

Addendum: Aluminotype verses Ferrotypes

Yes, all do agree that the blacks are slightly deeper and warmer in a true black asphalt japanned Ferrotypes Tintype plate and the blacks are greyer and colder in Black Aluminum Trophy Plaque plates (aka aluminotype or alumitype). The difference isn't huge. Just like the difference isn't huge between a cheap resin coated black and white photographic paper print as compared to an expensive fiber based photographic black and white paper print. Most would agree that the resin coated cheap paper is great for a 101 basic black and white photography class and non-serious work, but clearly wouldn't do when it comes to fine art photographic prints. That little bit seems to make a huge difference with virtually all art photographers. So, it should go with wet-plate collodion Tintypes. But, quality at the moment seems to be trumped by convenience and cost. You have to japan your own tin if you want to shoot real Ferrotypes. Check the "Doer's Guide to Wet-Plate Collodion Photography" manual with DVDs for the most consistent and best way to do that. Follow the formulas and instructions to the letter and you can't go wrong. There is a substantial investment involved in getting set up for this. But, in the long run it may prove cheaper than just using the Black Aluminum. The reason for that is the Black Aluminum plates are a one-time use deal. You can't rub a dud image off and reuse it without risking many scratches, smudges, and other defects showing up in the next image. The only way to recycle the plate for image making is to bake a coat of asphalt based japan on it. Obviously if you can do that you'd probably be making real Ferrotypes plates to use for your finer work, as well, which can be recycled the same way.

Ah! But, you say I'd rather be shooting plates than slaving in front of a japanning oven. Well, you and everyone else these days! There are probably close to a thousand active wet-plate photographers and that number is steadily expanding. Nearly all are shooting on nothing but Black Aluminum Trophy Plaque plates. On the other hand there are less than a dozen wet-plate artists in the world who are shooting on real Ferrotypes plates. All this because Aluminotype "wet-plate images" are so incredibly easy to make. They are being churned out by the bushel baskets full! As a result a huge Aluminotype Bubble is being formed and like all bubbles it will eventually burst. That's when, once again, just like in the 19th century, tintypes will be a dime a dozen. But, such will not be the case for real Ferrotypes Tintypes. Those who persist in making them will still be in command of a truly unique and obscure historic photographic process that will maintain its value far into the future. Something on a par with contemporary Mercury developed Daguerreotypes which are an expensive and a major challenge to make

and thus only a few determined souls will probably ever be making them to any extent.

Yes, but, some would insist that making real Ferrotypes Tintypes is irresponsible, as they could easily be mistaken for original 19th century specimens and possibly sold by some felon as an original. This is true. But, so could well made reproductions of anything out there. I know a gentleman who makes beautiful totally cast iron reproduction 19th century head rest posing stands. They are superb and he is very proud of his product, as he should be. No one would ever dare suggest to him that he should make the upper parts of his stand out of cast aluminum so that the stand could never be mistaken for an original. Like wise anyone making authentic Ferrotypes Tintypes instead of Aluminotypes should be just as proud and should never have to apologize to anyone for anything. As a matter of fact, it should be the other around!

So, here's the bottom line to this controversial issue: If you want to run down the broad and easy path along with the herd over the eventual cliff, just go right on making nothing but Aluminotypes. But, if you want to be special, and don't we all, you will make real deal Ferrotypes Tintypes. To a lesser extent, you will make real glass ambrotypes. And if you really want to be extra special you will make fine albumen prints or other handmade historic processes prints from contact printing on fine wet-plate negatives. And yes, those could be confused for originals. Ain't it Grand!