

AN ETHEREAL GLOW
The work of Albarrán Cabrera

The choice of materials involved and the reason for their implementation in any artwork should always consider both the structural and conceptual purposes for inclusion. Materiality, if one is to create a singular object, should be as heavily considered in a photographic print as any sculpture.

Albarrán Cabrera, a collaborative duo based in Barcelona, use gold leaf in their photographs, not for simple decoration or nostalgic flamboyance, but rather its unique ability for reflective illumination and contemplative significance. “Not mere extravagance” as Jun'ichirō Tanizaki wrote in his 1933 essay on Japanese aesthetics *In Praise of Shadows*, in which he espoused the elegant use of gold leaf for illumination in the shadowy corners of pre-electricity rural homes. The essay's expression of gold as an almost mystical medium of luminance seems apt to Cabrera's use of it as a printing substrate for its ability to produce “an ethereal glow” from beneath the thin layer of gampi paper that bears their color photographs.

The reflective work of Albarrán Cabrera arises from a foundation of analog processes made in the darkroom. As master printers for many celebrated photographers, the duo specialized in producing platinum-palladium editions while developing and eventually focusing on their own creative practice. The selection of early prints on view displays the origins of their compositional explorations using negative space, askew orientations, and cosmic abstraction which continue to be implemented in later works.

In order to bridge the tactile nature of their earlier work as black-and-white printmakers, Albarrán Cabrera began implementing the use of fibrous and semi-translucent Japanese washi paper for a new direction into color work as featured in their ongoing portfolios *The Mouth of Krishna* and *This is you (here)*. The sub-layering of gold leaf that followed was inspired by a range of art-historical origins from Russian Orthodox iconography and Byzantine painting to, more clearly, Japanese Byōbu folding screens and printmaking techniques. The metallic layer is never overtly apparent, only subtly glowing through the photograph's highlights and giving the print an overall iridescent warmth, shifting in intensity when viewed at an angle.

In the series *Kairos*, which seeks to photographically represent the metaphysical idea of *the eternal present*. The phantom idea of “Now” is represented by delicately altering the image to reveal an imperfect strip of gold, or through an amorphous space of light between conjoined negatives, separating two subsequent exposures of a scene (past and future) taken moments apart. Printmaking, the creation of textural and precious photo-objects, is for the artists always paramount. This dedication to craftsmanship and the philosophies explored are what continually draw me to Cabrera's enigmatic work as it has had such a profound effect on the way I view the world afterward. *Shouldn't art always serve this purpose?*

Albarrán Cabrera are the photographers Angel Albarrán (b.1969) and Anna Cabrera (b. 1969) and have worked collaboratively as artists since 1996. A rich inner philosophy about memory and experience — and an alchemical curiosity for photographic printmaking — guide their aesthetic practice. Influenced by both occidental and oriental thinkers and artists, their photographs question our assumptions of time, place and identity in order to stimulate a new understanding of one's own experience and perception.