

City Lights: Scan a Set of Stunning Photos

Colby Caldwell made his new series by lugging a scanner and a power source into a forest.

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Untitled 41 (from the ffff series), 2020, archival pigment print on Hemp paper, 6 3/4" x 12" on paper 11" x 14", Edition of 16

The Forest Floor Series

About 15 years ago, **Colby Caldwell** saw the future of photography in a flatbed scanner. “In actuality, it is a camera, just in reverse,” Caldwell says. “Typical cameras receive light, but scanners emit light as well.” For years, Caldwell used a scanner in his studio to make [highly detailed images](#) of dead birds, spent shotgun shells, and other subjects. Then, in January, Caldwell decided to take the scanner directly to the forest floor, lugging it and a power source in his backpack. “I feel compelled to be in this landscape, working improvisationally with what I find—branches, a stump stippled with fungi, desiccated leaves, stones, water,” he says. The images that Caldwell has made public so far, based on eight to 10 minute exposures, are still life shots featuring leafy detritus and tree bark, but the scanner also provides atmospherics wholly unlike a camera—blocky segments caused by the scanner being moved mid-exposure, with the segments often separated by horizontal ribbons of digital glitchiness. (Electronic ghosts are a source of fascination for Caldwell; a [previous series](#), *how to survive your own death*, consists of variations on an abstract digital pattern Caldwell made accidentally.) The best images toy with geometrical echoes between the segments and the forest forms being photographed. Many are labeled “tbd” or “untitled” and categorized under what he’s calling *The Forest Floor Series*. Caldwell says that trudging through the woods with a scanner “delivered me back to the primary desire of photography: how to harness light, how to play with time.” *The works are available at colbycaldwell.com and hemphillfinearts.com. Free.* —**Louis Jacobson**