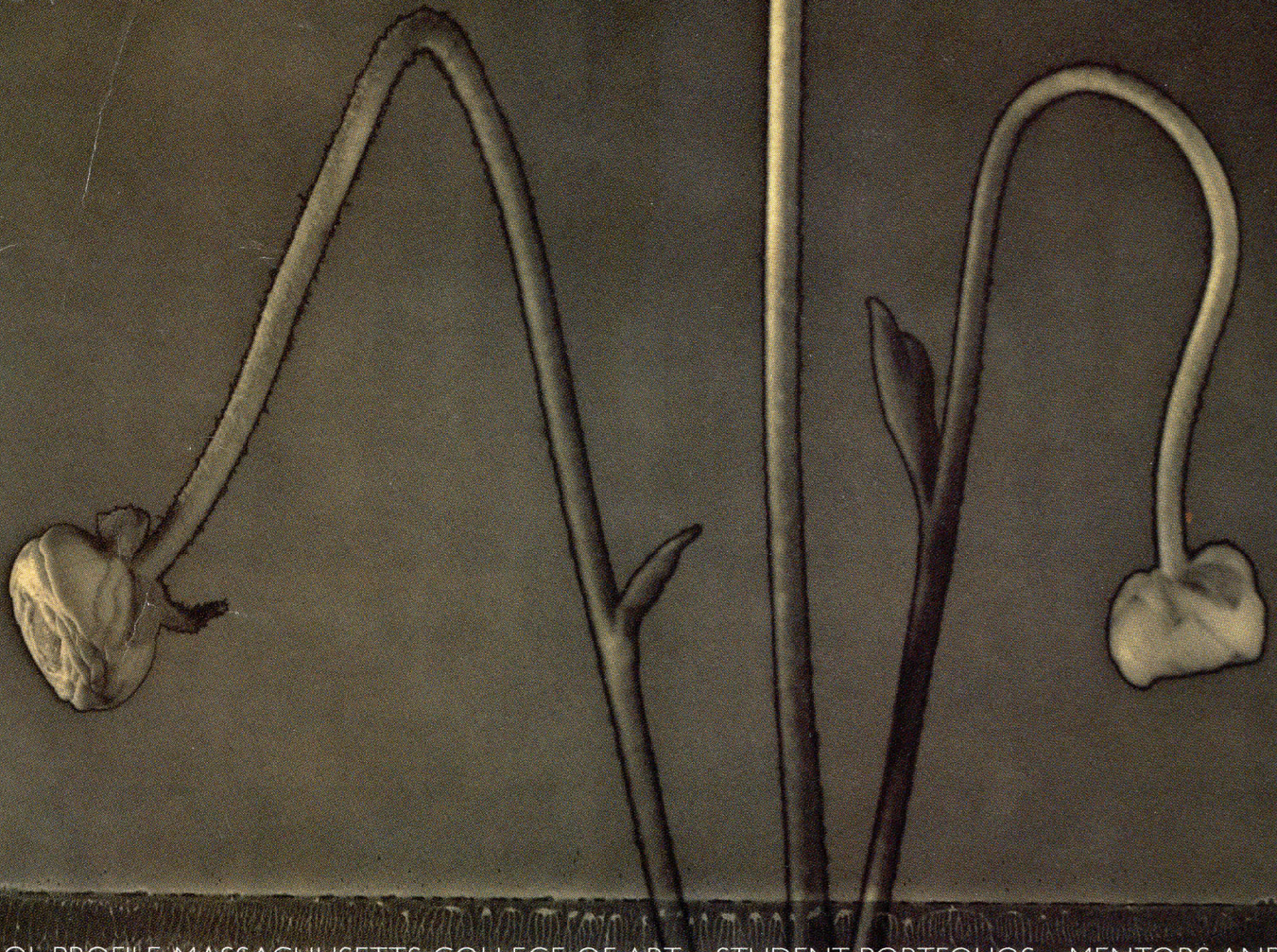
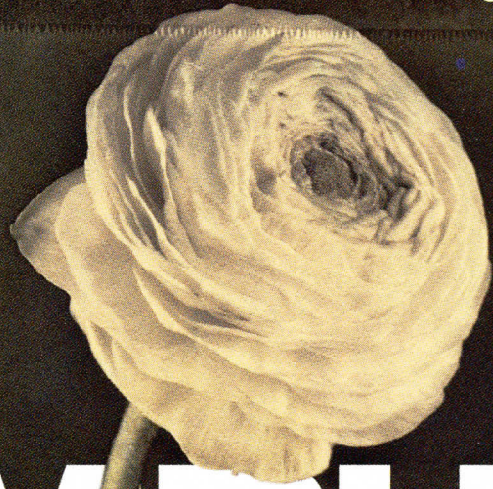


OCTOBER
1998

AMERICAN
PHOTO
ONCAMPUS

YOUNG MASTERS
TOM BARIL AND
YUNGHI KIM
BREAK THROUGH



Below right:
"Chrysler Building,
1997." Opposite:
"Two Lilies, 1996."
Below: Tom Baril.

tomorrow's classics today

Tom Baril
combines impeccable
darkroom craft with
a modernist's eye.
By **Russell Hart**

Tom Baril was a student at New York's School of Visual Arts when he got the call that changed his life: Would he print Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs? That was 1979, and after more than a decade in Mapplethorpe's Manhattan darkroom Baril's own work caught fire. He is now one of the bestselling fine-art photographers in America—and he still makes his sumptuous prints in the darkroom where he labored over Mapplethorpe's pictures. (It's now a part of the Mapplethorpe Foundation.)

Indeed, Baril's success may partly have to do with something else he shared with the late Mapplethorpe: a love of classical tradition. "I celebrate photography's past history, rather than trying to figure out where it's going," he says. But Baril isn't interested in a rehash. "I don't want to duplicate what's been done," he explains. "I want to comment on it and rework it instead." Reworked or not, Baril's lush, warm-toned prints are extraordinarily beautiful objects.

"Even people who are really knowledgeable about photography are drawn in by the sheer beauty of the prints," says Robert Klein, whose Boston gallery was the first to show Baril's mature work. Klein now sells more by the 46-year-old Baril than any other photographer he represents.

Though Baril thinks "doing something unique" is important to succeed as a fine-art photographer, he also believes technique is often overlooked by photo students. "A lot of students tend to dismiss the craft of photography," he says. "They think it gets



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PATRICK SELLITTO

Left:
"Smokestacks,
1994." Below:
"Morning
Glory, 1997."



white," says Baril. "People sometimes mistake the effect for platinum printing."

And why not platinum? "Now that you can make good 30x40-inch digital internegatives, I'm thinking about it," says Baril, most of whose silver prints are 20x24. "It would be a natural thing for me, given that the manipulation I do in conventional silver printing is to try to give the image a depth and richness that you just can't get with straight silver prints." Baril is actually in the midst of creating a limited-edition portfolio (probably 50 sets of ten prints each, all Baril's flower studies) using the time-honored gravure process. "Since it's real ink on regular artists' paper, I have a much greater choice of color and surface than I get with photographic papers," Baril says.

The photographer had that kind of choice when he was working on his recent coffee-table book, *Tom Baril* (4AD Publishing/D.A.P., \$65). Created with a highly labor-intensive process called dry-trap printing, it comes remarkably close to re-creating the quality of Baril's original prints. In addition to making separate printing plates—and separate impressions—for each image's highlights, midtones, and shadows, the printer (Allethaire Press) ran each page through its press a fourth time, to apply a special tinted varnish that mimicked Baril's tea-stained highlights. "The book is basically handmade," says Baril.

Why is Baril so concerned about the craft of printing, and the photograph as a beautiful object, when all that seems to matter to some other photographers is image content—often reduced to pixels on a screen? The photographer puts it simply: "I think a photograph is bound to be better," he says, "if you print it yourself." ■

"I celebrate photography's past."

in the way of their message and their art. But photography is by nature a technical medium, and if your technique isn't solid, it actually distracts from what you're trying to say. Besides, you can always make a living if you have technical skills. If you don't, you're in trouble either way!"

Baril's technical skills and classical bent are more evident than ever in his most recent body of pictures. "In 1994 I had the idea of taking subjects you've seen through the history of photography—the Brooklyn Bridge, the Chrysler Building, calla lilies—and shooting them with a pinhole," he says. Working with a 4x5 view camera, Baril soon found the pinhole unnecessary, its exposures awkwardly long for many subjects. Now he uses lenses for most pictures, with the

exception of an ongoing series of ocean views in which the pinhole's long exposures blur waves into featureless tones.

What really ties this new work together, though, is its unique print quality. "I felt I needed something other than what I was getting from the usual cold, clinical bromide papers," says Baril. His solution? A warm-toned "portrait" paper, selenium toner, and tea—the drinking kind. "Soaking the print in tea gives me an edge, a way to add warmth and depth," says the forthright Baril, who saves his tea bath for last. "But it requires as much control as any toner." That control extends not just to how long the tea itself is steeped and how long the print is soaked in it, but also to the solution's temperature, which affects the color and intensity contributed to an image. "The tea basically eliminates any



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