

Richmond Arts Review

RESEMBLANCE

BY MARK HARLEY



Michael Kolster, "Scott Mill Dam, Lynchburg", 2012. Archival pigment print from scanned ambrotype, 32" x 40".

The James River is the subject of [Michael Kolster's](#) most recent project, on view at [Page Bond Gallery](#), called *Down by the River: Exploring American Waterways 40 Years After the Clean Water Act*. To photograph the river for this project, Kolster uses a wet-plate collodion process, which, dating back to the 1850's, consists of a piece of glass coated in a thin layer of collodion, then promptly dipped into a silver nitrate solution. The photograph is then taken while the plate is still wet. Collodion, like the James River, is deeply rooted in Virginia's history, having been used in gunpowder, as well as adhesives for wounds, during the Civil War.

Kolster's photographs of our beloved river begin in the Blue Ridge Mountains, then head east, past the industrial remnants of Lynchburg, and eventually wind up in Richmond's James River Park System. Several of Kolster's images are presented in their original glass plate form in front of black velvet, revealing his photographic process, while others have been enlarged on paper, which highlights the immense detail offered by this one hundred and fifty year old method.



Randy Toy, "Xia Yu II," 2012. Ink and dry pigments on paper, 15" x 22 1/2".

Alongside Kolster's wet-plates is [Randy Toy](#)'s most recent work from his *Zhin-Tu Monoscape* series. Drawing from eastern philosophy, Toy's works on paper are ephemeral at first, but upon closer inspection begin to resemble the majestic, mountainous landscapes of fifteenth and sixteenth century Japanese paintings. The ink's thin, overlapping layers, and reaction to the paper surface, seem closely related to Kolster's glass-coating process. It is as if Toy has depicted one of Kolster's plates with the liquid-emulsion still shimmering, dripping across the glass's surface.

Since photography's first introduction in the nineteenth century, it has been in an increasingly complicated relationship with painting, specifically when it comes to both mediums' relationship with the landscape. What had previously taken painters weeks, even months to complete, took the nineteenth century photographer mere minutes. This quickness and precision offered by photography fueled debates that have continued into the twenty-first century regarding the photograph-as-art. These two exhibitions, on view until October 2nd, take an alternate approach and instead celebrate some rudimentary similarities between the two mediums.

