

# COLLECTOR DAILY

## Herbert Matter @Gitterman

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / March 12, 2014

**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 26 black and white photographs/collages, framed in black and matted, and hung against white walls in the l-shaped gallery space. All of the works are vintage gelatin silver prints or collages, made between the late 1930s and the early 1950s. No size or edition information was provided.

**Comments/Context:** The fact that we can apply the labels graphic designer, photographer, painter, film maker, teacher, and perhaps a few others to Herbert Matter is a testament to his wide ranging interests and creative abilities. This show focuses down on Matter's output as an abstract photographer, bringing together straight images, collages, and most notably, a diverse selection of cameraless darkroom experiments, made mostly in the 1940s. What's exciting about these artworks is that they aren't simple one step photograms, but are instead complex compositions mixing multiple techniques and processes, often in unexpected layers and combinations.

Part of the fun here is trying to figure out exactly what Matter was doing to achieve certain visual effects. One series is clearly capturing spinning objects, perhaps fabric, or wire armatures, or lit structures of some kind, set against a featureless black background; they reveal motion to be a repetition of smaller steps, a calculus of gestural, swirling aggregation. Other images seem more obviously drawn with light, some with tiny fingers of electrical charge escaping from the ends. These nests of lines then seem to be sandwiched with other negatives, to provide gradient backgrounds, or negative reversals, or additional dapples. One work appears to be a gathering of driftwood negatives, laid out and solarized, and then merged with a separate background.

When Matter worked with wet emulsions, paint, chemical drips, and other viscous materials on glass, his abstractions became even more densely energetic. A gorgeous set of three works is dominated by black lines with bright white highlights, set against a medium grey background, like a view into a sparkling scientific microscope slide. In another series, Matter let the watery materials dry into high contrast crackled blobs and splatters, the compositions piling up into fluid white expressionist gestures interrupted by black hairline fractures.

When paired with Matter's straight photographs of lichen on rocks, sunlight on water, the blurred geometric beams of a World's Fair pavilion, or the shadows cast by a Calder sculpture, his darkroom abstractions reveal similar aesthetic and spatial organization principles. Together, they provide a continuum from real to unreal, from selected to improvised, showing the consistent innovation in his underlying vision.

**Collector's POV:** The works in this show are priced between \$5500 and \$18000, generally based on size. Matter's prints have been intermittently available in the secondary markets in the past decade, with recent prices ranging from roughly \$1000 to \$12000.