Celebrating forgotten varieties of vegetables and fruits
Jerry Spagnoli's daguerreotypes in the new book by Amy Goldman

A couple of days ago, just a few seconds before I rushed out of my studio for an appointment, somebody rang the doorbell. It was the postman delivering a package from the prestigious Bloomsbury publishers. I understood straight away that it was *Heirloom Harvest. Modern Daguerreotypes of Historic Garden Treasures* a book by Amy Goldman that had just been published in the USA (Bloomsbury; 1-62040-777-6; $85.00; 192 pages). It features 175 images created by Jerry Spagnoli, one of the foremost daguerreotypists of our time.

I was so excited that I promptly cancelled my appointment. I just had to open the package and see Jerry's pictures! Soon I was avidly turning the pages, immersed in these visual treasures. Spellbound by this elegantly designed book, I came to know all about Amy Goldman's passion for "the fruits of the earth", which she explains in her essay of this name at the start of the book. As a fellow lover of the world of plants and nature, I was captivated by Amy's descriptions of her work as an agricultural activist and seed preservationist and I was intrigued by the events that led her to start collaborating with a contemporary daguerreotypist fifteen years ago.

On a 200 acre plot of land surrounding her farm in Rhinebeck in the Hudson Valley, in the state of New York, Amy Goldman grows ancient and traditional varieties of fruits and vegetables, which are defined as "heirloom plants" and "heirloom varieties". What better way could there be for celebrating and preserving the images of heirloom fruits and vegetables than by employing the ancient photographic process of the daguerreotype? The desire to establish a symbolic continuity between the preservation of ancient botanical species and the practice of creating daguerreotypes today is what gave Goldman the idea for this very original book.

Placed against light or dark backgrounds so as to make them stand out and enhance their patterns, structures and irregularities, the fruits and vegetables photographed by Spagnoli have an almost tangible quality that only the daguerreotype can create, also because each image is actually taken as if it were a portrait, rather than an objective and scientific botanical study. This concept is expressed very clearly in the interesting conversation on photography, memory and history between Jerry and M. Mark (the founding editor of the *Village Voice Literary Supplement* and *PEN America*), which is included in the “afterword” of the book.

Amy and Jerry's two wonderful projects complement each other perfectly, as each daguerreotype image and each heirloom vegetable represented subtly evoke history and tradition, while also carrying us into the future. As Jerry aptly puts it: Our project is an archive, assembled in this particular historical moment, and the use of daguerreotypes to preserve these images refers to the continuity of history. It is a medium of the past, the earliest form of photography, preserving moments in the present to provide an insight for people in the future about life here, now.

After reading these evocative concluding words by Jerry you turn the page and you are struck by a marvellously elegant composition showing an asparagus plant that stands out against a delicate bluish background (produced by the solarisation of overexposed parts of the silvered plate). It bears a crop of perfectly round seeds which preserve the elements of the past as well as containing new life and our hope for the future.