Photograph - Papaver Orientale

Object: Photograph
Place of origin: Great Britain (made)
Date: 1852-1854 (made)
Artist/Maker: Atkins, Anna, born 1799 - died 1871 (photographers)
Materials and Techniques: Cyanotype
Museum number: PH.381-1981

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level H, case EDUCATION, shelf 12.2

Public access description

As a botanist and early photographer, Anna Atkins quickly realised the benefit of using the cyanotype process to record specimens of plant life, such as this poppy. Cyanotype was invented by the astronomer Sir John Herschel in 1842. The following year, Atkins became the first person to print and publish a photographically illustrated book, British Algae, Cyanotype Impressions, part 1. To make a ‘photogram’ with the cyanotype process, the photographer laid an object on paper impregnated with iron salts, then exposed the paper to sunlight for a few minutes. When washed in water, the area where the plant had blocked the light remained white, but the area that was exposed came out a rich blue.

Descriptive line
Cyanotype print of a poppy.

Physical description
Blue and white photographic image (photogram) of a poppy

Dimensions
Height: 35 cm, Width: 24.2 cm

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Object history note
One of 160 plates removed in 1981 from a unique album, Cyanotypes of British and Foreign Flowering Plants, inscribed by the artist in 1854 as a gift to her family friend and collaborator, Anne Dixon, second cousin of the novelist Jane Austen. Provenance: The artist; Anne Dixon; Sotheby's Belgravia, London, October 28, 1981

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O91281/papaver-orientale-photograph-atkins-anna/