

## *The Museum of Optography*

The *Museum of Optography* is a new and unusual kind of Museum dedicated to all matters connected to the little known phenomena whereby the last image that enters the eyes of the viewer remains bleached on the retina at the moment of death, this image can then be temporarily fixed in a process called Optography. A rather grim idea, but one that conjures up in the mind what we all contemplate; that last moment of life we all await.



*A Jesuit Friar called Christopher Schiener made an amazing observation in the mid 17th Century whereby he had observed an image laid bare on the retina of a frog, a faint, fleeting record of what the eye had been fixed on at the moment its owner had died. It was rumoured it became possible to fix this image and create what is termed an Optogram. (Time-Life, 1970)*

The story of Optography begins in earnest with experiments carried out in 1870 by Franz Christian Boll who discovered, on the walls of the retina 'Visual Purple' a pigment, later named Rhodopsin, this substance was photosensitive akin to film. Shortly after Wilhelm Kühne a professor of physiology at Heidelberg University took Rhodopsin's innate film like properties and produced a large number of images from rabbits and in 1880 uncovered the only known human optogram; the story of Gustav Erhard Reif and his optogram takes us to nearby Bruchsal and Ludwigsberg in the detective story that continues to this day in the *Museum of Optography*.

Heidelberg in the 1870's was the centre of a world wide curiosity with optography and optograms, In France it inspired novels by Jules Verne, in America, newspapers were hungry for new stories about the subject. In England, Scotland Yard attempted to uncover the retinal image from Annie Chapman, one of Jack the Rippers victims. In 1977 Evangelos Alexandridis a professor of Physiology at Heidelberg, University redid Kühnes experiments producing in the process four optograms on the request of the police at the time, these images appear in the *Museum of Optography*.

The founder, director and proprietor of the *Museum of Optography* is artist, Derek Ogbourne who inaugurated the first optographic wonder at the Brigitte Schenk Gallery on the 30th March 2007. From then on the museum has gone from strength to strength, now almost twice it's original size, On 21st September 2008 *The Encyclopedia of Optography* was published to coincide with the opening of *The Micromuseum of Optography* at *The College of Optometrists, British Optical Association Museum*. Ogbourne is both curator and creator where the boundary between truth and falsehood are purposely blurred by the artist in a rich and complex multimedia show in which real archival objects sit alongside inventions, manipulations and metaphorical elaborations. Video, photography, objects, drawings, texts and sound archive make up the exhibition.