

Running in the Shower With a Giant Print

By *Guilherme Maranhão*

When I went down to Houston, TX, for FotoFest 2000 I found an old and abandoned photo paper roll in a nice camera shop—it was 30 feet of Polycontrast II Rapid RC from Kodak, one meter wide. Five bucks later it was mine. Even though I didn't know what to do with it.

I decided to print 8 images in this roll of paper, without cutting it. This operation took one whole night. In order to develop the images I built a small pool with pieces of polyethylene film. The black-and-white images have all the defects of the old paper plus all others created by the irregular development. It is great!

This huge print changed the course of what I considered "my photography". The experience was great, and I wanted to repeat it since.



So last December a huge discount in a Kodak Ultra paper got to me. It was a 100 feet long, 62 inches wide roll. At the same time I got a huge batch of old chemistry from a friend: a lot of R-3 chemistry kits (that "prints from slides" process). I could put both together and start thinking.

What started to make sense was a film I was given some time before: the very strange LPD4 Line Film from Kodak, a black-and-white direct positive film. Slow speed, fine grain, high contrast, a document film that requires nothing but plain b&w developer to make b&w transparencies. I found EI 1.5 for this film, under daylight. One page I found in Kodak's web site described the film as one conceived for blueprint reproduction.

So, the expired 1998 film developed in a normal b&w process yields b&w transparencies, with a little too much contrast, but clear and easy. A developing time with Rodinal at 1:70 dilution helped diminish contrast a bit.



I started making photographs while on the highway, going back and forth between home and work (my daily 120 miles). Results had lots of contrast, but I was enjoying it, and I believed high contrast would make it easy to cross process the negative color paper in that positive color chemistry.

Later I sat down facing the light table, facing also a bunch of b&w slides, trying to figure out how to print them and how big? I would precut some 50 x 62-in. sheets of paper in order to print images one by

one, but also leave half the entire roll untouched, just in case I ever decided to do something like that 30 feet image.

So one night paper cutting began, the size didn't have to be precise, so I used a utility knife. Since it is color paper, everything had to be done in complete darkness. In the darkness it is harder, but it is much more fun!

In that previous 30 feet print each image was something around 3 by 4 feet. I used a 50mm enlarging lens. The enlarger itself was on top of a workbench while the paper was on the floor. In order to make these 50 x 62-in. prints I created a shelf on top of another bench, so the enlarger would touch the ceiling. But with the 50mm lens the image of one frame was still smaller than the sheets of paper.

I remembered reading about how we can use normal photography lenses to make very big enlargements. It is a shortcut for those who don't own an enlarging lens for this specific job. Most enlarging lenses seem to be better with enlargements up to 20X, with exceptions. To solve the problem, instead of my 50mm, I placed a 35mm/2 AF Nikkor on top of the lens board (not screwed in, inside bellows), just resting there. With the shorter focal length the image on the "carpet plane" became much bigger and it covered the entire paper.



It would be ideal to use an enlarging lens capable of 40-60X. Since it was not available, a regular fixed focal length good quality photographic lens, placed with its back towards the negative (as in the camera) can be a better choice than a regular enlarging lens.

To have the paper in the right place I laid a bunch of 2x4s (pinewood) on the floor. These pieces of wood theoretically would stay in place due to their own weight. They would function as an easel that locates the paper under the lens, and under the shelf.



The enlarger's position is also very important: the shelf and negative holder levels were checked against the floor level many times during the printing session. They have to be the same so the picture appears as a rectangle, not some other geometrical form!

Lights shut off! The exposure came around the 30 second mark, fast for such a big print. The slides created in LPD4 have very transparent areas. I didn't perform any tests to determine exposure, I preferred to try the first 4 images with 30 seconds... I'm too lazy to mix chemistry just for a test.

My laziness can also be blamed for the lack of any attempt to correct or filter color. My idea has always been to experience the color these odd

materials can give me. And that's how it went. What I could achieve this way was a certain uniformity among the prints: all slides apparently had the same kind of grey.

I exposed the sheets and kept them in another room until the lab, a.k.a. furnace room, was ready for the developing session. I placed my half pipes—which are nothing but clear poly tacked on a simple pine wood structure—on top of a workbench. Turned the exhaust on and equipped myself with a gas mask, latex gloves and safety goggles.

Safety is the only thing I don't bother finding a substitute for, for all the rest I'll try different methods, materials and equipment. By the way the gas mask was found in a normal hardware store, it was one of the most expensive ones they had, but it is good to use with ammonia, which is the most terrible smell in an "experimental color lab". Especially when you are dealing with an enormous amount of paper, that drags a bunch of developer into the bleach-fix. This releases an array of weird smells, including ammonia.



The size of the half pipes has to be enough so you roll and unroll the paper inside it. If it is too wide, or too long, you'll end up wasting too much chemistry. That's why I use the clear poly tacked on a pine structure, I can adjust the length of slots to the width of the paper.

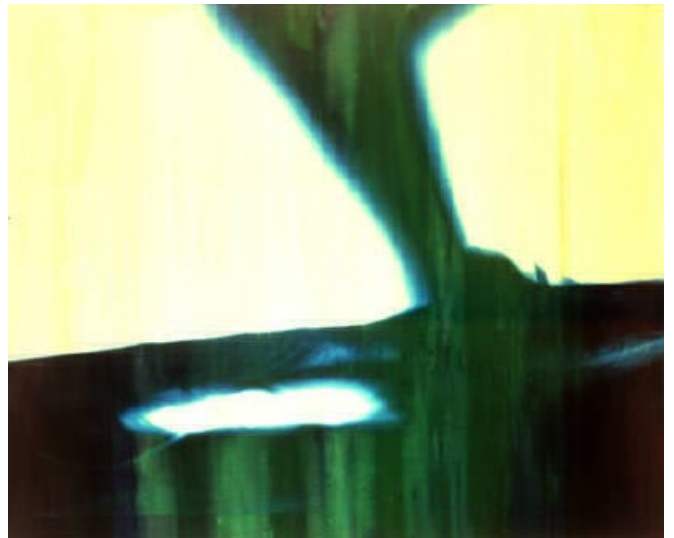
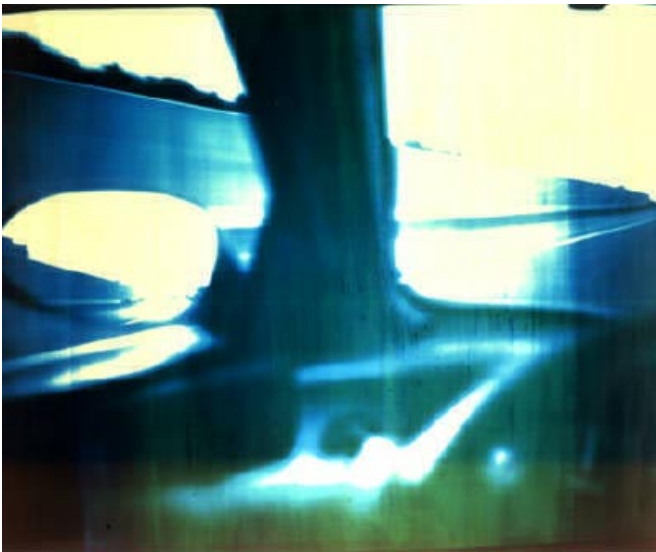
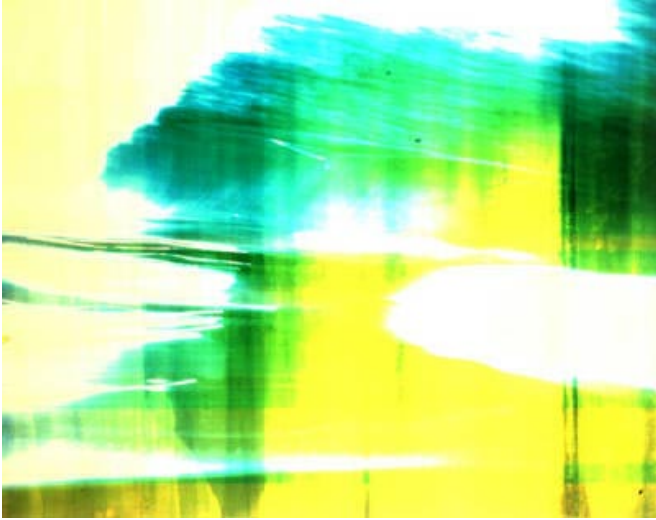
The chemistry already in stock solution was diluted to work solution with one gallon of water at 140F: I wanted a fast process, and I wouldn't use more than 1 R-3 kit for those 4 sheets of paper!

The prints bathed in the 4 different solutions: developer, stop, color developer and bleach-fix, timing was abstract at this point. Lights on! One minute after they were in the bleach-fix... I started to realize a bunch of cleaning would take place later in the "lab". The prints showed many folds due to their huge size and my poor handling experience.

I looked around and the only place I could try to fit the prints for a wash was the shower, and I could use one myself. It was a long shower...

The highlights were completely white, it could be overdevelopment or overexposure, maybe both. Maybe 140F water was not such a good idea. The green and blue tones in the prints are the result of that batch of paper with that batch of old chemistry.

There's no way to reproduce those tones with other materials, and that's what makes it exciting for me. A friend wrote me, she'll be happy when people ask me: What if the image disappears?



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

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