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A Special Effects Photography course in the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences at RIT

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At the request of students in the Advertising and Commercial Photography program of study here in the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences I was cajoled, or arm-twisted, some years ago to design a new course that would be based on something loosely called "photoinstrumentation" but which would enable these students to at least learn about "cool" photography but without the "math".

After some years of indecision ultimately I designed a course and called it "Special Effects Photography". It now caters to just about every major program in the School. It is designed for practicing photographers and students to provide them with an overview of photographic effects beyond those encountered in everyday situations in illustrative, commercial and advertising photography.

Going further, the terms "Special Effects" is a term that includes a whole host of techniques that photographers use to create images that may or may not resemble reality but which usually have some unreal or questionable quality about them. Usually the purpose behind using special effects is to raise the impact or level of interest of an image or to produce images that only exist due to the use of such effects.

Currently among the topics to be covered are stroboscopic, high speed flash, matte box, front and rear projection, paper negatives, polarization effects, strip photography, peripheral photography, in-camera masking, infrared photography, the Sabattier effect, the Phoenix Process, slit-scan photography, combination flash/tungsten photographic techniques and others.

In addition, students are encouraged to build "gadgets" that make various effects possible or more readily achievable. These include the construction of a matte box, a sound activated flash synchronizer, a "tailflash" synchronizer for leaf shutter applications, a mechanical stroboscope and a rewind bracket suitable for motorized strip photography.

Special effects depend on the basic belief that photographs don't lie. Photographers exploit this premise by presenting to the observer images that are seemingly impossible to achieve in reality or which emphasize certain features of a subject beyond that achievable by normal photographic methods. In addition, special effects often modify reality for some ulterior purpose such as to enhance aesthetic merit, to convey information in a more effective manner than would be possible with a standard photograph, or to confuse or deceive the viewer into a false interpretation of reality.

Special effects can be classified according to a variety of criteria. Some occur prior to the making of the photograph. Others are used during photography and yet a third class of special effect is that which is accomplished by modifying the original image after the initial photograph is recorded. They could also be classified based on the procedures used or the technology involved. The techniques can be optical, chemical, physical, photographic, electronic, or combinations of these methods. In fact, there are so many techniques that could be called "special" that it becomes impossible to attempt to list, classify, and discuss all of them.

Special effects and Trick Photography are sometimes considered synonymous but the word trick suggests that the photographs are intended to entertain or deceive viewers rather than serve more serious artistic and professional purposes.

The advent of electronic image storage, manipulation and output has had a significant impact on the degree of sophistication and scope of special effects. Not only has this technology allowed for improved quality in creating traditional effects but it has made possible the creation of images that were totally impossible in the past.

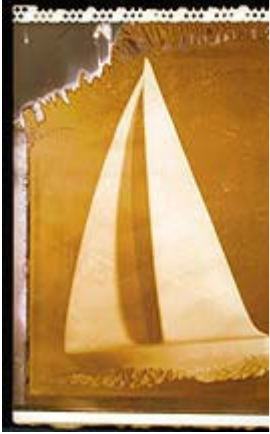
However, in my special effects photography course only special effects produced by standard or traditional methods by still photographers are considered. This is not meant to exclude computer manipulated as much as to recognize that much can be done with computer manipulation but that in the context of a course of instruction some limits need to be established to reach some reasonable coverage of this vast subject.

Special Effects Photography is a 4 quarter credit hour, one quarter (11 week) long, course meeting for 2-4 hours of lecture/demonstration per week and periodic 2-4 hour group photography sessions.

Below are some examples of work completed by students who completed the course.



Matt Byers
- solarization



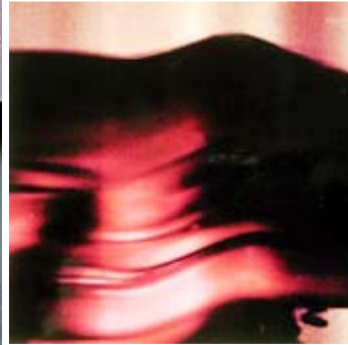
Kenyon Cooke
- solarized hand



Sabrina Fairclough
- splash



Sara Strom
- solarization



Adam Dore
- solarized



Matt Berkman
- mattebox photo



Kevin Schelkun
- splash



Mari M.
- linear strip photo



Sang-Kook Park
- linear strip car photo

Sang-Kook Park
- combined negatives

Tiana Lichtenau
- high speed egg photograph

Mari. M.
- splash photo



Sara Strom
- stroboscopic model

There is an outline or syllabus of this course available online at the following address:

<http://www.rit.edu/~andpph/ipt/des-specfecs.html>

Contact the [Andrew Davidhazy](#) if you have feedback, comments or suggestions about this course.