Classic cyanotype on one page

Cyanotype quick guide

Two iron salts, ultraviolet light and water, with no darkroom[1] and no fixer: washing is enough[2]. Steps, amounts and signs that you're on track.

The reference formula, from Mike Ware[3]

Citrate solution	25 g of green ferric ammonium citrate, dissolved in distilled water to make 100 ml
Ferricyanide solution	10 g of potassium ferricyanide, dissolved in distilled water to make 100 ml
To coat	The two in equal parts, and only as much as you'll use

Ware dissolves the citrate in about 70 ml of water and the ferricyanide in about 80 ml, at room temperature, and tops each up to 100 ml[3]. Ferricyanide (red prussiate), not ferrocyanide[4].

1 Prepare Make up the solutions

Work in dim incandescent light, with no fluorescent light or daylight[1]. Keep each solution separate, in a brown bottle in the dark; mixed, they don't last long[3].

2 Coat Spread the mixture on the paper

Use cotton watercolor paper with no chalk buffer[1]; up to Letter or A4, 160 g/m² is enough, according to Ware[1]. With a glass rod, about 1.5 ml of mixture for 8 × 10 in; with a brush, up to twice that[3].

3 Coat Let it dry in the dark

About an hour, at room temperature and away from light[5].

You're on track if the dry paper is pale yellow. If it turns green or blue before you expose it, the whites will come out fogged[1].

4 Expose Set up the contact print

A flat object or a negative on the coated side, under glass and pressed firmly. The negative is the same size as the print[6] and goes printed side against the paper[7].

5 Expose Expose to ultraviolet light

In the sun or with a UVA lamp; for the same energy, a 365 nm lamp works better than a 395–405 nm one[8]. There's no universal time: make a test strip with times that double from one step to the next[9].

You're on track if the shadows look bronzed; when in doubt, go one step further[10].

6 Develop Wash in running water

Face down, until the yellow is gone from the whites: Ware allows about 20 minutes[3]. The water shouldn't be alkaline or hard[3].

7 Finish Let it dry and store the print

The shadows regain their blue as they dry, over about 24 hours according to Ware and Jacquard[1,11]. Keep it away from anything alkaline, which breaks down the blue[12]. If light fades it, it recovers in the dark[13].

Safety essentials

- Safety glasses and nitrile gloves from the first step: safety data sheets such as Sigma-Aldrich's classify ferricyanide as an eye irritant and toxic to aquatic life[14].
- Leftover solution and the first wash bath go in a closed, labeled bottle for household hazardous waste collection, not down the drain[14].
- Away from strong acids: in contact with them, ferricyanide releases very toxic gases[14].
- If something goes wrong, rinse with plenty of water and call Poison Help (US): 1-800-222-1222. Other countries: cyanocodex.com/en/safety/first-aid/

Sources

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