

Myth: The Return of the Tintype!

If it were only true. What some folks are touting as a roaring return is more like an advent and not a return. It's more like the advent of the aluminotype, also called alumitype or trophy aluminum tintype. In order for something to return from some other time or era, it generally has to be the same as it was when it was in vogue. Sorry to point a critical finger, but there are serious differences between the common, and boy do I mean common, aluminotype tintype and a real deal authentically produced wet-plate collodion Ferrotypes Tintype. The later was made by the billions in the last half of the 19th century and sporadically here and there in the first half of the 20th century.

The most obvious difference is the metal used. Aluminotypes are on aluminum. Some commercially available plates are black enameled on one side and shiny aluminum on the other. Some are white on the back, and some are black anodized on both sides. Real authentic Ferrotypes plates are made of ferrous metal, that is to say of iron. They are black japanned (baked on coats of asphalt based paint) to give a glossy black finish on the working side and usually have just a thin coat of the same paint on the back showing as a somewhat translucent brownish finish. At a glance Ferrotypes look and feel very different from a piece of peel and pour trophy aluminum. Looking closer, the black user side is a deeper, warmer, and richer black than the aluminum plate's slightly grayish cooler black side.

As mentioned before, the aluminum plates are readily available commercially and are fairly inexpensive. The Ferrotypes plate is not commercially available in our time. One must manufacture their own. Not an outrageous request but still requires time and money to put together. It is yet another art in itself one must master. Only a tiny few in the wet-plate community are committed to it. The reasons they persevere are obvious: Ferrotypes Tintypes are authentic, far more one of a kind unique, offer greater artistic expression, and are capable of giving a higher quality image that truly pops like so many original antique tintypes do.

Perhaps the one thing the ultra hip aluminotype tintype has in common with the early days of real Ferrotype Tintypes is they may number now in the millions, and if not the aluminotype plates themselves, at least the combination of them and all the digitally manipulated scans, images, and inkjets from them. Unfortunately, most wet-platers have bought into this protocol hook line and sinker. The painful reality is, this is in no way the return of the true and original **Tintype!**