



10 questions

10 F.A.Q. about chemigram

I have noted that questions posed by the public and the media, concerning chemigram, almost always contain the same misconceptions. Here are answers to ten of the most frequently asked questions:

1 / « Is chemigram photography ? »

No, "photo - graphy" means " writing with light". Chemigram means "writing with chemistry" because developer and fixer do the writing. To say that a chemigram is a photograph because it is created on photographic paper is like saying that the Mona Lisa is a piece of cabinet-work because it was painted on a piece of wood.

2 / « Is a chemigram a photogram ? »

No. A chemigram, like a photogram, is made without a camera (= "cameraless photography") and without an enlarger (= "lensless photography"). As in photography, a photogram is a technique in which light does the writing. However, in chemigram chemistry does the writing, not light. Chemigram must remain in a category of its own. It must not be placed in the same category as photogram, as some photogram historians have done, in books or on the internet.

3 / « Is a chemigram created exclusively with chemicals ? »

Because the word "chemigram" is derived from the word "chemical", many critics mistakenly believe that chemigrams are created only with the use of chemicals. They misunderstand that the use of a localizing product* (varnish, wax, oil) allows for more accomplished results . The transformation of these localizing products is not chemical but physical : erosion, uplifting, dissolution, cracking. It is possible to obtain very rough chemigrams by using nothing more than emulsion paper, developer, and fixer. The resulting image is like a watercolor.

4 / « Is it necessary to use rare localizing products to create a chemigram ? »

No. The different types of localizing products are endless. Anything that can adhere to emulsion paper can be used to make a chemigram. Products can be found in the kitchen, the bathroom, or at a paint shop.

5 / « Is it necessary to use rare chemicals to create a chemigram ? »

Not really. Some people think that the complex forms of chemigrams cannot be obtained without rare chemical products like those found in alchemy. In fact, the products used in chemigram are the same as those used in photography, such as developers and fixers. For example, acids are not used as they are in the technique of engraving. In conclusion, chemigram is no more "chemical" than photography.

6 / « Is the creation of a chemigram a matter of chance ? »

This is often the first question I am asked. How creative is the author of a chemigram, and how much does technique help him? Let's not forget how technique is helpful to a photographer unlike a painter or engraver.

They are various forms of chance: • uncontrolled chance, where the technique is not yet mastered; • controlled chance, where technique is mastered; • uncontrollable chance, where technique is partially mastered and which partially permits the introduction of "accidents" (cf. "The Open Work" by Umberto Eco). Having mastered the use of certain varnishes allows me to eliminate practically all chance interventions. Sometimes, I do let chance intervene. In art, as in life, chance can be a wonderful source of surprise and creativity. • programmed chance: a choice of numbers is selected randomly.

7 / « Why is there such a focus on technique? Is it not the result that matters most ? »

With a few exceptions, most intellectuals have had nothing but contempt for technology. However, it is technique that creates new languages: the 16 mm. camera created the New Cinema. "Only through a profound understanding of artistic technique, can we come to a full appreciation of any work of art." (Anthea Callen, *The Impressionist Painters and their Techniques*).

8 / « Does the word "chemigram" suffer from any pejorative connotations related to the word "chemical" ? »

Perhaps. The word "chemical" is too often used to explain the negative effects of pollution, pesticides, or other modern day scourges. Nevertheless, all that is chemical is not necessarily bad. Chemistry is at the very foundation of creation. It is the study of the elements, of all that exists on earth. The use of positive chemistry in chemigram is very rewarding.

9 / « Can one place an "O" in the middle of the word "chemigram" ? »

Absolutely not! One says "chemical, chemist, chemistry". When I coined the word in 1958, therapeutic techniques that begin with the same four letters were not well known.

10 / « Can chemigram be compared to current technology ? »

From a technical point of view, what painting is to walking, photography to the automobile, and the computer to the airplane, the chemigram is like a bicycle: simple, fast, and cheap. Most of the chemigrams found on the internet, were made without localizing products, by painting with developer and fixer on photographic paper. However, a chemigram made with a localizing product (varnish, wax, oil) achieves more accomplished results that resemble neither a painting, nor a photo, nor a computer designed image. Anyone who is satisfied only using developers and fixers on photographic paper makes me think of a cyclist walking beside his bicycle!