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E-6 COLOUR PROCESSING

If you have previously processed monochrome films the next logical step is to move on to colour processing. Colour films are divided into two categories - negative and reversal, colour negative is a medium that everyone is familiar with from your happy snapper to the professional photographer, this the type of film that you take along to your local chemist for a D & P service and is one of the most widely used film today. Colour reversal or transparency films are often referred to as slide films and are commonly used by the serious enthusiast and professional photographers alike and is generally the preferred medium by editors of magazines for publication. There are two main types of slide film available which require different processing systems. films such as Kodachrome need to be returned to Kodak for processing while E6 compatible films can processed by D & P labs or done at home in the darkroom by the photographer. The purpose of this article is guide through processing your first E6 slide film and perhaps at some future time we will deal with processing and printing colour negatives.

Most of the equipment you require to process your first slide film you will already have, in addition to this you will need a means of controlling the temperature of the chemicals therefore an accurate thermometer is essential as their temperature needs to be constant. The easiest method of maintaining chemical temperature is by means of a water bath, a deep plastic dish or the use of wash basin where hot water can be added to maintain the processing temperatures + or - 1° C. Alternatively a small heater, similar to that used in fish tanks are available for photographic use, which maintains the water bath at the required temperature.

All the major film manufactures market a number of their own E6 films. Just as in monochrome films, there is a wide selection of film speeds to suit your requirements. The choice of which film may be down to personal preference, some have either a warm or cool tone that have an effect on how the colours look in the slide. Some photographers are able to determine a brand of film by simply looking at the saturation of certain colours in the slide, some enhance the reds or greens whilst some remain neutral, trial different brands and use them according to the photographic subject matter.

There are a number of easy to use processing kits on the market, the most commonly used are the three bath type which contain a FIRST DEVELOPER, COLOUR DEVELOPER, and a BLEACH /FIXER. Great care should be observed when mixing the chemicals as cross contamination will have an effect on the film therefore if you are using the same graduated measure make sure that you clean and rinse well before mixing the next chemical. Only mix enough chemicals to process the number of films that need developing as once mixed the chemicals have a short working life. Hear is a brief description of each chemical and what it does.

FIRST DEVELOPER

This is basically a kind of a black and white developer, if you were to fix at this stage you would have a B& W negative.

COLOUR DEVELOPER

This couples in the dye layers of each colour with in the film. Think of colour film as a sandwich of different layers of colour through which the light passes through, when placed into the colour developer it binds all the colours together in the final image. Also incorporated is a chemical reversal which changes the film from a negative to a positive image.

BLEACH /FIXER

This does exactly what its name suggest it removes the unwanted dyes and unexposed silver particles in the film and reveals the coloured image in the slide. If the film was viewed before this stage it would look very much an unattractive strip of brown tape.

To begin processing, first mix the required amount of chemicals and place them into the water bath and bring up to the processing temperature of 38°C (the water bath should be set at two degrees higher than this). Load your film into the developing tank in the usual way and then prepare a two gallon bucket of hot water at 42°C this will be used as a preheat bath and serve for rinses between each chemical . Other items you will require is some wetting agent to be added to the final rinse as a conditioner and a few cloths to wipe any drops water as you lift chemical containers out of their water bath.

The first step is to bring the tank up to the processing temperature. you can do this by placing it in the bucket of water for 5 minutes or pour in clean water at 42°C and leave for minute, this will bring the tank and its contents up to processing temperature. On pouring out the water you may note that it is coloured this is normal.

Pour in the FIRST DEVELOPER and agitate immediately for 10 seconds then at intervals of every 30 seconds for 6 ½ minutes. Pour the developer back into its container and save. Wash the film with clean hot water for 3 minutes making sure that you change the water several times during this stage.

Pour in the COLOUR DEVELOPER and agitate as above for 6 minutes, pour out and save. Wash the film again for 1 ½ minutes with several changes.

Pour in the BLEACH/FIX and agitate for 1 minute then every 30 seconds for 10 minutes, pour out and save.

Wash the film for 4 minutes with several changes of water, on the final rinse a few drops of wetting agent can be added. And leave for 1 minute. take out the film and hang up to dry.

CONGRATULATIONS YOU HAVE NOW PROCESSED YOUR FIRST SLIDE FILM.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THESE TIMES ARE A GUIDE FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN IN THE KIT

You may ask what do I do with the slides now, well once dry the can be mounted into plastic glass or glassless slide mounts ready for viewing delight your family and friends by putting on a slide show for them. If you get more ambitious then with the use of two or more projectors you can produce an Audio Visual show with slides and sound to compliment each other.

Other options are that you can make colour prints from slides, reversal papers are available with their own chemistry which enable you to do your own colour prints at home. The enlarger used to print monochrome negatives can be used much in the same way, if it has a colour head you simply just dial in the suggested filter guide given on the back of the paper packet. This will give you a starting point if the enlarger does not have a colour head it will have a filter drawer and you simply place them in this, they are available from any photographic dealer. I do not intend to a this point to go any further on colour printing as this will be covered at a later date.

A useful item in processing your own colour films and prints is acquiring a rotary processor, they automatically agitate the tank during the various stages and leave your hands free to do something else in the mean time. Have a look around the dealers for a second hand one you should get one for a reasonable price.

Please note that colour processing chemicals are toxic and great care should be observed in using them and in their disposal AT ALL TIMES FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN IN THE KIT.

ENJOY YOUR PROCESSING

By P. Dunn