

# artist interview: Malin Fabbri



As the founder and editor of [Alternativephotography.com](http://Alternativephotography.com), Fabbri has created one of the major online source for alternativephotography processes. Along with this site for alternative photography enthusiasts, she has also authored books on cyanotypes, anthotypes and pinhole techniques.

**THM:** Hi Malin! It's such a pleasure to talk to you! I think your website, [AlternativePhotography.com](http://AlternativePhotography.com) is such a fantastic resource. Can you tell us what inspired you to start it and what your mission is?

**MF:** *It all started 22 years ago (23 on the 5th of April 2023) and it all happened organically. There was never a "grand vision" but more of something that started small and grew big.*

*I was studying for my MA in Design Studies at Central St. Martin's School of Design in London, and my thesis was about the perception of images. I compared the perception of ordinary stock images to the perception of handmade images in a study. I used cyanotypes for the handmade images. Many artists I had been asking for help during my research wanted to read my thesis, but I was a poor student, and it was expensive to print over 100 pages and send by post, so I registered a website and published my thesis there. After a few days, an artist asked if I could add some of their images to the website, and I thought "Yes, why not?" and the first gallery was born. Then someone else contributed with an essay and a how-to article that I agreed to publish, and the knowledge bank was started.*

*What has truly been inspiring, and what has kept me going for all these years is the unfailing enthusiasm of artists working with alternative processes. For many people, art process is their passion and a large part of their lives, and it really shines through.*

*Today the website has more structure, though the core has stayed the same, and there are 3 areas we focus on: Learning with the over 900 articles that is the knowledge bank. Inspiration, in the gallery and people sharing their process. And the community, where we work with events such as Anthotype Day. And, when I say "we", it's me and other volunteers running this.*

**THM:** Your website is turning 23 and this magazine is turning 10 this spring. What a coincidence! Happy birthday to us! For our part, we had a lot to learn about publishing a magazine! What do you think you have had to learn and how has managing a website changed since you started this project?

**MF:** *It's not many websites or social media accounts that last for such a long time, so a well-deserved happy birthday to both of us!*

**THM:** Cheers!

## From pinhole to print

Inspiration, instructions and insights in less than an hour

Gary Fabbri, Malin Fabbri and Peter Wiklund



## Blueprint to cyanotypes

Exploring a historical alternative photographic process

by Malin Fabbri and Gary Fabbri

**MF:** Luckily my day-job when I started out was as web designer, so I had quite a lot of the skills I needed to run a website. The biggest thing I've learned is to ask for, and sometimes pay for help. At the beginning I tried doing everything myself, from content, to design, to programming php and css. Now the website is so much bigger, so it's not possible or feasible for one person doing it all. Some examples are the Facebook group moderators. The group now has over 47,000 members. There are 5 excellent moderators that do most of the moderation. Without them, spammers would grind it to a halt. There are other volunteers too, like Dennis Humphrey who did a fantastic job helping me out with the World Anthotype Day, as well as two hired students who helped with social media coverage. A lot of the content is written by artists and teachers who share their processes and how they work. Some things are hard to find volunteers for and I've set a budget to hire developers to work on technical aspects. So, lesson learned, don't be afraid to ask for help.

**THM:** How did you get started as an artist in general? Was art something that was encouraged in your household? What were some of your earliest formative experiences in the arts?

Photography is something I discovered on my own, but my parents are both teachers, so the love of learning and exploring comes from them. I have always been interested in photography and got my first camera as a child. I documented my surroundings and annoyed my little brother by taking pictures of him on - not always the most appropriate - occasions. In my early twenties, I moved to London and, since the city was new to me, I explored it with my camera. I signed up for a formal photography education and started exploring both the city and experimental photography. I remember my teacher saying, "can you just do a normal print for this assignment?", when I insisted on setting fire to my negatives and sandwiching other negatives together in abstract compositions. I spent a lot of time exploring the city with a camera clutched in my hands. I also frequented plenty of inspiring exhibitions both famous artists in large galleries and museums and the smaller independent artists exhibiting in pop-up galleries or cafes.



## ANTHOTYPE EMULSIONS VOLUME 1

by Malin Fabbri

The guide covers research from photographers at World Anthotype Day 2022

alternative  
photography



OVER  
100 PLANTS  
TESTED AND  
RATED

## ANTHOTYPES

Explore the darkroom in your garden  
and make photographs using plants

Malin Fabbri





*Self portrait in New York* pinhole camera, silver gelatin print

Have you worked in other art mediums as well? And out of curiosity, did this non-traditional approach also carry over? Setting fire to paintings and so on....

**MF:** No. I did a drawing course at one point but quickly decided it is not my cup of tea. I can hardly draw stick figures that look right. I also tried some aquarelle painting but the same there, my smudges were just smudges and I did not experience that therapeutic feeling people talk about, mine was more like frustration!

Can you talk about where your interest in alternative photography, in particular, comes from?

*There was this one small independent exhibition I went to when I started writing my thesis and were looking for different kind of image styles. Unfortunately, I don't remember the name of the artist, but that is when I saw my first cyanotype. I was absolutely mesmerized by the handmade quality and the brush strokes. 2000 was a time when digital cameras started to be mainstream, and every image around seemed to be a low-quality digital print. Seeing the cyanotype was so refreshing and it was love at first sight. I just HAD to learn this process. I got help from the email list - that still exists today - called simply "The list". For those not old enough to have used email lists, that is the equivalent of a Facebook group today, only that it's all done by chains of emails. Anyhow, that is where I got all instructions for how to create a cyanotype, and I rushed off to the Silverprint shop to get all the chemicals, brushes, paper and stuff I needed to get started. Later on I also took a trip to New York and met with several artists there, and also had lunch with Judy Seigel, who was publishing the World Journal of Post-Factory Photography which was the largest resource of alt. proc. knowledge at the time. I never regretted falling into this quirky corner of the world.*



*Old and New* Anthotypes from ilacs



*Tysslinge Reeds* Tea-toned cyanotype

You are most known as an artist for your anothotype prints and the wonderful books you've written on the process – which are the ONLY books written exclusively about that process, is that correct? What is it you like so much about anothotypes?

*Yes, I believe my Anothotype books are the only books written on the topic, and I am very proud to have written the first one and been able to share my research, hopefully inspiring others too. What do I like about it? What is there NOT to like about it? Ha ha!*

*There are several aspects of the anothotype process I love. The personal angle is that as a child my grandmother and I used to dye yarn she had spun. We used birch leaves and grass to dye the yarn, and I have since been fascinated by how many colours and pigments there are in nature that can be used to colour, dye and "paint" with.*

*When I did the research for my book on cyanotypes (Blueprint to Cyanotypes: Exploring A Historical Alternative Photographic Process) I read the diaries of Sir John Herschel and discovered the anothotype process. He tried to invent colour photography using pigments from nature. This all made sense to me, and I spent a few years doing research.*

*At the time I was also pregnant with my first and second child, so I wanted to find processes that were non-toxic that I could work with (there are some plants that are very poisonous, so read up before experimenting!). It is also a process that isn't harmful to the environment.*

*Then it's the explorative aspect of the process. There are as many variations as there are plants and pigments. These endless possibilities attract me too. You can never be "done" with the process. There is always more to try.*

*And finally, the images fade. I know many artists find this annoying, but I do like the fleeting nature of the anothotypes. Nothing else in life is forever, so why should a print be?*

*I have gathered research in my book "Anothotypes – Explore the darkroom in your garden and make photographs using plants" and am also continuing doing research into different emulsions during World Anothotype Day, with the help of other artists from around the world.*

*My interest started when the anothotype process was obscure, and now I find it all over social media and the internet. I like to think I have inspired some of these artists to discover this wonderful process. I have been working with this process for over a decade, and am not bored yet, so that is a good sign!*

What other artists inspired you as a young artist? Who inspires you now? And how do you think your appreciation of art has changed over the years? What inspired you then and what inspires you now? Is the same or has that changed?

*I always liked abstract or conceptual art, where the artist is trying to convey an idea, a concept or a thought. So, some of my favourite photographers from a young age are Man Ray, Tina Modotti, Picasso's photographic work, and photographers in that era. I like the way they play with both the light and the objects and ideas.*

*A photographer I admire for her bravery is Eva Arnold, whom I met once at a lecture about her life. She went places with her camera that few had gone to.*

*What inspires me now is a hard question to answer. I do love the way many of the artists come up with new ways of working, refining the processes and pushing the borders of how things can be done. Artistically, I don't think I can point to any one artist, but it has to be the collective creativity that I see in the community at AlternativePhotography.com. There are so many talented artists, and so many ways of expressing their art, it's just pure magic to watch and be able to showcase in the galleries.*

Do you have any other creative outlets? What kinds of things do you like to do other than make art? Are you a reader, an athlete, a musician, an animal lover? What other interests do you have?

*Oh, yes, there are just not enough hours in the day to do everything I love doing. Apart from spending time with friends and my two teenage boys, I am an outdoors person. I keep fit by hiking in the spring and autumn, kayaking in the Stockholm archipelago in the summer, and training CrossFit in the snow in the winter. I also manage to squeeze in some reading. I play the harmonica, too, and have a group I meet with regularly. So, music is also a big part of my life. Everything fun in my life seems to center around creativity and quite a lot of it gets poured into developing AlternativePhotography.com and coming up with new events and things for the community. And of course, also writing books on alt. proc.*

You play the harmonica? Do you play blues or folk music? What do you like to play? Originals or covers?

*I play a variety of music, it can be anything from traditional folk music to and Irish tune, to mainstream music, (just learned "Hallelujah" by Leonard Cohen the other day), but what I love the most is just jamming. I have a couple of different friends that play the guitar, and just jamming with them is so much fun, getting in sync with another instrument. I would love to have more time to practice this too, I really need more than one life.*

What is your vision for the future of AlternativePhotography.com and do you have any projects coming up that you are excited about?

*I have spent 22 years and - I'm sure - way more than 10,000 hours developing AlternativePhotography.com. Who knows what the internet will look like in another 22 years?*

*I have a long, long list of things that I want to try out and develop. The biggest bottleneck is time. Since no one gets paid - including me - for the work, I also have to work to pay the bills. So, I have to prioritize my time on things that are most important. The website has never been - and will never be - about making money. The memberships that come in pay expenses and hired developers (who tend to be quite expensive). I use the funds carefully to do things that are most beneficial to the community.*

*Apart from the ordinary steady flow of new how-to articles, new artists joining the galleries and the running of the existing events, I also want to add a few new things every year, and in 2022 the first ever World Anthotype Day was started. It was a success, and I am really looking forward to running it again this year. New for 2023 is an event for our members: an Anna Atkins tribute event with a submission deadline on Anna Atkins' birthday, the 16th of March. We encourage artists to create cyanotypes in Anna Atkins' style. These will be made into a calendar. If this event is successful, we may do a calendar event with a theme each year, it depends on the response.*

*Something that has been on my mind for a very long time is creating video courses since many people prefer learning this to reading books or doing workshops. This way we can reach a larger audience and hopefully inspire more people to get out there and "get their hands dirty".*

*Apart from that I have a few topics I have done a lot of research on for some years that I would like to put into a new book. There will be more things before the year is over and many things to look forward to.*



*I Hope There is Still Time* - Anthotype from Geranium

That is amazing! It's inspiring to see how dedicated you are to the website. It really is a fantastic resource. I love that you draw inspiration from the collective creative energy. As a teacher, I can relate to that. I get a lot of inspiration from my student's energy in the classroom. I also love that you are always thinking of new ways to engage artists and bring a community together. I know it's a lot of work. We hope that our readers will submit to the Anna Atkins call for entry. How do they do that? And is there anything else you'd like to tell our readers?

*Then you can relate. The Anna Atkins event is open for entries until the 16th of March, and it's submitted by a form and then send in the work. Details can be found here:*

*[www.alternativephotography.com/call-for-entries-anna-atkins-calendar/](http://www.alternativephotography.com/call-for-entries-anna-atkins-calendar/)*

*If you miss this there will be an event later on this year, that is now called "The Christmas card competition" but since not everyone celebrates Christmas, I may restructure it, details of this can be found here:*

*[www.alternativephotography.com/call-for-entries-christmas-cards/](http://www.alternativephotography.com/call-for-entries-christmas-cards/)*

*Then there is of course World Anthotype Day 2023, the second of its kind, which takes place on the 19th of August.*

*[www.alternativephotography.com/world-anthotype-day](http://www.alternativephotography.com/world-anthotype-day)*

*And, World Cyanotype Day on the 30 September that we will support this year again with galleries and social media coverage:*

*[www.alternativephotography.com/world-cyanotype-day](http://www.alternativephotography.com/world-cyanotype-day)*

Thanks for the interview and best of luck with the fantastic website. We hope to continue to work together over many years. Cheers to that, too!



*Look My Son* - Photopolymer Gravure

For everything you might want to know about alternative process photography, visit: [alternativephotography.com](http://alternativephotography.com)