

Pinups, Photographs, Polaroids, and Printing Plates: Iterations in Robert Heinecken's Work Process

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As an artist, Robert Heinecken actively exploited both photographic and printmaking processes for their abilities to reproduce, reverse, resize, and repurpose images from American mass media. He was formally trained as a printmaker, and his oeuvre includes engravings, etchings, and offset lithographs. In the realm of photographic techniques, Heinecken worked in gelatin silver, dye-diffusion transfer, silver dye bleach, and digital printing. In both mediums, he was always ready to embrace new image-making technologies. Indeed, even a casual observation of Heinecken's body of work makes it clear that experimentation with a variety of image processes led to the rich diversity of appearances among his projects. Closer examination of his working methods reveals that throughout his experiments, Heinecken relied on graphic-design techniques he learned in graduate school, as well as a thorough understanding of graphic design's applications in advertising, to manipulate appropriated mass-media images into provocative conceptual works.

Heinecken received his master's degree in 1960 from the graphic-design division of the art department at the University of California, Los Angeles. His master's thesis, titled "A Record of Creative Work in the Field of Graphic Design," includes a list of works exhibited at his comprehensive exam: among them, magazine and newspaper advertisements, promotional pieces, and interpretive covers for printed publications.¹ The allusion in Heinecken's thesis title to the blending of creative work with the more typically commercial field of graphic design forecasts the way he would continue to employ his training in printmaking and graphic design as a foundation in his artistic career.

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For much of the twentieth century, prior to the integration of computers and digital imaging into graphic design, graphic reproduction required a combination of photographic and printmaking techniques in order for images and text to be printed together. Positive and negative images were produced using darkroom photography, and printed images and text fragments were literally cut and pasted onto *paste-up* boards. These boards were then photographed (which was referred to as *copy work*) to prepare photographic versions of pages of image and text suitable for printing. The photographic image was then converted to a plate to be printed. Each step required attention to detail, knowledge of materials, and craftsmanship, and the steps had to be followed in a specific sequence in order to produce the desired result. By the time he finished graduate school, Heinecken was well versed in this procedure, and possessed the skills required to execute each step. Over the course of his career he continued to hone those skills and apply that knowledge to developing his thoughtful, multistep working processes.

The Robert Heinecken Archive at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, holds more than ninety boxes of archive materials and more than five hundred works of art. A significant portion of the archive is comprised of project-related materials that document Heinecken's work from the 1960s to the 1990s. Among them are carefully collected magazine pages, photographic work prints, hand-drawn sketches, annotated mock-ups, lithographic negatives, and printing plates.

An in-depth visual examination of the project materials of five works in the archive provided the opportunity to unravel Heinecken's working methods. This essay focuses on the materials and processes of Heinecken's *Refractive Hexagon* (1965), *Are You Rea* (1964–68), *Cream Six* (1970), *Tuxedo Striptease* (1984), and *Recto/Verso* (1988). These five pieces are representative of significant bodies of work in Heinecken's oeuvre that are related by method: gelatin silver puzzles, gelatin silver photo-linen works, gelatin silver photograms, offset photolithographs, dye-diffusion transfer prints, and silver dye bleach photograms.

The individual works investigated here are well documented in the Archive by project materials and in Heinecken's own words in lecture notes; they thus offer a reliable introduction to the variety of materials and techniques he used.

GELATIN SILVER PUZZLES

When Heinecken started working in photography in the early 1960s, the principal fine-art photographic process was negative-to-positive printing on black-and-white gelatin silver paper. Gelatin silver photographs are composed of silver image particles embedded in a transparent gelatin binder layer on a paper support.

Among Heinecken's earliest photographic works are his innovative photo-sculptures and puzzles, which involved adhering photographic image fragments to three-dimensional shapes, as he did with *Refractive Hexagon*. What follows here (and in subsequent passages) is an outline of the steps the artist followed in the creation of a work; these analyses of his processes are based on the visual examination of project materials and final works in the Heinecken Archive.

Refractive Hexagon (plate 17)

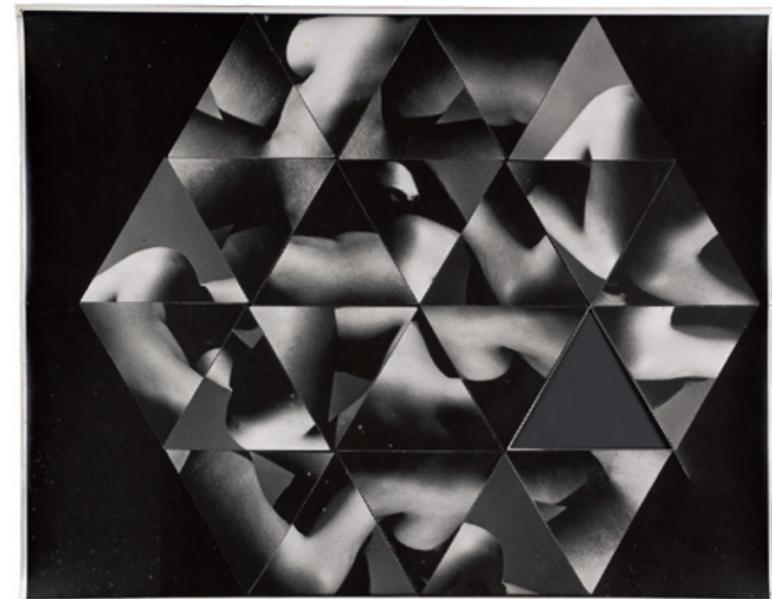
Working Process:

1. printed a gelatin silver photograph from a negative of a female nude (an image made by Heinecken)
2. cut equilateral triangles out of the photograph (fig. 1)
3. photographed the triangular image fragments
4. printed a gelatin silver photograph of the triangular fragments from the negative produced in step 3 (fig. 2)
5. cut out the twenty-four triangular fragments from the photograph made in step 4
6. adhered the photographic triangles to equally sized Masonite triangles (¼ inch thick)
7. varnished the photographic image surfaces
8. arranged the triangular "puzzle pieces" in the shape of a hexagon, in a customized wooden tray (on a label attached to the underside of the tray Heinecken noted: "No particular arrangement is necessary")

The basic procedure of Heinecken's puzzle work is easy to infer. However, in the case of *Refractive Hexagon*, the materials indicate an intermediate step that is not implied when looking at the final work—that is, step 3: *rephotographing* the triangle image fragments cut out of the initial photograph. Heinecken could just as easily



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All images illustrated with this essay are from the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson. Robert Heinecken Archive.

1. *Multiple Solution Puzzle* (1965) work print

2. *Refractive Hexagon* (1965; plate 17) work print with one triangle fragment cut out

have photographed the finished fragments *after* they were attached to Masonite, but the archival evidence suggests that was not the sequence here. By photographing the image fragments, Heinecken created a negative that could be used to print multiple images of the triangles, as often as he wanted and at any size. This allowed him to easily repeat the same image content in more than one puzzle. While *Refractive Hexagon* consists of twenty-four unique triangle puzzle pieces, *Kaleidoscopic Hexagon #1* (in the CCP collection) consists of six puzzle pieces: three pairs, each representing the same elements—a breast in profile, the back of a leg, and crossed arms. The three triangle image fragments that are repeated in *Kaleidoscopic Hexagon #1* also appear in *Refractive Hexagon*, where each is included only once.

GELATIN SILVER PHOTO-LINEN WORKS

In addition to printing gelatin silver images on paper, from the late 1960s and into the 1970s Heinecken created gelatin silver images on textile supports. The textile he used was Argenta Photo-Linen,² a material reported to have been first introduced at the 1963 Photokina—the biennial trade fair held in Cologne for the photo- and imaging industry. Contemporary accounts described this material as being processed and handled just as other gelatin silver enlarging papers, and available in standard paper sizes from 5 by 7 inches (12.7 by 17.8 cm) up to 20 by 24 inches (50.8 by 61 cm), and in 50-inch (127 cm) rolls from 33 to 330 feet (10 to 100 m) long.³

Image sources for Heinecken's works on photo-linen included negatives purchased from Hollywood mail-order companies, pages from pornographic magazines, and negatives borrowed from other artists. The figures in Heinecken's gelatin silver photo-linen images are often life-size or slightly smaller. These works tend to include the addition of hand-coloring applied with chalk, graphite lines that define or enhance the outline of image content,⁴ and washes of white acrylic paint, as in *Cream Six*.

Cream Six (plate 63)

Working Process:

1. contact printed a 35 mm roll of gelatin silver negatives depicting images from pages in pornographic magazines
2. selected three images to use
3. printed positive gelatin silver images on transparent supports for each negative
4. printed multiple variations of gelatin silver photographs using the transparencies created in step 3 to make negative print images (fig. 3)
5. created a mock-up of the final work (fig. 4)
6. printed enlarged gelatin silver images on Argenta Photo-Linen (six total)
7. stapled the gelatin silver images on photo-linen to wooden stretchers
8. enhanced the image content with white acrylic paint, graphite lines, and green and red chalk

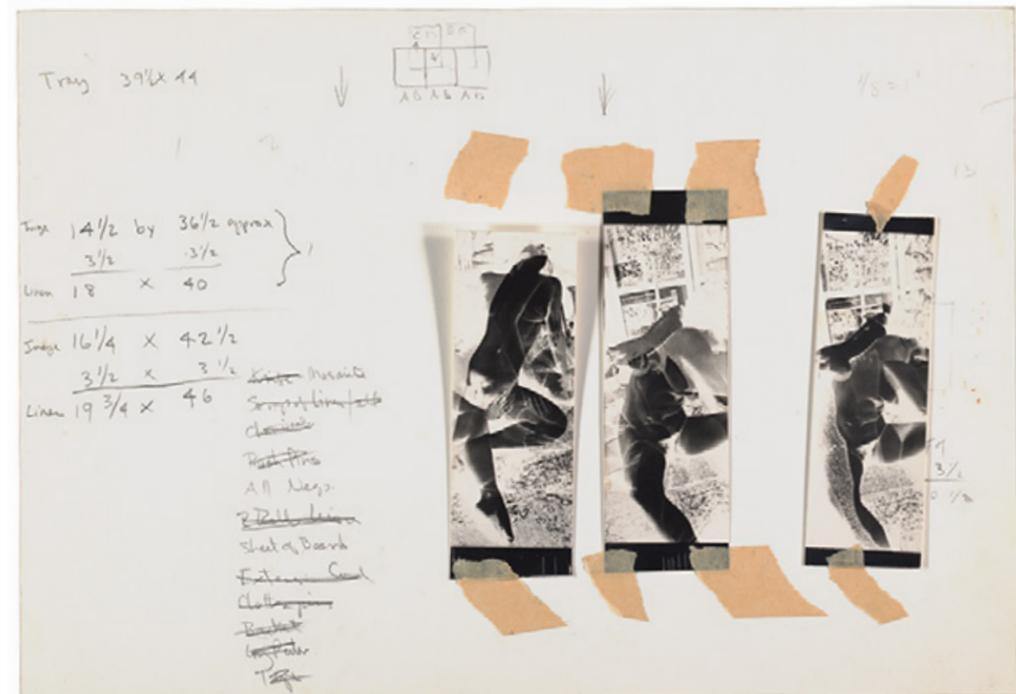
Cream Six consists of six image panels; in them, the same image content is repeated three times. Panels 1, 3, and 5 depict the left half of the primary image (see work prints in fig. 3), and panels 2, 4, and 6 depict the right half of that image. Though the primary image content is repeated, no two panels are printed exactly the same way. Many work prints for the primary image exist in the Heinecken Archive, including conventional prints, high-contrast prints, negative-image prints, Sabattier effect prints,⁵ and prints with ink and/or graphite lines added. Given the dimensions of this work—it is overall nearly seven and a half feet (226.9 cm) wide—and the labor required to print it, it is logical that Heinecken would make many work prints on paper to determine how he wanted the images to look before committing to exposing and processing six pieces of light-sensitive photo-linen approximately 20 by 45 inches (50.8 by 114.3 cm) in size. A sketch on the mock-up (fig. 4) indicates that Heinecken was experimenting with overlaying additional images on panels 2, 3, 4, and 5. In the end he printed more than one image on all six panels. However, the secondary images are difficult to discern, and it is impossible to know exactly how he printed them. Recognizable image content in 35 mm contact prints of the source images in the Heinecken Archive suggests at least three negatives were used. (These contact prints also reveal that the title word *Cream*, outlined in graphite at the top of panel 5, appears on a record album cover in the background of the primary image.) The hand-coloring on this work is subtle, but it is unclear whether that has always been the case or if it has faded over time. Heinecken's frequent repetition of image content within individual pieces and in separate works is clearly evident in *Cream Six* as well as in *Refractive Hexagon* and *Kaleidoscopic Hexagon #1*.

GELATIN SILVER PHOTOGRAMS

Between 1964 and 1968 Heinecken created one of his most celebrated and closely studied works, *Are You Rea*, using repurposed images and texts that had originally been printed in magazine pages. From the mid-1960s to the end of his career, the artist's dominant image source was print media; indeed, several of the project-materials boxes in the Heinecken Archive contain his carefully collected magazine pages. Though for the most part the pages are unique, there are a few groupings that have identical image content on one side. While this repetition of image content indicates that the material may have been particularly compelling to Heinecken, perhaps more importantly, it shows that he collected multiple pages with the *same* image content on one side, but *different* image or text content on the verso, because he was interested in the juxtaposition of image and text on *both* sides of a page. Heinecken is known to have examined magazine pages in transmitted light, using a light table, in order to better visualize superimposed image and text content. His lecture notes cite that he reviewed at least two thousand magazine pages before selecting only twenty-five to contact print for the *Are You Rea* portfolio (a redaction process that is common in the field of commercial graphic design).⁶



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3. *Cream Six* (1970; plate 63) work prints

4. *Cream Six* (1970; plate 63) annotated mock-up with gelatin silver work prints



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5. Comparison of magazine image source for *Are You Rea* (1964–68; plate 25) with gelatin silver photogram and offset photolithograph. Magazine image: 8 x 7" (20.2 x 18.5 cm); offset photolithograph: 12 x 10" (32.4 x 25.3 cm)



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6. Lithographic negative and aluminum offset photolithograph printing plate for *MANSMAG: Homage to Werkman and Cavalcade* (1969; plate 39)

Are You Rea (plate 25)

Working Process:

1. collected and sorted magazine pages (over three to four years)
2. selected twenty-five pages for the portfolio
3. contact printed gelatin silver photograms of the magazine pages
4. produced portfolios of gelatin silver photograms
5. converted gelatin silver photogram images into offset photolithograph printing plates
6. produced portfolios of offset photolithographs

For *Are You Rea*, Heinecken created visually complex photograms by contact printing double-sided magazine pages on gelatin silver paper. (All twenty-five magazine pages used as the image sources, as well as work-print photograms, and offset photolithographs, are held in the Heinecken Archive.) The gelatin silver paper recorded negative images of the positively printed information from both sides of a page, superimposed together. Figure 5 shows the original image source (in transmitted light) for the portfolio's fourth image, a related gelatin silver photogram work print, and an offset photolithograph of the same image from the portfolio. Heinecken manually reduced unwanted text in the upper-right corner of the recto of the magazine page, perhaps using an eraser or dull blade. This type of editing to remove text from the original magazine page was observed in other magazine image sources in the Heinecken Archive.

OFFSET PHOTOLITHOGRAPHS

In addition to the photogram portfolios, Heinecken had five hundred offset photolithograph portfolios of *Are You Rea* printed. The artist operated his own small studio press, with which he worked with offset photolithography and other print processes during most of his professional career. Offset photolithography was especially important to his work based on periodicals, including *MANSMAG: Homage to Werkman and Cavalcade* (plate 39). The Heinecken Archive holds lithographic negatives, aluminum printing plates, and prepress proofs relating to several of the periodical pieces (fig. 6).

Offset photolithography was developed in the early twentieth century through a series of innovations and technological advancements in both offset printing and photomechanics. The term *offset* refers to the transfer of wet ink from a printing plate to an intermediate surface before printing the final image. *Photomechanics* is the process by which printing surfaces (plates or cylinders) are produced with photographic methods. An offset lithographic press uses a right-reading plate (as seen in fig. 6) that transfers the image to an intermediate rubber-covered offset cylinder, which in turn transfers the image to the final support of paper, metal, or other material.

There are many advantages to offset printing over direct printing. In terms of reproducing images, especially for mass media, the greatest boon is that the printing plate never comes into direct contact with the rough final support and therefore can be used to make many impressions. While Heinecken tended to shift among new photographic technologies, offset photolithography remained a constant throughout his long career—as a resource for images (in the form of magazine pages) as well as for image making.

DYE-DIFFUSION TRANSFER PRINTS

In 1972 Polaroid introduced the SX-70 process, an integrated dye-diffusion transfer technique in which all the image-processing and image-forming materials are integrated into the film unit. By 1974 Heinecken was actively incorporating this technology into his work process. Examples of work with SX-70 Polaroid prints include the series *He/She* (plates 70–74) and the series *Lessons in Posing Subjects* (plates 75–79).

Heinecken also worked with Polaroid's Polacolor process, a dye-diffusion transfer technique in which the negative and positive image-receiving layers are peeled apart after the image is processed. In 1979 Heinecken was invited by the Polaroid corporation to make images with one of their 20-by-24-inch cameras. Nearly a decade later, in 1988, he received a Polaroid grant to use a 40-by-80-inch camera at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.⁷ Substantial evidence of the work process for *Tuxedo Striptease* is in the Heinecken Archive; it provides much insight into the thought and preparation that went into creating his instant color works.

Tuxedo Striptease (plate 80)

Working Process:

1. collected magazine pages with images of female models, and a baby, wearing apparel referencing a tuxedo
2. sequenced magazine images to create a "striptease"—that is, the women's outfits are progressively scantier in each subsequent image
3. prepared magazine images for photography (fig. 7)
4. photographed magazine images using a large-format Polaroid camera and Polacolor film

The Heinecken Archive contains all but one of the original source images for *Tuxedo Striptease*. Many of the magazine fragments used were taped to a backing board to keep them flat for photographic copy work, and several were enhanced with white or black paint to better define image content or margins. This type of image preparation was common in twentieth-century graphic reproduction.

The Heinecken Archive also includes ten draft Polacolor prints donated to the Center for Creative Photography in 1985, with the following note from the artist:

These 20 x 24s (Polaroid) were done in a set of 10 I guess and are numbered from 1–10 in the order of disrobing the tuxedo outfit. SX-70s show numbers 8 and 9 which you don't have [this refers to two SX-70 prints taped to the last Polacolor in the draft series that depict different images made for the final series]. They are dupes of extras or discards. The finished set was made so that all the color balanced and all the heads were the same size, etc. I've not shown them as yet and may not—until I figure it out better.

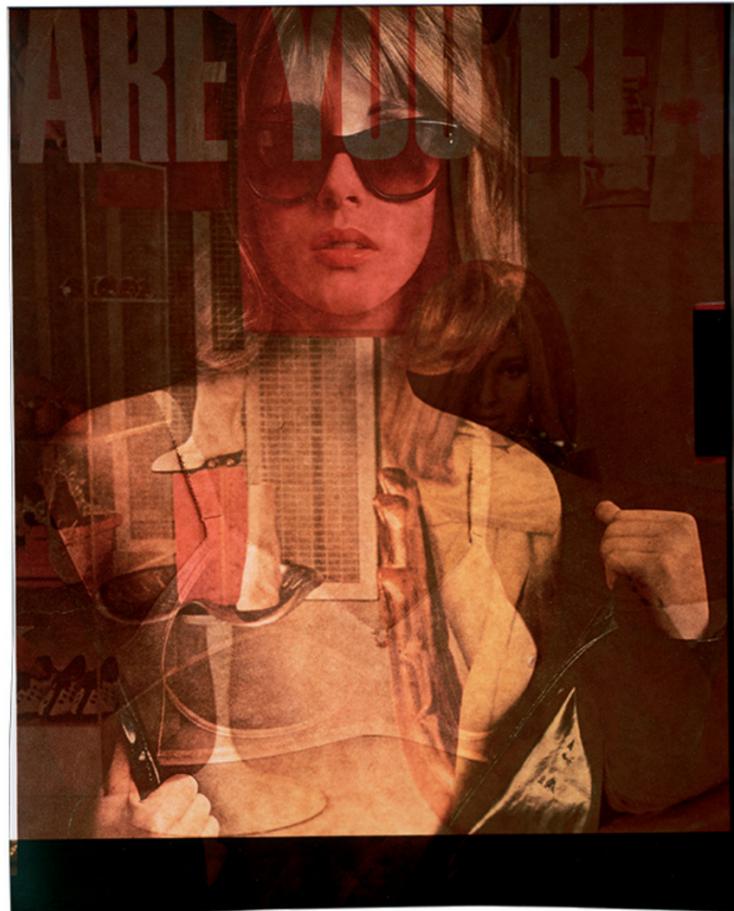
Heinecken July '85



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7. Three paste-ups for *Tuxedo Striptease* (1984; plate 80)

8. Image source for the first *Are You Rea* portfolio image (1964–68; plate 25), printed as a silver dye bleach photogram



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SILVER DYE BLEACH PHOTOGRAMS

Though Heinecken openly embraced new color photography technologies in the 1970s and 1980s, his continued use of found image sources and photographic copy work remained a consistent aspect of his working method. In the 1980s Heinecken adopted yet another color photographic process: silver dye bleach. The Cibachrome system—the first commercialized silver dye bleach print process—is a direct-positive process that was introduced in 1963. Direct-positive photographs are printed from a positive image source rather than a negative. The name of the process refers to how the image material is formed. Preformed yellow, magenta, and cyan azo dyes are incorporated in the final image support during manufacture, and the dyes are bleached out during the processing in relation to the presence of silver formed after light exposure and chemical development. For silver dye bleach printing, Heinecken turned to magazine and television image sources. The magazine image sources for the *Recto/Verso* portfolio, along with notes on how each page was printed, are preserved in the Heinecken Archive.

Recto/Verso (plate 85)

Working Process:

1. collected magazine pages showing images of female models
2. selected twelve magazine pages for the portfolio
3. contact printed silver dye bleach photograms of the magazine pages
4. commissioned text to be written by friends and colleagues to have printed on translucent paper accompanying each photogram as an overlay

Heinecken's *Recto/Verso* portfolio might be described as a reengagement with his *Are You Rea* portfolio. The concept and basic working methods are the same. However, the shift in photographic technology from gelatin silver to silver dye bleach dramatically changed the

visual appearance of his double-image photograms, resulting in positive full-color images instead of negative black-and-white images. A surprising find in the project materials of the Heinecken Archive were eight silver dye bleach prints of magazine pages used for the *Are You Rea* portfolio. These images are work prints: there are no finished works in silver dye bleach using the *Are You Rea* magazine pages. However, they illustrate that after more than twenty years, Heinecken was still interested in the *Are You Rea* image content, and curious to see what it would look like printed in a different photographic process (fig. 8).

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When asked in 1988 “What is your work process?,” Heinecken replied:

I'm very conscious of the necessity for me to be inventive and shifting. Other artists land on something that they know is right for them. That's the appropriate way for most people to approach art, and I sort of teach that way. But for me, it's a leapfrog idea, through the generations that occur if you let the materials dictate what's next. There's something about the flat magazine page, then it's formed, then you photograph it, then it's flat again but it still reflects dimension. So what's next? Do you want to reform it again? That's what I really like about what I do.⁸

A multifaceted artist, Heinecken was clearly at ease working in a variety of mediums. His background and training in printmaking and graphic design, and his extensive knowledge of materials, provided a solid foundation for his complex, multistep working processes. These skills, combined with a continued openness to the possibilities of new image-making techniques, were vital to Heinecken's innovative and provocative art.

NOTES

1. Center for Creative Photography (hereafter CCP), Robert Heinecken Archive, Personal files: “New Acquisitions 1996,” AG45.
2. My thanks go to Luke Batten, director of The Robert Heinecken Trust, and Ellen Brooks, photographer and Heinecken's former student, for sharing this information with me at the Robert Heinecken Scholars' Day at The Museum of Modern Art, May 17, 2013.
3. Irving Desfor, “Photo Linen Paper,” *Ottawa Citizen*, July 20, 1963, p. 12. <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2194&dat=19630719&id=v1QzAAAIBAJ&sjid=K-YFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6653,4533416>, accessed July 22, 2013.
4. Heinecken's use of hand-coloring and graphite lines relates to his background and interest in traditional printmaking processes. For example, in 1979, in reference to his 1970/97 work *Different Strokes for Different Folks*, he stated:

“The color and linear drawing are generally isolated to the genitalia of the figures and the line is stylized rather than expressive. [. . .] The source for this idea stems from my interest in Japanese erotic art of the Ukiyo-e and Shunga styles.” Heinecken, untitled lecture delivered at the 1979 photography symposium in Graz, Austria, published as *Symposium über Fotografie/Symposion [sic] on Photography*, Manfred Willman and Christine Frisinghelli, eds. (Graz, Austria: Forum Stadtpark, n.d. [1980]), p. 15.

5. The Sabattier effect is created when a photographic print is exposed, developed, washed, and then exposed to diffused light and developed again prior to final fixing, giving the print both positive and negative qualities. It is often confused with solarization, which is a reversal of image density from overexposure. A simple way to determine whether a picture has been made by solarization or the Sabattier effect is to look for a “Mackie line”: a thin line of low-density area between adjacent highlight and shadow areas, produced by the Sabattier effect.

6. CCP, Robert Heinecken Archive, UCLA Teaching Files, AG45:42.
7. Lynne Warren, et al., *Robert Heinecken Photographer: A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospective* (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), pp. 125–26.
8. Claire Peeps, “Inviews: ‘Paraphotographer’ Robert Heinecken, an Interview,” *Photographic Insight* 1, nos. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 1988): 39.