

Charles Caito is a fine art photographer who uses large format cameras and 19th century techniques to create images.

He first picked up a camera as a teenager and briefly dreamed of a career in the creative arts. When it came time for him to choose his course of study in college, however, his parents worried that he would not be able to support himself as an artist. Their promotion of a secure future in business steered him toward a degree in industrial design, instead. After he began a career in industry, however, he felt that he was moving away from his life's goal.

After several years in business, Caito's interest in photography was rekindled when he saw a televised documentary about O. Winston Link, a large format photographer who documented the waning days of Norfolk and Western's steam powered engines in the late 1950s. Link's lovingly crafted images of steam locomotives arrest a moment in time that today is associated with a golden age of industry and prosperity in America.

When his wife Susan subsequently presented him with two of Link's photographs as an anniversary gift, Caito was inspired to research the imagery and techniques of the early days of photography and photographic reproduction. When he discovered for himself the early American work of portraitist Charles DeForest Fredericks (1823-1894) and the topographic photography of Scotsman James Valentine (1815-1880) he realized that in order to achieve the kind of photographs he wanted to produce, he would have to start using larger cameras, along with virtually obsolete methods of producing images. Charles Caito's pursuit of large format photography had begun.

In 1996, not long after this resolution, he and Susan moved to the United Kingdom and he began in earnest to teach himself the fundamentals of large format photography. He started by accumulating books about the old techniques and borrowing a friend's camera. Though primarily self-taught, he was able to find willing tutors to give him the technical advice he required to expose, develop and print his photographs.

Caito quickly realized that he enjoyed shooting historic places and, as a photographer, has become a maker of visual records. He has occasionally documented registered historic houses before they underwent major renovation. In his depictions of old buildings, he wants to create the illusion that his photographs were taken and printed in the nineteenth century. To that end Caito's images usually do not include passersby in current dress, automobiles, or other twenty-first century details that would betray the photographs' modern origin.

He prints primarily in platinum, a process that he came to appreciate through the work in that medium by Josef Sudek (1896-1976). For Caito, Sudek's work has the timeless atmosphere of pictorial photography as practiced by Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936), Frederick Evans (1853-1943) and Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882-1936). He has also been inspired by the medium of photogravure, an old reproductive process by which photographic imagery is transferred to metal plates and printed like etchings. The photogravure process imparts a gentle softness to photographic images, and brings the mechanical origins of the photograph closer to those of the fine art print. Although he has not yet mastered the process of photogravure, Caito's aim is to continue studying and master its techniques for the printing of his own work.

Caito has taken advantage of the opportunities that his membership in the Cleveland Society of Alternative Photographers has provided him, not only to expand his knowledge of antique processes but also to rub shoulders with photographers who work in those intriguing procedures. Their areas of expertise include: daguerreotypy and wet collodion plate photography and printmaking in platinum, albumen, cyan, and gum bichromate.

Charles Caito has exhibited with the Cleveland Society of Alternative Photographers at several of its annual shows at the Cleveland Plain Dealer Gallery. In addition, he has had solo shows at the Monymusk Arts Centre in Aberdeenshire, Scotland and at Peter Williams Museum Services Studio in Boston. His work has also been show at the Beck Center in Lakewood, Ohio.