

The future of film

With sales of film on the up, the **Royal Photographic Society** decided it was time to form an RPS Analogue Group. Group chairman **David Healey** explains why

Why did you feel this was the right time to set up the RPS Analogue Group?

Film's disciplines and principles are foundational to digital imaging. A significant number of members still own and use film cameras, and over 100 have joined to date. A generation of digital-only, younger photographers are buying Instax, Lomo and old film cameras as they're intrigued by film. We're here to educate and encourage them all.

Tell me a little about your role within the group?

I chair a talented and enthusiastic committee, who look after the

programme, newsletter, events, communications and exhibitions.

What is the ultimate aim of the group and what events can we expect to see in the future?

The aim is more photographers (analogue and digital) who better understand film, darkroom and alternative processes, share skills and learn and take great photos! There's a generation of people from photography lecturers to primary-school children who are completely unaware of film and its importance. Recent events have included workshops on instant photography, trends in film use and split-grade

printing. Forthcoming ones will cover fibre-based printing, scanning, using slide film and photographing landscapes. Our members' print exhibition will be held in December*.

How would you define 'analogue' photography?

In brief, 'analogue' refers to images made using film or other light-sensitive emulsions, and chemically processed. 'Hybrid' imaging is where analogue and digital processes are combined: we welcome people who do that too!

Has film's decline been greatly exaggerated?

Yes. The evidence is that sales are no longer declining and growth is happening. Lomo sells hundreds of thousands of rolls a year. It's still made by Kodak Alaris, Harman Technology Ltd/Ilford, Fujifilm, Agfa, Foma, Adox, Impossible, and (to be relaunched shortly) Ferrania.

Why do you feel we're seeing such a resurgence in analogue photography? Do you think there's something a bit more 'earthy' about the format?

Human beings are designed to be creative, and we like hard copy. The virtual-only world is ephemeral. Seeing a hand-made print, or a projected Fujichrome Velvia slide in a darkened room, is a very different experience to an image on a phone.

It seems to extend to more than just film photography. We're also seeing a growing interest in alternative processes. Do you think this comes from the same desire?

Yes, alternative processes have always been popular. A full-time practitioner may know better, but I think the connection with photographic history, as well as the engagement with image and printing experimentation, is a big part of the draw.

I wonder if perhaps analogue photography feels a little more ritualistic than digital? There's a level of engagement throughout the whole process. It feels much more like a craft, whereas digital can feel a little more automatic. Would you agree with that?

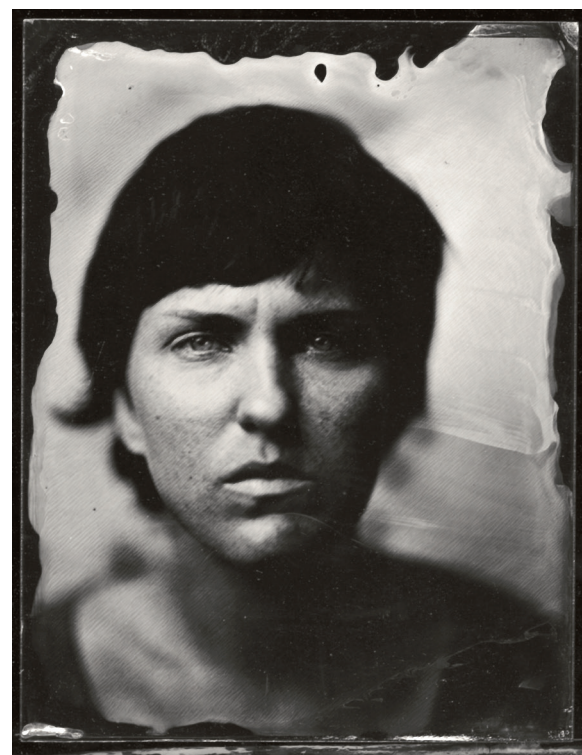
Teenagers are often bored with digital: developing and printing film is tactile, new to them, demands skill (for example, to load a film spiral) and involves personally making images. In an entertainment age, we often merely observe others' creativity, or use creative tools made by others. In Lightroom we click a preset: in the darkroom we change the image ourselves. It is 'my' image that mysteriously appears through the developer.

In what ways do you think film and digital can inform one another?

Photography's essential skills are common to both modes of capture. If you only have 10 shots on a film you make each count, so it's a more planned, disciplined workflow. Twelve-year-old pupils in a school's photography club using a 10x8in camera see shutters and apertures closing and opening, focus images on the ground glass, and change the shape of the image with the movements so they can understand what their iPhone cameras and apps do for them.

What is your own background in photography, particularly as it applies to analogue photography?

My Latin teacher taught me at age 11 both to print and to enjoy landscapes. My Saturday job in the local camera shop taught me about equipment. I have used photography in my various communications jobs. Then an art teacher asked me to help her A-level



art students use the school darkroom, and I now tutor photography there. For my other employer, Keyphoto, I help digitally trained technicians and art teachers better understand film photography.

If film is truly experiencing a renaissance, would there be good sense in camera manufacturers investing some time into developing new film cameras?

By so doing they would advance photography. A new generation of young photographers need new 35mm and 120 SLRs – especially photography students. College and university departments still teach film, and their darkrooms are busy.

Do you feel manufacturers could look to particular film cameras for inspiration? Are there certain features that you'd like to see?

A manual, mechanical, robust 35mm SLR with a depth of field

'How Hill Windmill' by Chas Bedford
Mamiya C330 TLR,
1/2sec at f/16,
Rollei infrared
film developed in
Rodinal, R72 filter

To join the RPS and its Analogue Group, visit www.rps.org/special-interest-groups/analogue or call 01225 325 743. Group membership is free during the first year of RPS membership. AP readers who shoot film and print images are welcome to join. *Only Analogue Group members' images will be included in the exhibition (closing date 30 October 2015). Full details and entry form on the RPS website

preview button (and affordable like the Pentax K-m) is ideal. For those manufacturers who still make prime lenses, introducing a film SLR would increase their sales and give life to all those manual-focus lenses sitting in cupboards and in university photographic departments waiting for a new full-frame film body. An electronic film SLR could share lenses with its DSLR cousin. And if you make a medium-format DSLR, why not make a 645 film SLR with the same lens fitting? Plus, more high-end film scanners would appeal to those who shoot film and scan it.

Finally, which film camera could you not live without?

The one that takes my best lens and fits my hands! Option one would be a Nikon F100 (which handles like my D700) or a Nikon F2. I also like the Pentax LX. Option two is a Plaubel Makina W67 – it's compact, uncluttered, sharp and as it's medium format there's less tonal compression in images.