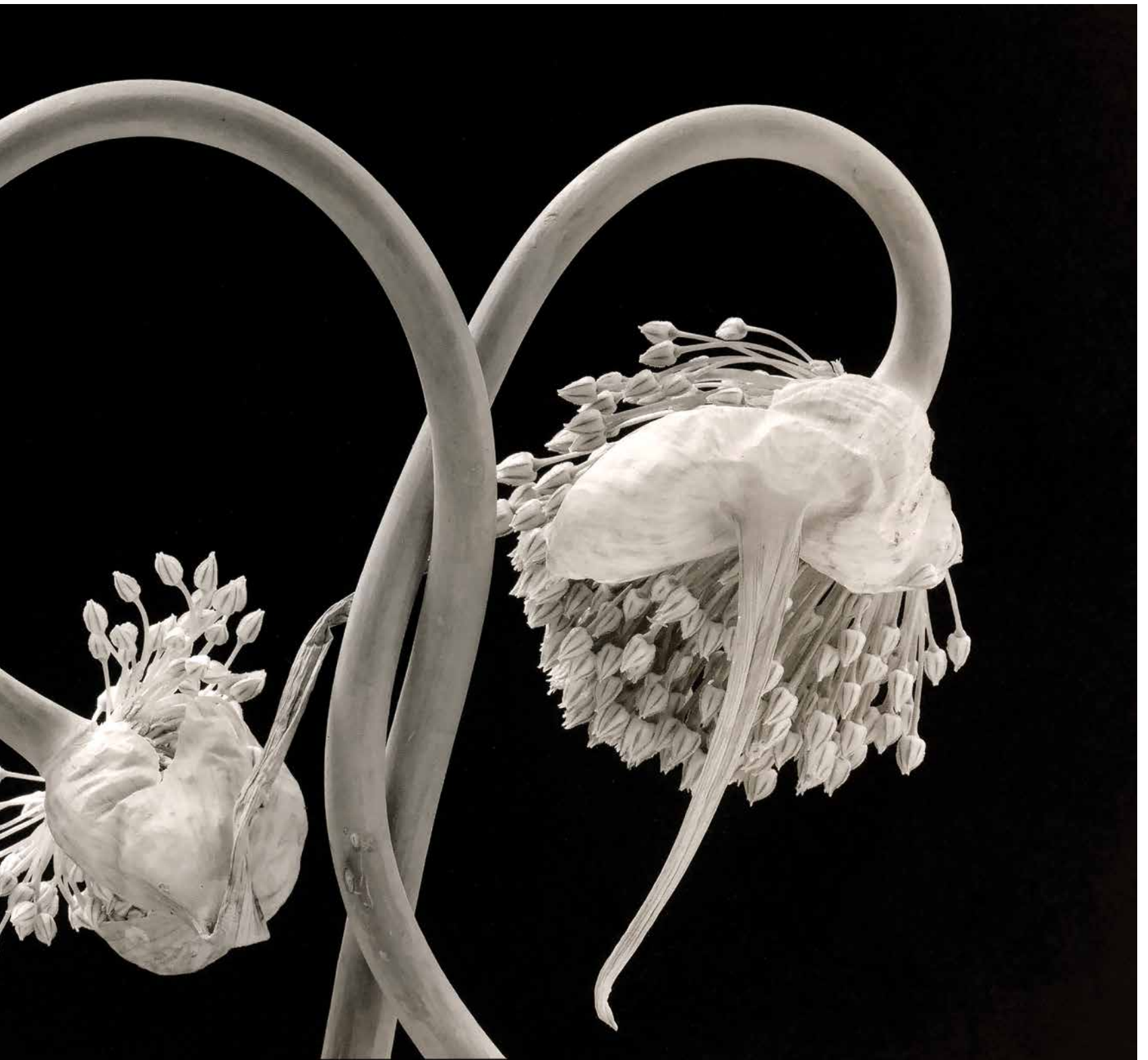
How have you transferred your use of infrared from the scientific to the artistic sphere?

It sounds a bit weird, but when I take an image in infrared, it looks normal to me because I've done it for so long and 'see' in infrared.

Twisted garlic
Platinotype print

This giant allium, commonly referred to as elephant garlic or Russian garlic, is a mild flavoured garlic with long stems and flowers. The stems often twist naturally as it grows, creating beautiful shapes with long lasting flowers.







Lenten rose (*Helleborus orientalis*)
New Chrysotype print

The Lenten rose is a delight in winter when not much else is in flower. Hellebores are beautiful from flower through to seed, I find them inspiring on so many levels. They are aesthetically pleasing through all phases of the plant's life cycle.

Different subjects reflect and absorb infrared so tonal values usually appear very different to how you see the subject. They don't really make infrared film anymore, or not film that sees deeply into infrared very well.

The fantastic thing about digital is that you can see deeper into infrared. You're not actually photographing with light – you're capturing radiation – although it's often described as light because it's easier for people to understand.

On a sunny, contrasty day, people generally think the middle of the day isn't a good time to take photos, but for infrared, that's a great time because generally there's a lot of infrared radiation around. You can capture a lot and it has a very wide tonal range. There are a lot of infrared photos that are blown out from the sun's radiation, but that's not the look I'm after. I'm trying to achieve a certain aesthetic with the tonality that infrared can produce.

What kind of camera do you use?

I use Nikon DSLR cameras that have been converted to maximise infrared transmission.

Initially, I converted a D3, then a D750 and now a Z5. In each case, the Camera Clinic in Melbourne has replaced the Bayer filter on the internal sensor with an infrared filter that blocks visible light. Live View on the camera allows you to see the infrared image directly through the camera. Once the image is captured via the digital camera, I then make a digital negative for outputting to screen-proofing film. I make the digital negative to the size I want for the final print size using an inkjet printer. Then I use that in an analogue sense where I'm hand-coating papers and contact printing the negatives in my home darkroom.

What printing processes do you use?

My choice of process depends on what I think will look best for each image. I print on 100 per cent cotton rag paper. I especially like the platinum-palladium print because, like infrared capture, it has a very wide tonal range. You coat the paper by mixing up a sensitiser that reacts to ultra-violet radiation. You can paint it on with a brush or squeegee it on using a glass rod.

I love the hands-on printing and ending up with something tactile and one-off.



Tomatillo Husks (*Physalis philadelphica*)
Platinotype print

If you enjoy Mexican salsa verde, tomatillos are food of the gods. After the striking green fruits have rotted from the husks, they leave a beautiful skeletal structure like glowing lanterns. This wonderful architecture contains the seeds for the next year's crop



Seed Head (Anemone hupehensis)
Platinotype print

The Japanese wind anemone is a delicate looking flower. When the flower dies, seed heads are formed. They are like cotton wool balls just waiting to be picked up by the wind for dispersal.

Opposite: Poppy (papaver species)
Silver gelatin print

Poppies have it all. amazing architectural seed pods. Delicate yet sturdy flowers. Amazingly tough, they will grow in a crack in concrete.







You let the sensitised layer dry, put your digital negative in direct contact with the paper and expose it to ultra-violet radiation. The print is then processed through a series of chemicals.

I also print with Van Dyke Brown and cyanotype, and I print in traditional silver gelatin. I also use the new chrysotype, which is printing with gold. It can create blue and red tones. Occasionally I make lumen prints by putting objects or botanicals directly in contact with silver gelatin paper and leaving it out in the sun for several hours.

Are these particularly difficult, trial-and-error sort of processes?

These processes are reasonably repeatable, but there's always a trial-and-error element because you're relying on variables such as the effects of room humidity – on platinum-palladiums and chrysotypes in particular – and how the papers have been stored. Also, chemistry can sometimes be fickle and doesn't always behave quite the way you expect.

You obviously enjoy using these processes.

It's very pleasurable and, quite honestly, I find it therapeutic. I have never forgotten the magic of seeing a print appear before your eyes in the dark room. I love the hands-on printing and ending up with something tactile and one-off.

Gossamer and pearls
Platinotype print

Orb-weaver spiders weave their webs throughout the evening. After evening rain or morning dew, pearls of water are captured in their webs. The silk of the webs is so strong the water forms beads that are captured and hang in a beautiful display that lasts for hours. The gossamer threads show nature's true beauty as they hold the pearls of water draped like jewellery in the trees.

I usually make an edition of an image, but each print is pretty much unique.

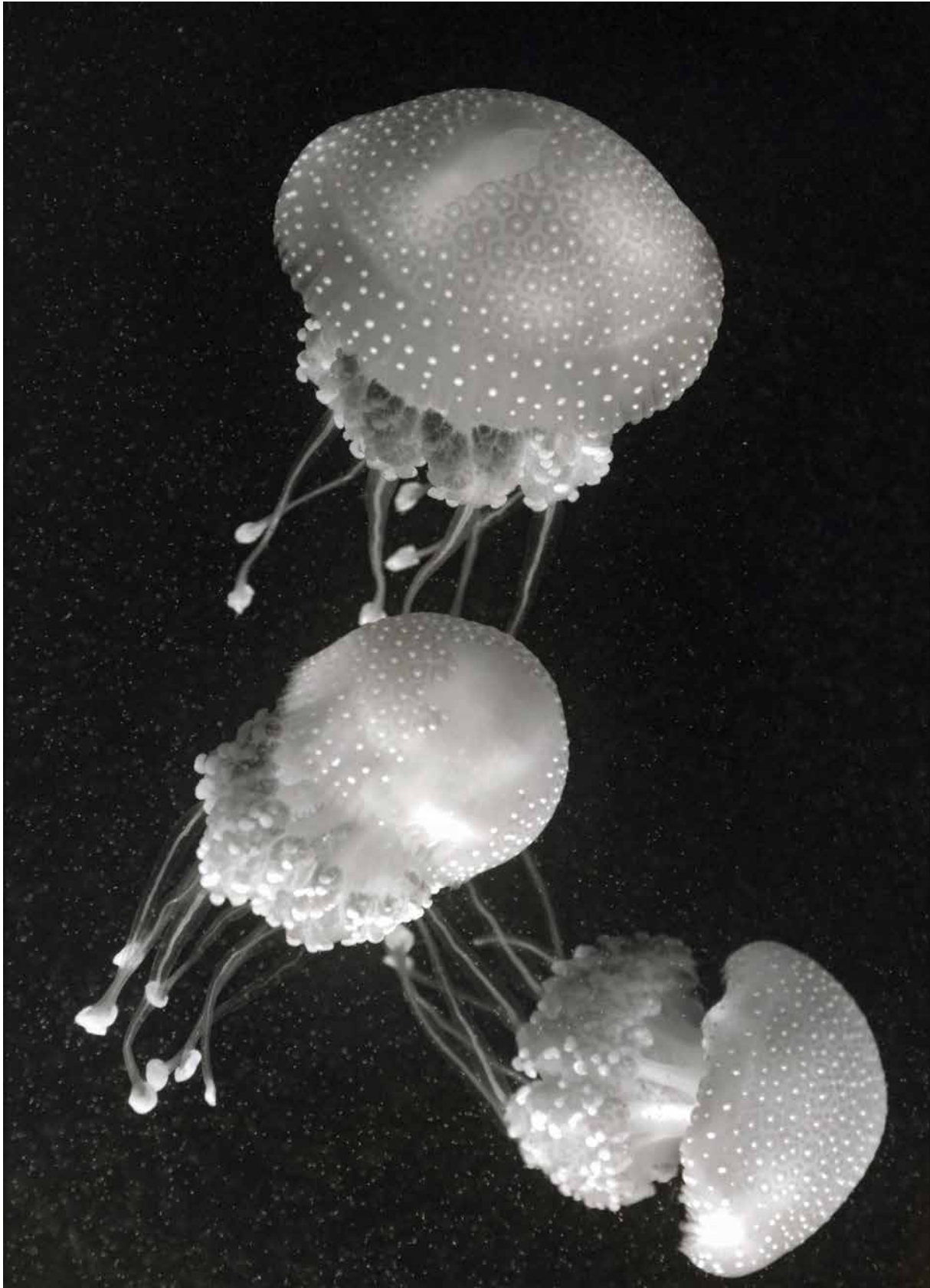
Does that make the prints more saleable and collectable?

I have had some success in this respect. I have exhibited in Australia, China and the USA and sold prints at exhibitions. I have a new exhibition coming up [from 23 October 2024 until 26 January 2025] at Gold Street Studios [in Trentham East, Victoria], where I've exhibited before.

It's known by many as the home of alternative processes in Australia. It's where I get my chemicals and where I've done courses to learn some of these processes. I've also had images published in a series of books from Routledge Press on the contemporary use of various alternative processes.

And last but not least, how do you choose the subject matter for your images?

I've always been fascinated by nature. It's very grounding for me and I live on a property in the countryside near Melbourne. Many of my photos are of trees and flowers. I want to honour those trees and nature, showing the beauty in them and how important they are to the environment. I just wish we'd take more care of the natural world. 📷



Jelly Fish
Platinotype print

Found throughout the world, the white spotted jellyfish is endemic to the Pacific Ocean between Australia and Japan.

The main structure is a gelatinous bell shape with trailing tentacles designed to capture food.

Jellyfish are graceful and quite beautiful to observe moving in the water. Watching them is like an underwater ballet performance.

To see more of Danielle Edwards' work, visit:

 <https://danielleedwardsphotography.com.au>

 www.goldstreetstudios.com.au