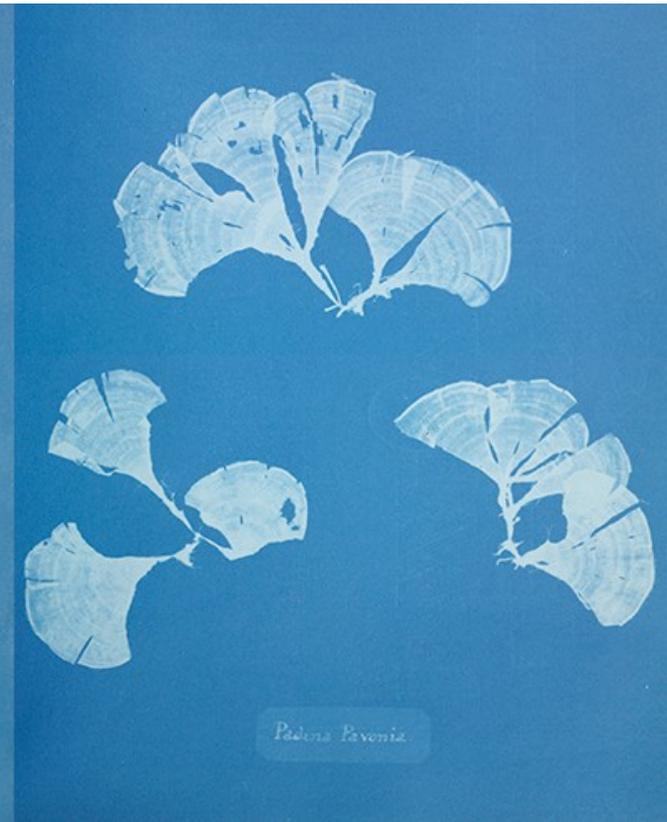
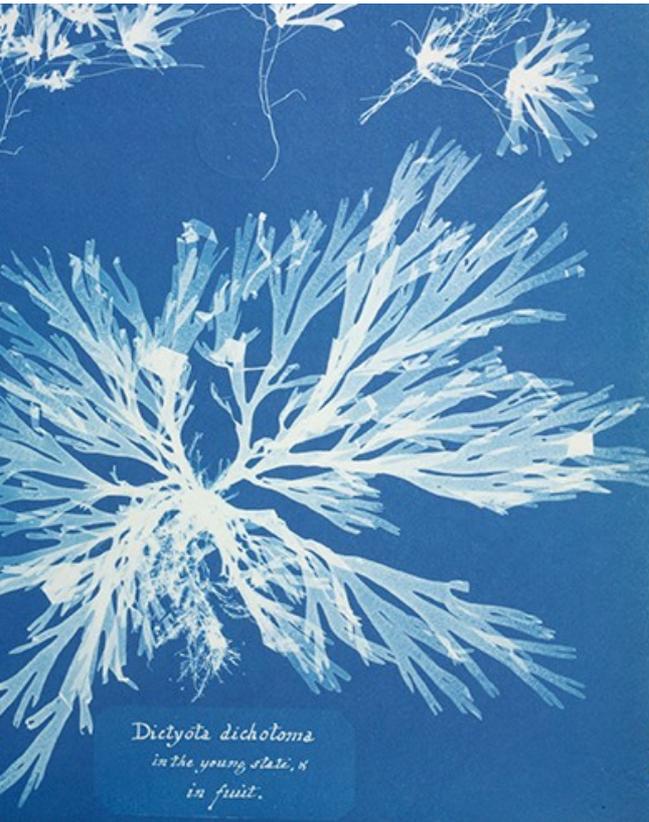


Anna Atkins



Artist Research – Study Sheet
Anastasia Mina, Artist - Educator
2020

Who was Anna Atkins?

- **Anna Atkins (1799-1871) was the world's first female photographer**
- In 1843, she published the first ever book of photography. It was called Photographs of British Algae. It contained her cyanotype photographs of specimens she had collected on the British coast.
- Early in her life, Atkins mother had died, so she had a close bond with her father who was a well-respected scientist. Through his connections, she was able to participate in scientific circles and study in a way that would not normally have been possible for women at that time.
- In her early 20s, Atkins produced a series of watercolour and pencil sketches to illustrate her father's translation of a book on shells.
- She later moved on to documenting algae and other plants using the cyanotype method which she is so well-known for now.
- Atkins and her husband were acquainted with William Henry Fox Talbot who was one of the first photographers, and she was able to correspond with him about the methods she used. Although she was focused on the scientific study of nature, Atkins' work shows a sensitivity to composition that marks her out as an artist who has remained influential to this day.



“The difficulty of making accurate drawings of objects so minute as many of the Algae and Confervae has induced me to avail myself of Sir John Herschel’s beautiful process of Cyanotype”

Task 1

Answer the following questions in full sentences.

What were the circumstances in Atkins' life that made it more possible for her to become a botanical artist?

Do you think we should describe Anna Atkins as a scientist or an artist? Explain your answer...



Task 2: Shell study

Before turning to cyanotypes to accurately capture the minute detail of the natural objects she studied, Atkins made sketches by hand.

Try making a shell drawing in pencil about the size of a postcard. Add touches of colour in watercolour or coloured pencil to highlight detail, light and textures. If you have an actual shell, work from that, and use the image source sheet if not. Start your drawing by lightly sketching the main shape. Next add some detail to the shape and look for pattern or texture to add in lightly. You can then use tone to pick up on shadows or highlights, and begin adding some colour to your sketch. Focus on close observation: aim to spend more time looking at the shell than you spend looking at the drawing itself!

Materials needed:

- Paper
- Pencil
- Watercolours (optional)



Task 3: Block shapes

Create a cut paper leaf or plant image inspired by Atkins' cyanotypes using the plant source images or leaves you have found. Cut into a blue sheet of paper (you can paint the paper yourself if you prefer). You can start by folding the paper in half to allow you to cut into the middle. See how detailed and fine you can make the cut out shape. When you have finished, place the paper on a white background.



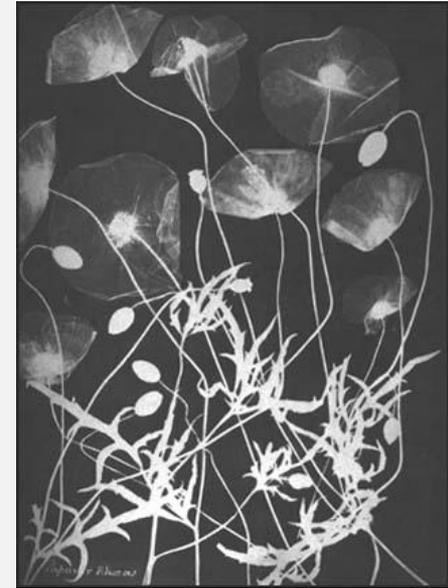
Evaluation

What is similar about the two images you have made? What is different? Do you think the purpose of the image has an impact on how effective it is.

FURTHER IDEAS:

Try making scanograms (like digital photograms, made on a scanner) using leaves and other natural forms you have collected - feathers and grasses are also good. If you don't have a scanner, you could try photocopying. You can try capturing the detail of plants and leaves by creating prints directly from them. Use a roller to ink a leaf and then press carefully on to a plain sheet of paper.

Investigate the work of Susan Derges, a contemporary photographer who specialises in camera-less photography and also takes inspiration from the natural world.





SOURCE IMAGES

