“Every photograph is a certificate of presence,” wrote Roland Barthes in his 1980 book *Camera Lucida*, the final and most personal of his many engagements with the medium. The presences Barthes had in mind—an ancient house, a table set for dinner, strangers and loved ones—were at once corporeal and temporal, representing specific moments of physical tangibility fixed precisely in time by light and chemistry. The elegant, conceptually expansive work of Alison Rossiter also conjures extraordinary ordinary presences, but of a very different kind. Since 2007, the artist has been collecting expired vintage photographic paper and developing it using basic black-and-white processes.

The cameraless pictures she produces may be depopulated, but they are by no means without subjects. The interactions between her latent materials and their darkroom baths yield a surprisingly rich range of abstract imagery, revealing time’s traces inscribed on the very skins of the photographs themselves.

At Yossi Milo Gallery, the works in Rossiter’s show “Substance of Density 1918–1948” are made with rare papers dating to the three decades named in the exhibition title, a period that saw important cultural movements and the creation of indelible artistic artifacts, as well as social and economic chaos and the unprecedented carnage of modern global warfare. (It is only a dark coincidence that the first year of Rossiter’s date frame is that of the eruption of the Spanish flu, the last pandemic, which infected roughly one-third of the world’s population, killing as many as fifty million people in a span of two years.) Framed both singly and in carefully conceived multipart compositions, the pieces are all titled after the expiration dates of the substrates on which they are made. The oldest papers here appear in Eastman Kodak Azo, expired March 1918, processed 2010 (#5) and (#2). The former is a misty gray and mottled, while the latter is night-dark and punctuated by nebular patches of white. Both sheets went bad the same month that Leon Trotsky was put in charge of the Red Army; the silent comedy *The Bell Boy*, starring Fatty Arbuckle and Buster Keaton, was released; and painter Elaine de Kooning was born. It’s impossible to know precisely what external events during their lifespan produced the effects that Rossiter’s intervention calls forth, and it’s that sense of time-traveling contingency that gives the project so much of its interest. The full results of her encounters with her materials remain uncertain until the moment of truth.

Though the specific mechanics of the processing were for the most part obscured, Rossiter’s darkroom procedures did show through in a few cases, particularly in Gevaert Gevaluxe Velours, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1930s, processed 2020 (#1) and (#2), where the stark division between dark and light suggests a strategic limiting of the paper’s contact with the developer. Large single-panel images like these are hung on their own, while the smaller and more numerous multisheet pieces are organized into a pair of salon-style suites. At first glance, Rossiter’s presentation might seem like a traditional exegesis on the monochrome. The three-by-three grid Density 1936, 2020, with its eight flat-white sheets balanced by a single beige rectangle at the top left of the composition—a slab of gingerbread awaiting its vanilla frosting—called to mind the paintings of Robert Ryman. But most works on view are built from papers of more variegated tones, the range of which is surprisingly extensive given the generally narrow palette available to them—blacks in various degrees of saturation; grays from charcoal to gunmetal; whites, taupes, and creams. They also bear gorgeously subtle variations, as in the diptych Density 1941, 1945, 2020, which evokes night-vision images of a forest, or Density 1930s, 2018, in which each of two differently sized panels contains a central patch of light progressively swallowed around the edges by a dappled veil. Here, as elsewhere, Rossiter’s recuperative gesture placed two opposed moods into poignant, productive dialogue, evoking the melancholy of desuetude, yes, but also the possibility that something might yet still be recovered from what at first seems to be nothing at all.

https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/202006/alison-rossiter-83308
JTF (just the facts): A total of 46 black and white photographic works, framed in white and unmatted, and hung against white and grey walls in the East and West gallery spaces. All of the works consist of gelatin silver prints, in groups ranging from single prints to as many as 9 prints framed together, made in 2010, 2019, and 2020. The papers themselves date from 1918 to 1948. Physical sizes of the framed works range from roughly 13×9 to 71×54 inches (or the reverse), and all of the works are unique. (Installation shots below.)

Comments/Context: Unlike almost any other contemporary photographer working today, Alison Rossiter places photographic paper itself at the heart of her work. Imagine a painter whose paintings result from various examples of raw stretched canvas, or a poet whose poetry is rooted in the variations in blank sheets of paper – Rossiter is this kind of photographer, an artist whose journey is thoroughly enmeshed in the very materials from which the medium is made.

But unlike the raw materials of most other artistic mediums, light sensitive photographic paper has the potential to tell a surprisingly wide range of invisible stories, via the latent imagery inadvertently captured on the paper over the years since it was manufactured. There might have been light leaks into the box or envelope where the paper was stored; the chemicals might have degraded or decayed over time; mold or mildew might have gotten into the box and mixed with the surface of the paper; or individual sheets might have been spilled on, or touched by a previous photographer, leaving behind stains or fingerprints. While not exactly endless, there are enough possibilities for contamination that each sheet (especially sheets of decades or even centuries old and expired paper) carries its own potential residues and mysteries, with chance, time, and environment combining to generate unexpected outcomes.
With digital technologies (both for photographic image capture and printing) becoming overwhelmingly dominant, it is natural that older chemical-based processing techniques have lost ground, and in a strangely backward way, this has likely been positive for Rossiter, as more obsolete papers have come out from their hiding places. Rossiter sources her papers from all over, particularly from other photographers and by scouring Internet marketplaces like eBay, but with each passing year, the scarcity of these expired papers increases. Given this constraint, Rossiter has to be careful with each batch of antique paper, making the most of its unique characteristics.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can now see that Rossiter’s art resolves itself into two separate groups, essentially based on what she finds in her tests of the papers. If the papers are more recent, less scarce, and are found to be generally without unexpected eccentricities, Rossiter has used them for more interventionist works, where she selectively develops the papers to create her abstractions. Over the years, she has experimented with pours, dips, and other techniques, creating both hard edged geometries and more sinuous curves, which she has then built up into pairs, grids, and other arrangements. But if the papers are older, scarcer, and are found to have some quirks, she has been much more hands off, allowing the inherent qualities in the paper to come forth during development. And again, she has then arranged these ghosts and residues into larger, multi-part compositions that expand, explore, and celebrate their visual possibilities.

Encouraged to respond to the works of Anna Atkins for a group show at the New York Public Library in 2018 (reviewed here), Rossiter dug back into her horde of photographic papers to unearth the very earliest examples. This effort ultimately came together a series of 12 works (each consisting of between 4 and 7 individual prints), made from papers dating between 1898 and 1918. The works were acquired by the library, and will be published as a photobook entitled *Compendium 1899-1918* by Radius Books (here) later this year. This gallery show picks up where that first project left off, exploring the block of time between 1918 and 1948. Dates matter to Rossiter, so her compositions are built from papers from the same year or the same few years, giving them each a particular historical resonance; in the back gallery, the works are arranged in chronological order around the walls, further highlighting the idea of a time line progression.

Most of Rossiter’s compositions here are primarily and fundamentally geometric. The individual component sheets range in color from white to black, with intermediate steps at various shades of grey, as well as cream, light yellow, muted gold, and light tan. The developed sheets (of different sizes, some of them test strips or smaller rectangles) are then gathered into groups and arranged into clusters of color blocks. In most of these works, there is little or no latent imagery that
catches our eyes – there may be some edge darkening or ghosting, or some subtle color variation across the sheet to some extent, but in general, the color of the blocks is relatively flat. Rossiter then uses these sheets as the raw material for compositional exercises, particularly testing the visual weight and balance of different potential combinations.

Rossiter is meticulous in working through the possible permutations. With two sheets, the blocks can be the same size or unbalanced, side by side or atop one another, both the same color or opposing colors. With three sheets, the color arrangements can now include three colors, and the scale choices of the clusters can include three different sizes. With four sheets, grids make an entry (both equal and unbalanced), and now four colors and four sizes can wander or repeat. And this iterative experimentation continues all the way up to as many as nine prints, where a 3×3 grid of sheets can be all white, variations of white and cream, and interrupted by a single golden block. In general, the compositions feel carefully built, the proportions and colors of the blocks (a big black sheet balanced by smaller ones of lighter colors, or a checkerboard pattern, or a tall thin central strip flanked by paired stacks) methodically arranged to create alternate forms of abstract push and pull.

But it’s when Rossiter discovers papers that have latent imagery that the compositions move from strict studies of color and form into something far more poetic. Ghostly rectangles (from test sheets) float atop mottled and spackled backdrops. Faint vertical lines (made from the misaligned openings of envelopes) zip through the darkness. Soft crackles blossom along the edges of sheets like ice crystals or Queen Anne’s lace. Moldy clouds are interrupted by pinprick points of lights like stars. Chemical stains and drips turn yellow into watery brown and grey into pewter blue. And any number of billowy auras, cracks, flares, tunnels, frostings, spores, glows, and mysterious hovering rectangles coalesce from nothingness, their subtle associations and almost narratives reaching back into the misty past.

The show also includes three extra large pieces, made from an oversized roll of Gevaert Gevaluxe Velours paper from the 1930s that Rossiter acquired from the Belgian artist/photographer Pierre Cordier. Rossiter tried three different approaches with these cut sheets: developing half the paper (thereby creating a bisected composition of dark/light), developing two thirds of the paper, and developing the entire paper (all dark). From the ripples and folds in the residue, it appears the paper may have been stored as a crumpled roll for quite some time, and the sheer scale of the paper changes the viewing dynamic from close in, intimate viewing to a more muscular wall-filling presence.

This is the kind of show that stubbornly resists digital viewing, however excellent the online reproductions and installation shots may be – the works require close inspection to catch all their nuances, and their physicality (and the history that it represents) is an integral part of the experience. It is a body of work that quietly simmers with sophistication, and rewards those willing to give it a deliberate and measured look.

**Collector’s POV:** The works in this show generally range from $11000 to $22000 each, with the very largest prints priced at $65000 each. Rossiter’s work has little secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

Alison Rossiter has always worked with an acute understanding of the ways history and material circumstance can shape what is aesthetically possible. The expired photographic papers she collects and processes are curious aesthetic objects in this regard, bearing as they do the lasting effects of industrial production, the accidents of time, and the inevitability of decay. That she succeeds in allowing the life of her materials to “express” themselves, to create disarmingly beautiful abstractions without recourse to either camera or celluloid, is a demonstration of just how malleable the idea of photography can still be.

In Substance of Density 1918-1948 Rossiter has continued her practice of processing expired photographic papers with liquid developer to reveal whatever latent imagery has developed in them over time. She then often groups together sheets from the same box or from several, creating both precise grids and undulating, almost rhythmic, assemblages. Much of the work evokes different moments in the history of painterly and photographic abstraction as it developed in Europe. An echo of Aleksandr Rodchenko’s end-of-the-line monochromes here, a touch of Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematist renewal of abstraction there, with a suggestion of László Moholy-Nagy’s photograms for good measure.

The initial encounter with Rossiter’s abstractions can feel strange and subdued, as if the historical framework of the show were stifling its expressivity—most of the work seems nearly monochrome, the abstractions almost rudimentary. First impressions such as these, however, are quick to give way to more subtle appreciations of the
unique textures and rich tonalities that Rossiter coaxes out of the papers she has saved from the indifference of history.

The consistent strength of her work is the ease with which it produces abstractions that seem simple and familiar, only to reveal shortly thereafter the complex chain of accident, chance, and decision-making at its source. The papers she uses each have their own unique provenance, beginning with the manufacturer and then working their ways through countless owners and sets of circumstances for storage. Her typical practice of titling works by listing the paper’s name, year of expiration, and year when she processed it (which the current show deviates from, though without discarding the historical focus) has the effect of compressing the paper’s history while keeping it close at head, ready to expand with each new inquiry.

*Density 1947 (2020)* brings together in a neat grid six pieces of gelatin silver paper drawn from the same box, each exhibiting different levels of oxidation and loss of light sensitivity. The almost uniform copper and gold silhouetting at the edges of five sheets, which frames the nearly bleach-white quality of the papers after Rossiter processes them, is contrasted with the more advanced oxidation of the sixth and topmost sheet from the box, which absorbed the brunt of time’s weathering effect. The result seems an almost organic abstraction, a static-like ripple of gold and white shimmering across the paper.

The three largest works in the show, each titled *Gevaert Gevaluxe Velours, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1930s, processed 2020*, are single sheets of the same rare and highly prized paper, produced in the 1930’s by Belgian manufacturer Gevaert Photo-Producten NV. Its coarse, almost sandpaper-like surface (a kind of tactility Rossiter has likened to that of Velcro) was considered a major achievement in the production of photographic paper, allowing for a special depth and quality of tone. The size of the sheets (two are roughly 64” x 49” and the third 54” x 53”) means they were rolled for storage. Having gone unused, the decades they spent rolled up resulted in the cracking of the emulsion which coats the paper. Through Rossiter’s controlled processing of each sheet, in which she lowers only a section into the chemical solution at a given time, the impressions left by years of neglect are transformed into ethereal abstractions that, x-ray-like, reveal the x-ray-like wear and tear of a life otherwise hidden.

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Rossiter’s is a unique way of bypassing more traditional photographic processes while staying rooted to the essence of the medium. The exposures are neither happening in response to a momentarily pleasing or compelling arrangement of light and shadow, nor are they being carefully devised in the more controlled space of the studio. No, the exposures that Rossiter is working with have happened over decades, a century in some cases, and without the guidance of a creative consciousness. In this equation the box functions as a camera otherwise would, providing an “apparatus,” or a container, through which responsiveness to light can be registered and an image, however fragmentary, can develop. Rossiter steps in at the decisive moment (one that Henri Cartier-Bresson could scarcely have imagined) and finishes what had been up to that point an impersonal and even random process, giving it the stamp of authorship, the structure of intent.

Look at the two sheets of paper in *Density 1930s* (2018). Through a kind of organic metaphor, both underwent a decades-long process of molding—a literal rotting from disuse and neglect. That such a thorough undermining of the paper’s integrity has brought about not its final ruin, but its final use as a vehicle for form, is something of a minor miracle. Such is the electric current running beneath the surface of Rossiter’s work, a glimmering suggestion that for some inexplicable reason history has conspired to see these materials survive and these abstractions realized.

https://brooklynnrail.org/2020/04/artseen/Alison-Rossiter-Substance-of-Density-1918-1948
The 21st-century rise of digital photography has had people dismantling their darkrooms and getting rid of obsolete printing materials, including light-sensitive paper. But one photographer’s trash is another’s treasure. Since 2007, Alison Rossiter has compulsively collected packages of expired papers, predominantly on eBay, and revealed the accidental compositions wrought on them by atmospheric pollution, mold, fingerprints and stains.

Some of her camera-less results are included in "Substance of Density 1918–1948" on view by appointment only at Yossi Milo Gallery, in New York’s Chelsea (and slated to open to the public when restrictions stemming from the health crisis are lifted). Many of these astonishingly beautiful abstractions, in a nuanced range of tones from white to black, call to mind paintings by such artists as Robert Ryman, Agnes Martin and Sean Scully. For this show, Rossiter has used papers dating to the end of World War I through World War II and on to the creation of Israel as an independent state. In her poetic conceptualization, as she sees it, something of this particular time in history has left its shadow on these papers. The works in the show are accompanied by a time line of events that happened during these years, which, Rossiter suggests, “is enough to place you in those decades, and then you can bring your own imagination.”

The exhibition is part of Rossiter’s ongoing project to develop sheets from some 2,000 packages of paper she’s collected, dating to the 1890s through the 20th century. Examples from the earliest two decades were recently displayed at, and acquired by, the New York Public Library, which is co-publishing them this spring with the gallery and Radius Books in the monograph Compendium 1898–1919. Radius also published her first compilation from the project, Expired Paper, which Aperture named as one of the 10 best photo books of 2017.

For some of the pieces she made using the 1930s Gevaert Gevalux Velours paper — including Gevaert Gevalux Velours, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1930s, processed 2020 — Rossiter dipped only the lower section in developer, creating the suggestion of a horizon line.

“Alison collects the discarded, going back into history, and celebrates the physicality of her materials,” says Yossi Milo, the gallery’s eponymous founder, noting that her photographs are sought out by collectors of all stripes, as well as by curators from such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art, in New York; the National Gallery, in Washington, D.C.; and the Art Institute of Chicago. “Each of her unique works is a record and witness of the wear and tear of time.”

Rossiter, who was born in Mississippi in 1953 and studied photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology, discovered the potential of expired papers by chance 13 years ago. Buying old film online for photograms she was making, she received a box of paper from 1946 thrown in with her shipment. As a test, she ran a sheet from the center of the stack through darkroom chemicals. “If it was a good paper, it would
turn out to be a white sheet at the end, meaning there was no exposure,” Rossiter says. Instead, because of the sheet’s deteriorating emulsion, the process produced what looked like graphite rubbed over a rough surface. It had the ethereal quality of a Vija Celmins drawing of a night sky, and for Rossiter, it was a like a bolt of lightning.

“From what I saw, my hunch was that failure of the emulsion could be happening in every single package of old paper,” says Rossiter, who had spent two years volunteering in the Met’s photography conservation department. She has since dedicated her darkroom practice to uncovering the small miracles embedded in these materials, while always leaving some paper in each package to keep it “alive,” as she puts it, for future study by conservators. “It’s a history of the industry,” she says.

Density 1922 (2019) — titled, like all the works in the show, with the expiration date on the package of paper used — consists of a large off-white and a smaller black sheet positioned next to each other, the former containing a tilted rectangle of a brighter white the size of the black sheet. The work resulted from Rossiter’s observation in the dark room that the smaller sheet, a test print that had lain at an angle for almost a century on the stack of paper, had created an image on the top sheet akin to Kazimir Malevich’s Suprematist Composition: White on White (1918). She put the larger sheet in fixer, to maintain the whites, and developed the test print, which came out black because of the air that had seeped into the package over time.

For another grouping — which used papers from 1919 to 1923, the early years of the Bauhaus — Rossiter assembled a geometric patchwork of five rectangles in shades of black and white. “It looks like it could have been somebody’s homework project at the Bauhaus,” she says, noting the sooty smudges on one sheet. “Somebody took the thing out of the package and put it back for some reason. I come along, and it’s like forensic fingerprinting. It’s a communion of sorts, photographer to photographer, printer to printer.”

Rossiter doesn’t typically set out to echo modern and contemporary artists, but she likes the dialogue that often occurs organically. She remembers being inspired by a show at Matthew Marks of Ellsworth Kelly’s small black-and-white paper works from the 1950s. “I thought, this is exactly what I’m seeing in my papers,” she says. “Ellsworth Kelly has given me permission to put my little prints together and call that a piece of art.”

Although she considers most of her works to be found images and puts the whole sheet used for each in either developer or fixer, Rossiter
makes deliberate marks on some, especially when the paper is particularly special. Several pieces in the show are made from a wide roll of 1930s Gevaert Gevaluxe Velours, which was designed to look like velvet. The paper was passed down from one Belgian photographer to another, who saw Rossiter’s work and contacted her with a gift of half his roll.

For two 68-by-53-inch works, Rossiter wet the whole sheet with water but dipped just the lower sections in developer, thus creating implied horizon lines. In each, the bare creamy paper of the upper section reads as sky while the inky washes streaking across the lower half suggest an ethereal landscape at dusk. Those streaks reveal that the paper was unfurled and briefly exposed to daylight at some point in its history.

“Because I know the rarity of the paper and the fact that a man in Belgium sent it to me because he liked what I was doing with papers, this is hugely thrilling,” Rossiter says of the story embedded in these pieces. “It is the most exciting thing that has ever happened in this entire project for me.”
The Darkroom
by Alison Rossiter

WATCHING A photographic image appear in a developer tray during my first black-and-white photography class in 1970 in Banff, Alberta, transformed my future. I was seventeen years old and farther from my family home in Florida than I had ever been on my own. At the heart of the photography course was a large group darkroom, with a maze of black walls to keep light from reaching the interior. Red safelights were used inside, since photographic paper is not sensitive to that wavelength. I had stepped into a world of night for day.

Other darkrooms followed in succession through college and decades of photography jobs. When I was at the Rochester Institute of Technology, in upstate New York, many apartments in the neighborhood of the George Eastman Museum included a room dedicated to printing black-and-white photographs. They’d have an enlarger and a table draped with plastic to catch chemicals. In Montreal I made a darkroom in my apartment with a staple gun and a roll of rubbery black vinyl. The area was directly above a restaurant’s refrigeration system. To avoid vibrations of the enlarger while making an exposure, I had to wait for the compressor to shut off every fifteen minutes. I have processed papers at the photographic conservation darkroom at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and in countless bathrooms with towels stuffed under doors. Each darkroom has a distinct character, and it is fun to see how photographers solve common problems in their own ways. Having moved so many times, I don’t have a strong sense of belonging to a geographic place, but any darkroom feels like home.

MY WORK WITH old photographic papers began in 2007 with a box of Kodak Kodabromide E3, stamped with an expiration date of May 1946. It came as an unexpected gift from an eBay seller who added it to my purchase of outdated sheet film. The first print I developed, straight from the
package with no exposure to light, looked as if someone had rubbed graphite across the surface of a textured piece of white paper, not unlike a Vija Celmins drawing. Age had degraded the emulsion, giving the print a distinct pattern. I had stumbled upon a way to capture substantial imagery made by the passage of time and to record the deterioration of a manufactured product.

The prints I process often serendipitously resemble the work of other artists on a different scale. A tiny moldy sheet of paper looks like a Jackson Pollock painting. A light leak creates a gradation recalling a Mark Rothko canvas. Silver mirroring on a century-old sheet of photo paper looks like a Liz Deschenes piece. Frequently, I find geometric shapes in my expired-paper prints that remind me of photograms by László Moholy-Nagy. In other bodies of work, I selectively develop sections of a sheet, creating the illusion of volume with black lines and tonal areas. A grid of twenty abstract graphite drawings by Tony Smith, shown in a solo exhibition at Matthew Marks in 2008, led me to a series in which I brought together four prints on a board with a small gap between them. His adjacent pieces had suggested the continuation of imagery.

In Ellsworth Kelly’s small collages from the 1950s, I saw the beauty of a simple black placed next to a creamy white, and it reinforced my feeling that photographic tonalities can stand alone as imagery. The variation in blacks and whites that early photo papers produce is extraordinary. The beauty of maximum-density darks and minimum-density whites from 1930s papers is striking in particular. My series “Most and Last” consists of diptychs presenting the darkest shadows and cleanest highlights that different papers were capable of rendering. In the late 1890s, Johan August Strindberg made his “Celestographs” by putting light-sensitized glass plates in a tray of developer and exposing them to the starry sky. Papers manufactured in the late 1890s that I have processed resulted in images that are startlingly like his.

The old materials I use surprise me, and I’ve learned to pay close attention to them. Responding to the results in my developer tray, I wonder if digital photographers have an equivalent experience. Now that gelatin silver materials and processes have been largely replaced by digital technology, my practical knowledge of twentieth-century photography is a resource for twenty-first-century photographers.

Darkroom work is slow and solitary. The privacy in my current lab in the far corner of a basement allows me to think without interruption. The room is painted a soothing medium gray from a Kodak test patch. I don’t bring a phone, and I can’t hear anything on the other side of the door. Moving in the space with just a safelight is second nature. In the darkroom, I am confident in my actions, one thing leads to another, and chance is welcome. My entire photographic experience is at my fingertips in there. What more could I ask of a room?

Above, Agnès Czybora, expired December 1944, processed 2014, diptych, 10 by 16 inches. Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York.

Left, Gertrude Gezelle, Papier Velours, exact expiration date unknown, ca. 1930s, processed 2014, gelatin silver print, 14 by 11 inches. Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery.

Examples from Rossetter’s collection of expired photographic papers, ca. 1900–22. Courtesy the artist.
ALISON ROSSITER WINS SHPILMAN PHOTOGRAPHY PRIZE

The 2018 Shpilman International Prize for Excellence in Photography has been awarded to American artist Alison Rossiter. She was selected from a pool of sixty-six nominations from thirty-six international institutions, and will receive a $40,000 prize for the biannual award, dedicated this year to the idea of “The Last Photograph” and the role of cameras as information transmitters in the virtual age.

Rossiter was born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1953 and lives and works in New York. She trained in photography and worked as a photography conservator before beginning to make cameraless photo prints in the late 1990s. Her practice focuses on experimenting with expired photographic paper to create minimalist, abstract images. The jury noted Rossiter’s “originality and candor in both artistic practice and conceptual framework; her ability to find a new place for analog image-making in our digital era; her critical thinking about the material history of the photographic medium as an alternative global history; her commitment to the dire questions of the conditions of photography and its physical relation to the human body; and her uncompromising aesthetics, building a remarkably rich and continually evolving syntax within a few rigid coordinates.”

This year’s jury comprised Celina Lunsford, artistic director of Fotografie Forum, Frankfurt; Karolina Lewandowska, photography curator at Centre Pompidou, Paris; Falma Fshazi, former general director of COD Art Center, Tirana; Vardit Gross, director of ArtPort Residency Program, Tel Aviv; and Dr. Noam Gal, curator and head of the photography department, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The award was established in 2010 by the Israel Museum and Shpilman family to recognize original work in photography. Rafał Milach (Poland), Noémie Goudal (France), Dor Guez (Israel), and Ivan Boccara (Morocco) were given honorary mentions.
Alison Rossiter

‘Paper Wait’

Yossi Milo
245 10th Avenue, near 24th Street, Chelsea
Through May 2

Alison Rossiter’s project is conceptual abstraction par excellence since it relies as much on what we know, or what we are told about an object, as what we see. The first part of her process involves acquiring unexposed, expired photographic paper, generally from eBay. Then she pours liquid developer on the paper and exposes it to light. The results are abstract compositions that blur the boundaries between photography and painting. They look like photograms but also like graphite drawings or gray-scale versions of paintings by artists known for staining their canvases, like Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis. The current show also includes more ambitious constructions made from multiple sheets of paper that recall Ellsworth Kelly or Suzan Frecon compositions.

Ms. Rossiter’s work relies on chance, a method cherished by countless creators, including Dada and Fluxus artists, and the retrieval and recycling of ready-made materials. There are also dormant histories in the paper, however, which Ms. Rossiter reveals in the titles. The series “Latent Eastman Kodak Velox, expired May 1919, processed 2014” employs paper that expired just after World War I, while other works use papers with bold and curious names like “Haloid Military,” “Defender Argo” and “Agfa Cykora.”

Ms. Rossiter has grown more deft at coaxing a range of tonality and effects from the paper and at asserting the connection between technology, aesthetics and time. The demise of chemical photography becomes a metaphor for the fate of defeated and exhausted empires. But she also suggests that expired materials, like forgotten people, have poignant memories and stories to reveal.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER
Alison Rossiter creates painterly, abstract expressionist prints in her photographic series “Paper Wait.” Using the fundamentals of analog photography, the artist forges a dialogue between technology, process, the history of the medium and simple, raw materials. She dips found, vintage photographic papers into developing solution to coax out their past and the memory of former owners. With the onset of digital photography, the aspects of chance and happy accident have virtually disappeared from the medium; Rossiter aims to rediscover them. Her titles are purely descriptive — “Eastman Kodak Velox, expired 1922, processed 2013,” for example, or “Defender Argo, expired September 1911, processed 2014” — and, taken in sum, provide a photographic history lesson. Each photo carries the imprint of its first owner, brought to life by Rossiter. The works emerge from her hand with glowing tones and beautiful grain: pure, seductive standalone images that eliminate the photographed subject.
Allison Rossiter
The American photographer tracked down vintage sheets of photosensitive paper (some more than a hundred years old) and treated them with liquid developer to create the abstract, minimal photographs in her excellent new show. The images variously suggest scarred walls, marble slabs, rippling water, and storm clouds—some of the most sublime pieces suggest nothing more than the fugitive impression of breath. Even the largest and most geometric works have an ethereal quality, as if their dusty tones could be whisked away by the breeze. Through April 4. (Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., at 24th St. 212-414-0370.)