

THE printing shop gets you printing

By Guilherme Maranhão

I have a friend called Antonio Seara. He's a spanish guy, very nice fellow, he lived for 5 years in Brasil, bounced here and there, ended up in London, in cold Canada. I bet he doesn't know for sure for how many years graphic arts have been in his life. Today he owns a small, but respectable business here in town, and he edits *Portugal News*, a portuguese newspaper for which I also write, and that's how we know each other.

Prom-Art, Antonio's business, it's been around for a while now, and it's been through a good share of offset printing technique evolution. They don't create the film anymore, the plate comes straight out of one machine that reads the image of a black-and-white laser print. The plate has a resin support, doesn't last as long as the aluminium one, but is good enough for most of Antonio's jobs.

And it's because all this that Antonio has—better yet, “had”—a whole pile of positive and negatives films and some positive paper, resting on a shelf in a small room devoted to his process camera. Well, I got this amazing gift still not knowing what to do with it. After all, these orthochromatic films have very little speed, uncommon sizes for photography (8.5x11in, 10x12in, 12x18in) and one cannot quite tell which is positive or negative by the nomenclature printed on their boxes. But as any other weird or expired film that lands in my hands, these were no exception, I started a few tests to discover who is who.

I also have a friend called Fatima Roque. She's a brazilian, nice fellow too, and has done a bit of everything, just like Antonio. She's a photographer to the last drop, and keeps telling me it's time to get some negatives, create some interference, discover what can happen, this kind of stuff. Loose the fear to set everything at stake.



And here the rules are to mix first, pick later: I got a box holding the negatives (35mm) of my work on the recovery of some people that survived an explosion in Osasco Plaza shopping mall on July 11th, 1996. I photographed these people for 3 years, starting a couple of months after the explosion. Most of them had wounds on legs and arms, the trial never reached an end, but some got settlements with the mall. And I choose Gilmara's story, of the 3 people I photographed the most, for this experience.

I prepared a normal batch of chemistry for paper printing (Multigrade developer 1:1, stop bath and Kodak Rapid Fix, paper dilution). Threw a negative inside the enlarger and picked up the box on top of the pile, an 8.5x11 film. Got the easel ready for that size, corrected the enlarger's head height. Focus, 7 seconds, f/8, OC safelight. I used the really old saliva method to figure out which side of the film was the emulsion side, and turned it up. Bumped into the timer start button.



The image showed up as it was a paper print. The film turned out to be a negative, so the images were positives, right? I repeated these steps again with this negative, doing some dodging and burning as required, and then repeated for other 6 negatives of Gilmara. Into the night! I washed everything, the good ones and the bad ones. Left everything to dry, and got some rest.

Next day I woke up asking myself what to do with those positive films hanging from my dark-room ceiling. If I was to contact print them on photographic paper, the resulting image would be negative. No good. So why not contact-print them onto the same film to get negatives, and later print on paper? Went down to the darkroom, prepared chemistry the same way as before and started with the contact prints on that same film.

When I got to the third one I started to realize it had too much contrast, no highlight or shadows detail. Well, the film was very contrasted, and whichever detail left on the positive wasn't making through to the second negative.

I decided to stop, turned off the white lights and investigated what was inside every new box I had. I found a few sheets of something that looked like photo paper in one black plastic bag. I took one sheet, under OC light, got it underneath one of the positives made the day before and exposed to the enlarger's light for 10 seconds. Inside the developer tray the paper remained white for a very long time. The borders that were exposed directly to light should have gone dark right away, I thought. But then some of Gilmara's face started to show up, it was a positive paper. I had never seen that. I went back to the black bag and counted: only 15 sheets. I closed it tight.



Turned the light on. I had to think, it was too little paper to do silly things. I sat at the light table with my 7 "letter-size" positives. In my head some memories of Fatima, of what she used to write, of the classes we had together with Angela Di Sessa... I got a utility knife, a Sharpie pen, some rubbing alcohol, scissors, clear tape and all positives and negatives, good and bad. I cannot quite tell what happened there, but I remember putting everything together with the clear tape at the end.

I headed back to the darkroom, but this time I mixed some of the process developer I got together with the films and papers from Antonio. It is a very high contrast developer.

One has to think extra hard in order to learn how to use positive materials inside the darkroom, especially after years and years of negative processes.

I had lots of fun this day. I still got to test if potassium bromide will help me get rid of some fogging in this paper, which is white. By the way, portions of the paper under easel's flaps turn black! Exposure was around 8 seconds for this paper, and development in that thing similar to D-8 came around one minute and a half. And you can see what happened.



I'll repeat everything as soon as I find some more of this paper, to refine the process and to study different types of interference in these images, in order to make them less of a test. What's important to remember is that these materials were collecting dust on a shelf, right?



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Guilherme publishes the column *Recicle* at <http://www.fotopro.com.br>, a brazilian website on photography. It's about reusing and recycling photographic materials no longer wanted by other photographers and camera shops, including enlargers, old film, old chemistry and huge color paper.

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