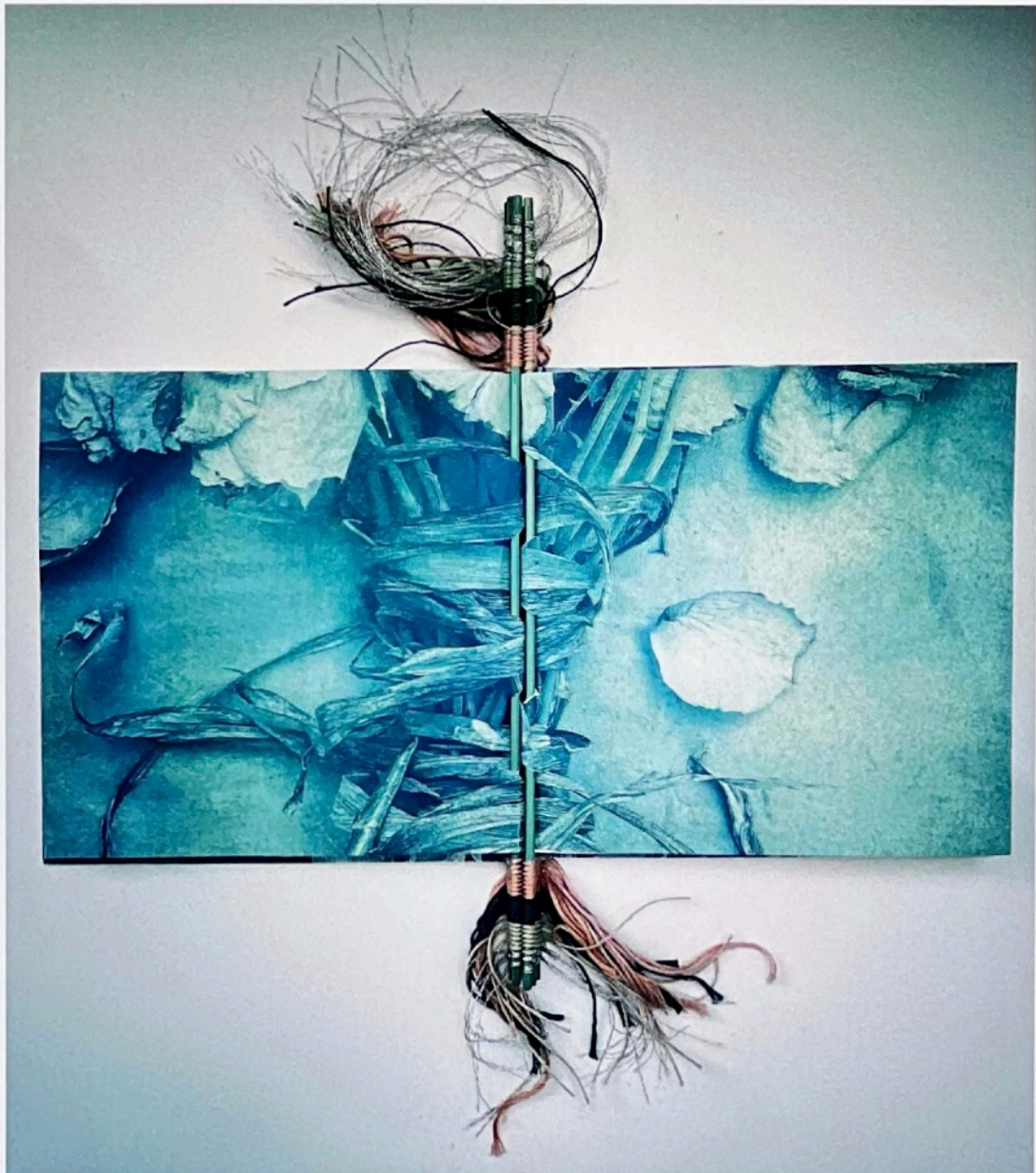
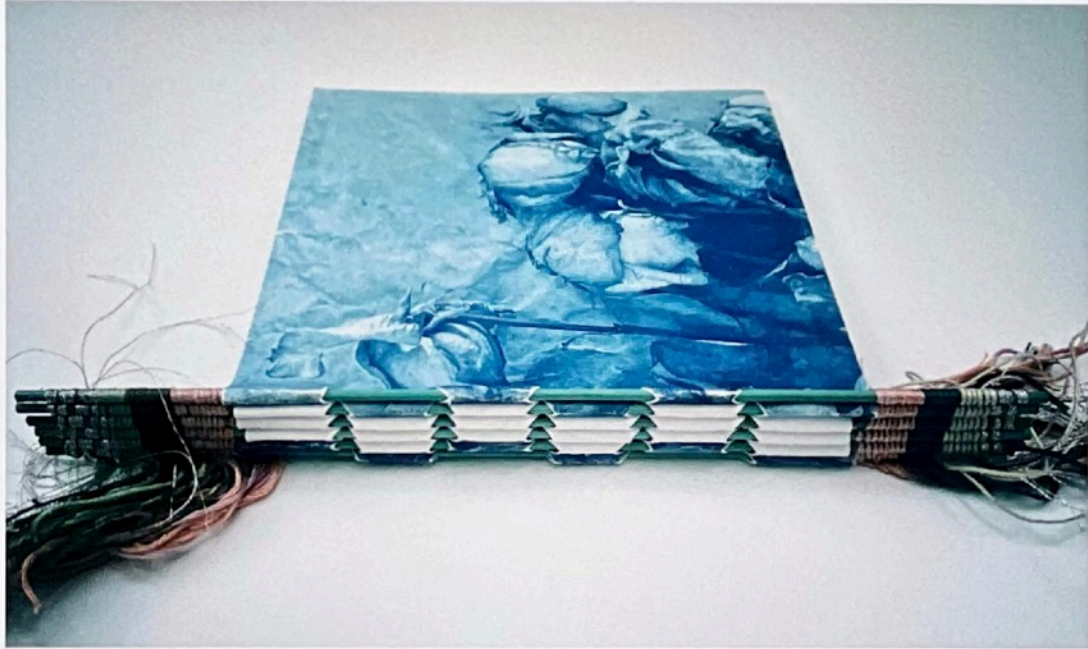


M ANALOG FOREVER

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Diana Bloomfield

Books as Sculpture

We go down our path of image-making, happy in the struggle of doing what we love to the best of our abilities, and somewhere along the way we hopefully grow and change for the better. We lose ourselves in something new or find a direction or calling that takes us down a new road with perhaps a new destination in mind. Sometimes, however, we do far more than that—we transform. The years and tidbits of knowledge we string together to form the career we relish in can often bring a new and profound aesthetic that maybe we never saw coming in the first place. This is one of the places that enables artists to create something that maybe they didn't have in mind before, but comes with the pleasure of knowing that they are onto something that has broadened their process and style. That is where Diana Bloomfield comes in. As a photographic artist realizing her vision in platinum/palladium, cyanotype, and gum printing techniques, it is with a newer process of creating unique photobooks as three-dimensional and tactile versions of former two-dimensional works that we find more inspiration and fascination. What becomes abundantly clear in learning about this incredibly creative process comes to us in the story about Diana's upbringing and journey into the

arts. This is a journey as unique as the objects she fabricates.

Raised in North Carolina like her parents and grandparents before her, Diana spent her early years growing up with art being included in every aspect of her school curriculum. In addition, inspiration often came by way of her family, quite notably her mother. While not an artist by trade, Diana's mother was immensely talented in the areas of cooking, sewing and creative thinking—always full of energy and ideas and creative ways to get something accomplished without cost to the family. Her father too had been a photographer in the Air Corps, though it was not something that he often mentioned. It was much later, however, that Diana learned of and saw many of his large-format photographs taken of her mother, out of his love for her and the medium itself, without any thought or plan or ever exhibiting them. Later in life, it was Diana's realization that creativity was simply an everyday facet of her environment, "I think the artistic aspect of what I do is just kind of woven into my days—in everything I do."

Even with a creative environment surrounding her, Diana never entertained

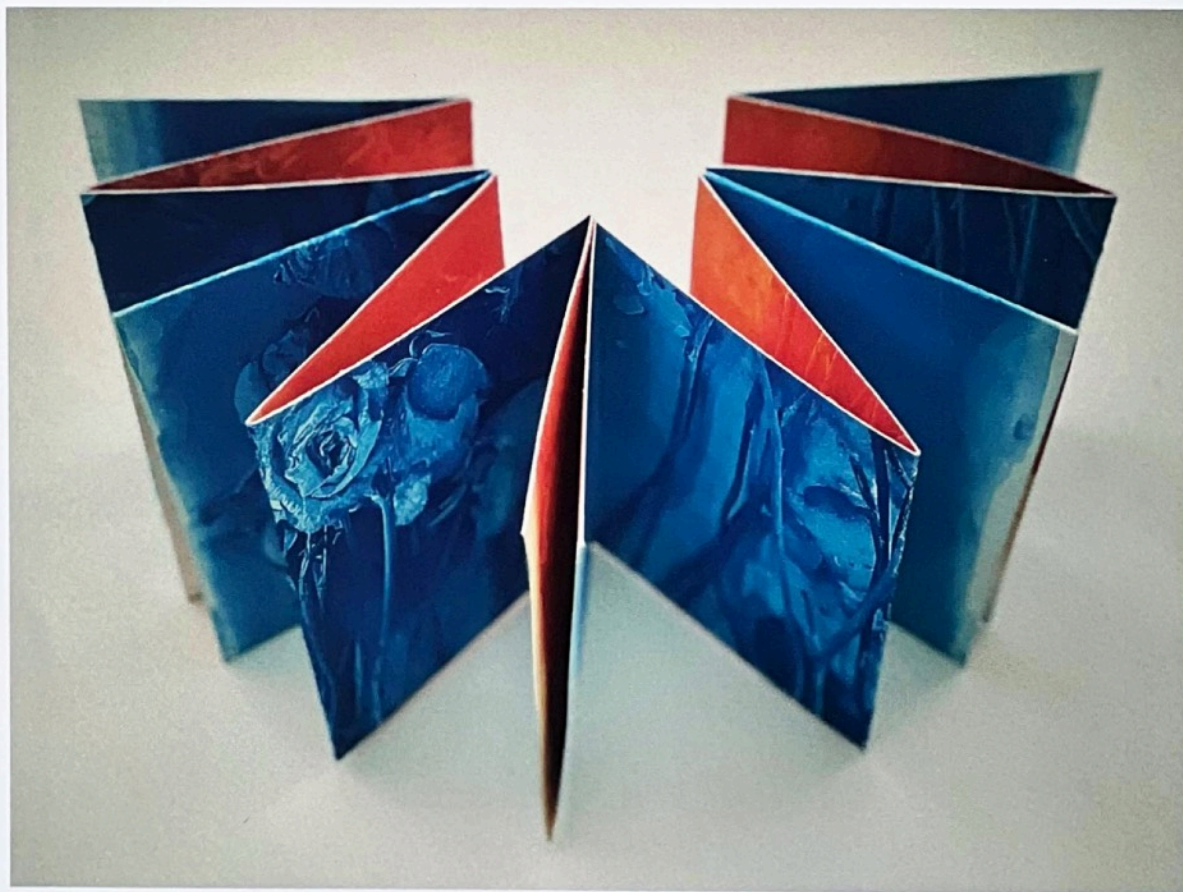
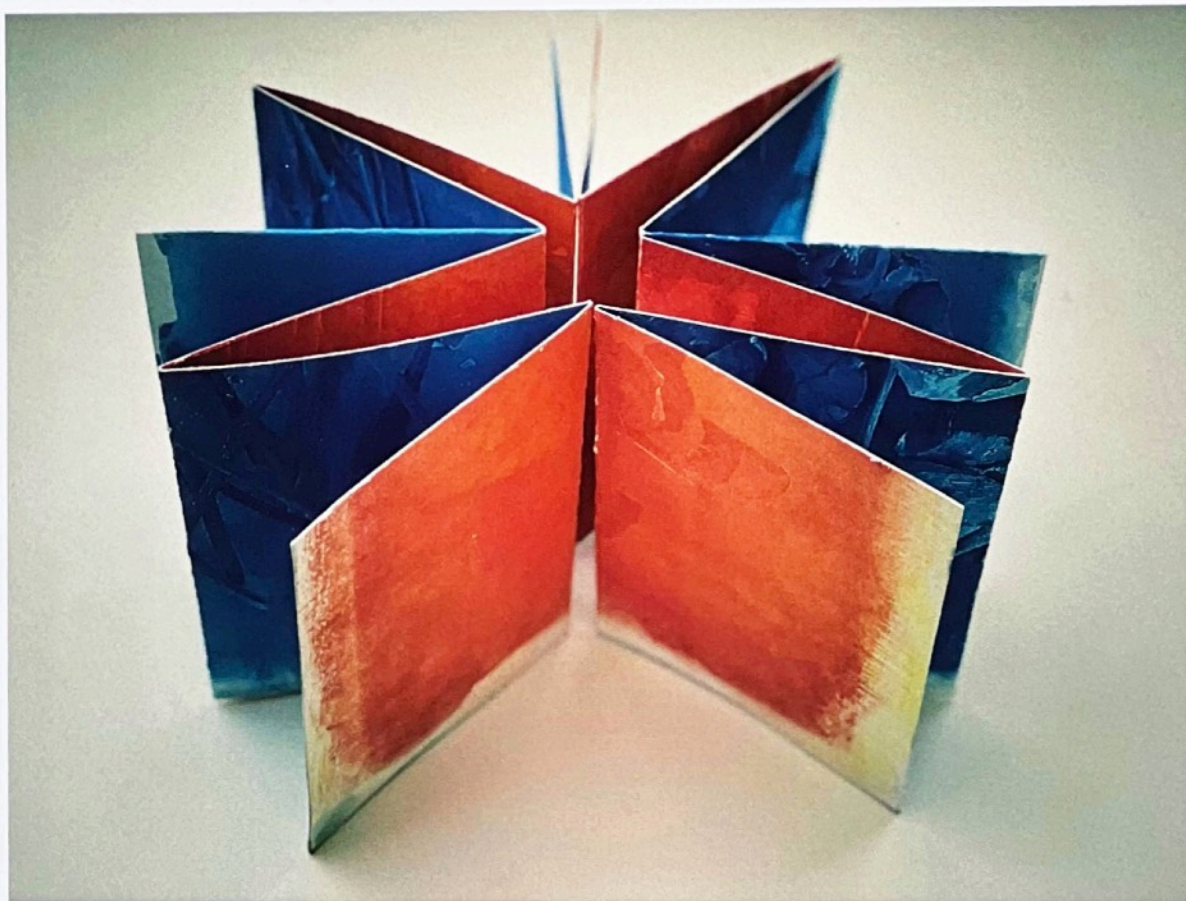
BY MICHAEL KIRCHOFF



the idea of entering the arts, and instead pursued a different route in school. However, after reaching her undergraduate degree in English Literature and a Masters in English Lit and Creative Writing, she soon realized that telling her stories would be much easier and far less lonely if she told them in pictures. It was upon leaving an administrative assistant position at Princeton University that she was gifted a small 35mm Rollie camera, and felt it necessary to learn how to properly use it. Diana promptly enrolled in a beginner photography class at the nearby Bucks County Community College in

Pennsylvania, and though not knowing what it even meant, enrolled in a Large Format Photography course. Realizing that it was a great decision to dive into photography head first like this, Diana soon learned the value of using large format and the need to get things as perfect as possible in-camera. An early series of large format street portraits quickly honed her skills with this newfound tool and medium that she had fallen in love with.

Admitting that she never cared much for using a traditional darkroom, it was a gallery visit to view some platinum/palladium

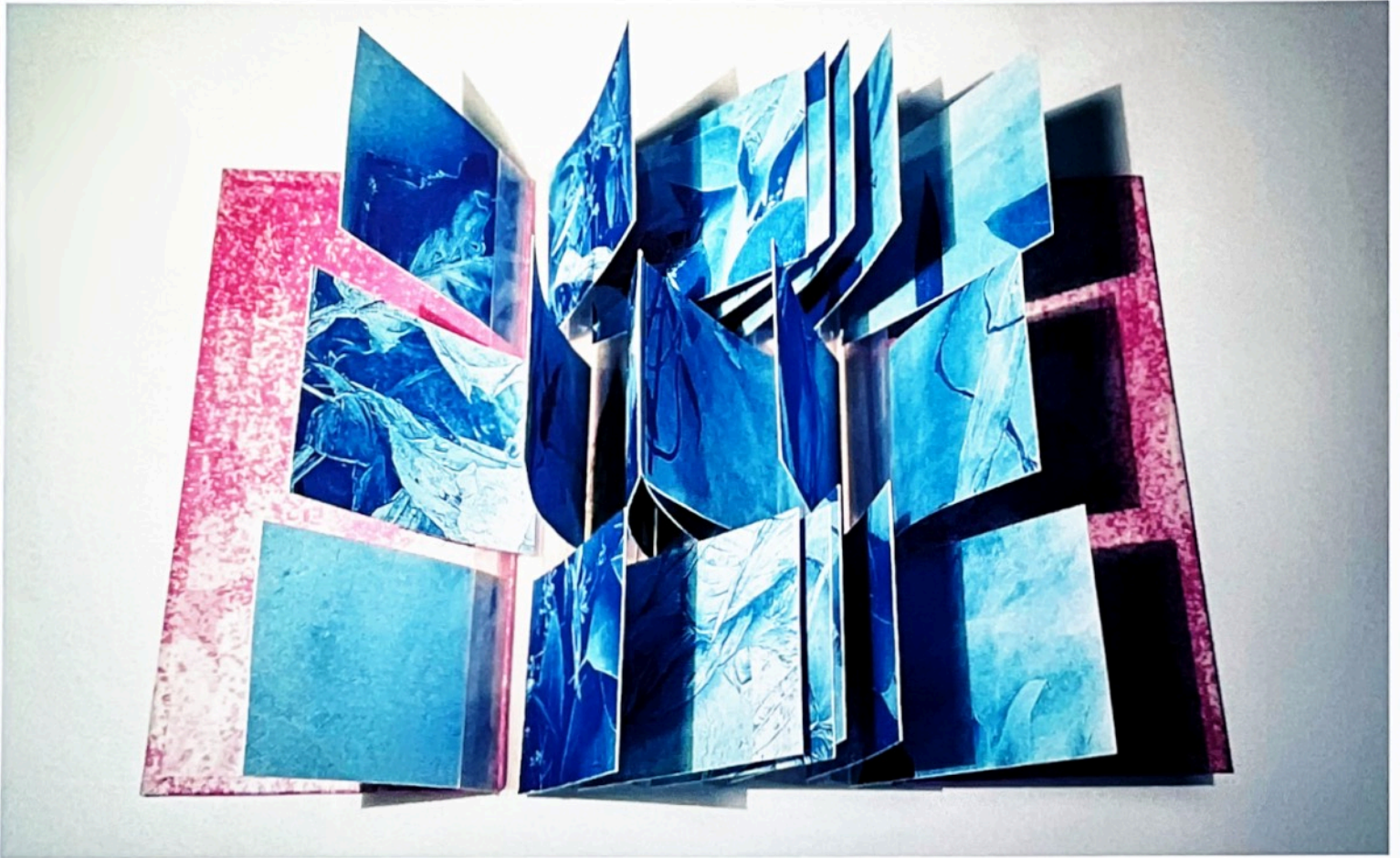


prints that opened Diana's eyes to a world of printmaking more to her liking. Jumping in again feet first, she tried her best to teach herself this process on her own, before taking a class at the International Center of Photography in NYC. This became her new way of working for many years before the pull to add color in her repertoire became apparent. Staying in the historical process realm, Diana began using cyanotype over her platinum prints, liking the appearance of split-toning. Years later, more color was desired in her process and she began experimenting with gum printing, followed soon after with tricolor gum printing. Much

experimentation and even more mistakes later, she eventually perfected the process to her satisfaction, and even now imparts her knowledge to workshop students on how to avoid making the same mistakes that she had.

After learning these inherently difficult processes over time, Diana can now state that the journey from the start of your vision doesn't matter as much as what the final print looks like. Getting there is all that ultimately matters, "I just want the images, mine or anyone else's I view—to be compelling, relatable, interpretive, evocative and memorable." Also, not wanting to





pigeonhole herself with the tools used to make the images, she relies on cameras as varied as large format, medium format, pinhole, digital, or even using photograms—whatever it takes to best serve the story she is trying to tell. Creating a hybrid workflow in her process only makes sense in this day and age, realizing that, “It’s a great time to be an ‘alternative process’ photographer/printer, with the ability to combine 19th-century techniques with 21st-century technology.”

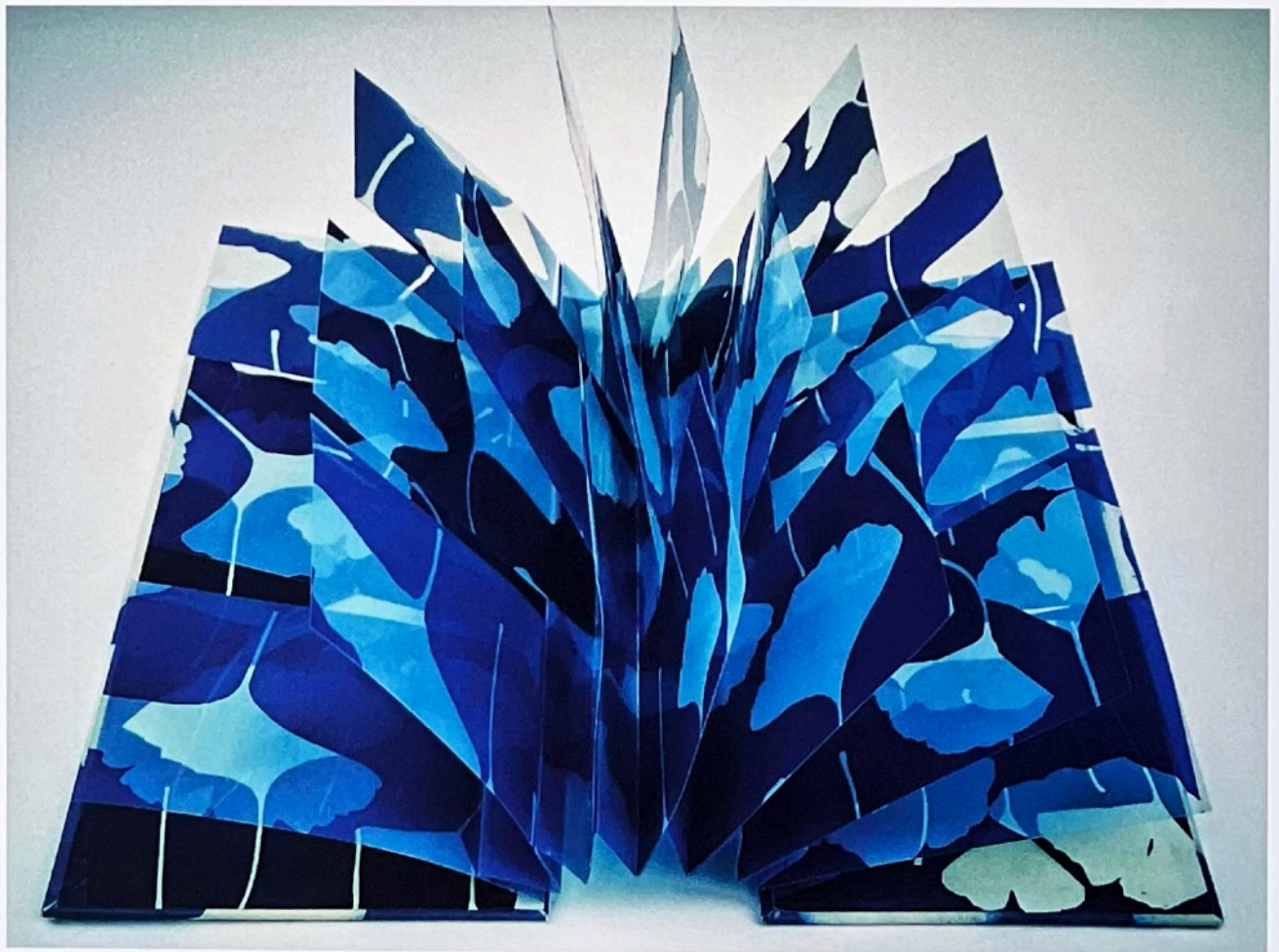
Diana’s latest art offerings, and the work we have chosen to highlight here, come in the form of Diana’s stellar handmade books, created from her beautiful prints. Stemming from a “365 Day Project”, started in 2018, known as *The Old Garden*, it was the want and

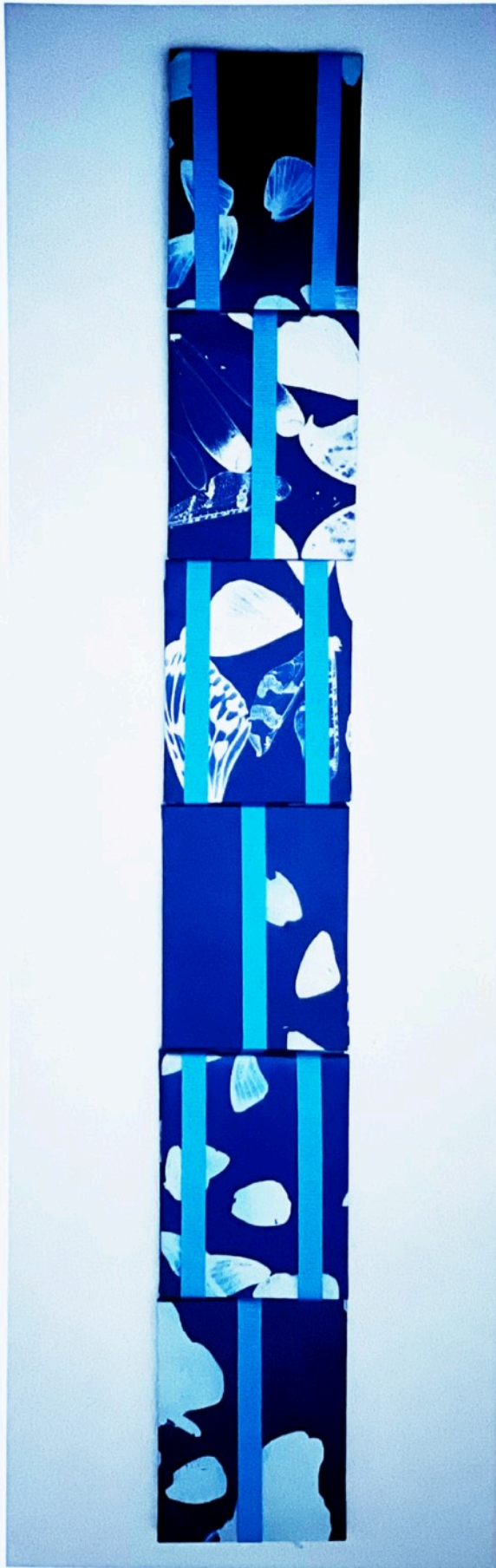
need to fulfill the making of a new piece of art every day that her friend Stephen Sheffield had inspired her to take on. Along the way, after being given some expired Kodak paper, lumen printing became a part of this project to round out the cyanotype and gum printing already in use. This desire to create some new and tangible pieces of three-dimensional art kept things fresh for Diana. “I really started the books initially to do something new and to keep from repeating myself. I love the idea that a piece of 2-D art can become a whole other piece of 3-D art, by simply folding, cutting, stitching, or gluing.”

Feeling liberated with the act of making a perfectly good print and then taking a knife to it and folding it up—literally and



DIANA BLOOMFIELD





figuratively deconstructing it—creates an object that offers multiple meanings. Books as sculpture have the benefit of creating a whole new conversation of what photography can be as an art form, and it is in this process that we begin to see the medium differently. “I love the whole idea of books as sculpture. Sometimes, too, photographers—especially those of us who print in ‘alternative’ processes—we so easily obsess over what we do, the art becomes very precious and fragile, and people shouldn’t touch it. We immediately put it behind glass and it becomes this beautiful thing, but totally untouchable. So, for me, the books allow those prints and images to breathe. They’re more intimate and tactile. I love making them, and I appreciate that people seem to relate to them.”

One final note worth making, and one that follows and punctuates Diana’s story and storytelling, is the illuminating fact that that person for whom she was working for at Princeton, and gave her that career starting camera—he’s now her husband—and just as supportive and generous as ever. Who doesn’t love an outcome like that?! *~end~*

