SP.747 Final Project
"Beginnings"

My final project is a poster-sized (22x28) cyanotype of a notan collage I made in photoshop. The title of the work is "beginnings" because even though MIT is ending for me, I am trying to look at it as the beginning of a new adventure. The subjects of the collage are my boyfriend Nathan (who will be entering this new adventure with me – thank goodness) and I, and a whole bunch of flowers I shot all over the world (but mostly in Vienna, Mexico, Honduras, and the U.S.). Flowers have always reminded my of spring and beginnings, and I like how they contribute to the mood of happy, playful, formal fun that is set up by the images of us.

The photoshop collage has had many phases, and the final project is nothing like the original. Initially the theme was just going to be "spring romance" or "celebrating spring" and included pictures of a whole bunch of my friends, their significant others, and Nathan and I, but I got some advice that it was too busy, and that this was a case where less could be more.

This project started because I very much like the concept of notans, and how much of an effect light and shadows have on these images. When selecting the images to use in the collage, I tried to focus on high contrast pictures with a dark background and a lighter foreground. Some of the images I wound up including required more than a simple threshold command of the entire photo. I became quite fond of the polygonal lasso tool, and put different objects in the photo into different layers, and thresholded each separately before merging the layers and dragging it into the collage. This was especially useful in close-up images of Nathan and I. He naturally has much darker skin than I, and a uniform threshold would make my features disappear into the white when his were just right, or his disappear into the darkness if mine were just right.

When compiling images into my collage, I made use of the guide tool since the finished image was so large, as well as the free transform tool to make everything fit the way I wanted. I also used the clone stamp and box tools for touch ups.

I printed a negative of my collage on 9 different transparencies. Joining them proved to be the most arduous and time-consuming part of the project. After doing a cyanotype test comparing different methods of joining the transparencies with overlap or not, I knew that I did not want to have any overlap, and that I needed the edges to just meet perfectly. Since I had printed with overlap to ensure that nothing got cut off I had to use a paper cutter and eventually a razor cutter to make sure the pieces interlocked like a puzzle. To attach them, I first made a scotch tape border around the whole print. Next, I temporarily joined the middle sections with smaller pieces of removable tape. Finally, I slowly and carefully put a large sheet of self-adhesive (like half of a lamination) on the whole poster from one corner, diagonally across to the other, removing the tape on the middle portion as I went along. Once it was in one piece, I could move on to the cyanotyping.

I mixed chemicals A and B in a 1:1 ratio and then covered an entire sheet of paper with a light coat of the solution with a paint brush. The piece was left to dry in the dark, and then I attached my large poster-sized negative to the paper, re-covered it with light blocking material and brought it outside. There, I put it between two large pieces of glass and let the sun shine on it for about 10 seconds, making sure nothing shifted, and there were no shadows in the way. When it was done, I thoroughly rinsed it, and hung it to dry. This was not as easy as I had anticipated, either. It was hard to find a piece of glass that was large enough and thin enough, and that was not filthy or full of scratches. Also, the sun and weather in general do not always cooperate. Finally, rinsing a huge image in a bathroom sink is never simple.

If my image had come out better, faster, I would have liked to try toning different parts of it. I thought to possibly tone the pictures of us a red/brown color with a combination of tannic acid and sodium carbonate while leaving the flowers blue, or toning the flowers a violet color with a combination of ammonia and tannic acid, while leaving the pictures of us the original cyan. If I were to continue with this project, this is what I would do next.