

PROJECTION PHOTOGRAPHY

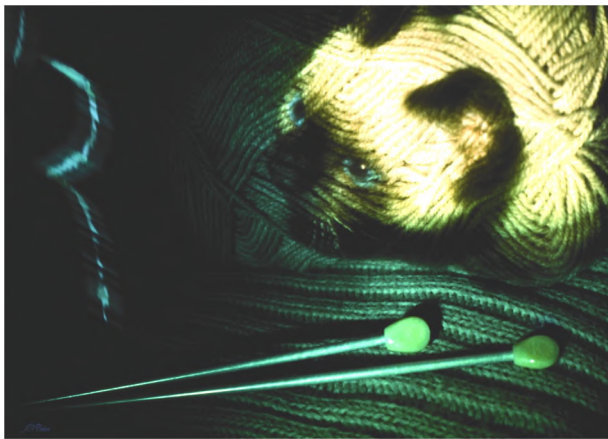
The World of John Neville Cohen

This article is based on John Neville Cohen's website as featured in issue 73 of the MLS e-letter New Light on Old Media.

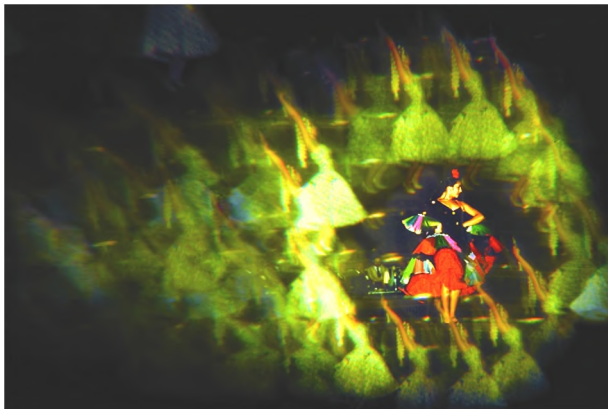
The magic lantern has often been used to project images onto objects such as buildings, and even people (Loie Fuller, for example), as well as onto screens and walls. John Neville Cohen is a photographer who has won many international awards and featured in over 20 one-man exhibitions in New York, London, Edinburgh, and across Europe. His eye-catching photographs are created by using a projector, or projectors, as his 'magic lantern' to explore subjects in different ways and photograph the outcomes. He calls it 'Projection Photography: The Best Form of Painting with Light'.



Preacher on book



Mischief



Flamenco



Beauty is in the eye of the beholder



Madame Butterfly

He began with an interest in portrait photography, but was aware that there was an element in paintings that added character to portraits that was missing in photographs – the texture of the paint. One day he was about to show the family his latest slides when he switched on the projector before having put up the screen. A portrait landed on the curtains and he found the answer. The effect of the curtain fabric texture combined with the portrait sent him in a new direction.

After that he projected images onto many different fabrics and surfaces, not always flat, as well as onto objects. The chosen screen often became the subject of the picture. For example, he photographed images, such as a portrait, projected onto a feather, a flower, a shell, a leaf, a butterfly wing, and even onto the edges of the pages of a book. Images were sometimes blended by using more than one projector, and sometimes manipulated for different effects with crystals, prisms and coloured filters.

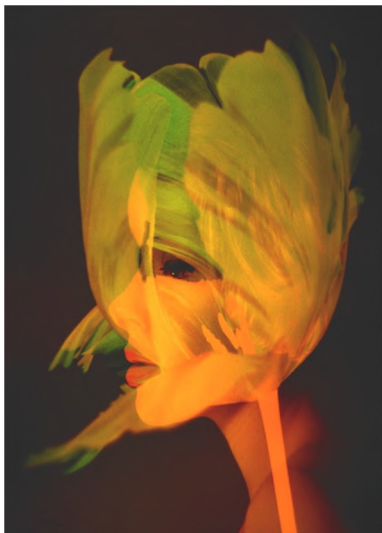
Another interesting technique was to use acetate film attached to a matt black card as a flexible mirror. The image could then be projected to reflect off the mirror onto a screen. By creating slight bends in the acetate mirror some very interesting results were obtained.

Each study and Cohen's chosen technique were selected to add a depth and complexity to his work, challenging perceptions and inviting viewers to share his imagination to see more than reality in the final image – a form of visual storytelling. His methods combine innovation and tradition, but without the need for a darkroom or any digital manipulation.

One of Cohen's most celebrated creations, 'Spirit of Spring', for example, showcases his 'painting with light' technique, blending innovation and tradition. Using two projectors, a portrait transparency is combined with the negative image of a tulip using appropriate masking. This is believed to be the first ever Kodachrome transparency that had both a positive and a negative image on the same emulsion, defying conventional photography without the help of digital software or darkroom alchemy. The interplay of light and form in this work evokes a sense of magic.

As Cohen himself remarks, "the artist begins with a blank canvas, but the photographer's canvas is always full." He picks out three key attributes to his art: invention, purity and fantasy. *The Times* described him as "regarded as one of Britain's most original photographers" and the late Sir George Pollock (an MLS member and former President of the Royal Photographic Society) said he "extends the boundaries of the possible in photography and shows us all how we can do so too."

Soon after he was first recognised in the late 1960s Cohen was invited to give lectures to various photographic societies. He recommended taking the 'magic lantern' for a walk with a long extension cable, to see how different images looked when projected and focussed onto different objects and textures. How an object appears when combined with an image or how the fabric texture influences the image can be the start of a creative idea.



Spirit of Spring



Water garden

John Neville Cohen's techniques and work in projection photography continue to inspire photographers and artists who wish to explore the interplay of light, projection and photography. For those interested in delving into this art form, Cohen's portfolio, as well as his many articles, offer a wealth of knowledge and inspiration.

In an era where digital technology dominates the photographic landscape, revisiting Cohen's methods serves as a reminder of the endless possibilities that can be achieved with simple tools like the magic lantern and its successors, together with a visionary mind. His work encourages us to look beyond the conventional and to see the potential for art in every light and shadow.

Cohen's website www.jncohen.net/Projection-Photography describes in detail how his award-winning photographs were created, under the heading 'Projection photography special effects – The Magic Lantern'. The website itself is a reflection of Cohen's approach to life – juggling multiple hats and embracing a wide array of interests.

Mary Ann Auckland



Crystals