

Plastic Cameras

Toying with Creativity
Second Edition



Michelle Bates



PLASTIC CAMERAS

*To Ike Royer and Mary Ann Lynch
who harassed and inspired me in my
journey and made all of this possible.*



Ike Royer, 1932–2008, © Michelle Bates. Image of Ike made in his office at Freestyle Photographic, with a Lensbaby lens on Nikon DSLR.



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Michelle Bates

Foreword by Mary Ann Lynch

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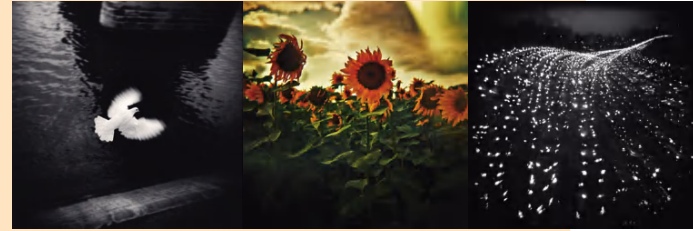
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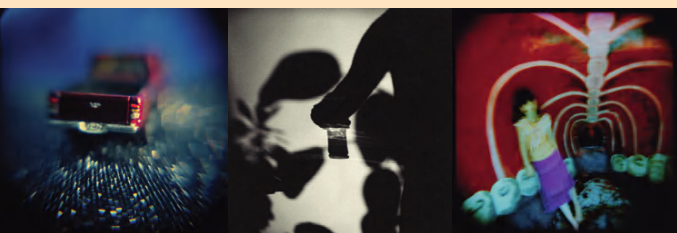
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contents



FOREWORD.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
INTRODUCTION	xi
CHAPTER 1: What are Plastic Cameras?	3
<i>An introduction to the history of plastic cameras</i>	
CHAPTER 2: Plastic Portfolios	15
<i>30 portfolios of images from some of the most influential and talented photographers using plastic cameras, from the 1960s to today</i>	
CHAPTER 3: That's So Cute!	91
<i>A survey of plastic cameras from the 1960s to today</i>	
CHAPTER 4: Film Options	113
<i>Film options for all your low-tech cameras</i>	
CHAPTER 5: Prepping and Shooting Your Holga	125
<i>Getting your Holga ready to play</i>	



CHAPTER 6: Let's Get Shooting!	145
<i>Learn to love your plastic camera's quirks and make artful images</i>	
CHAPTER 7: Techy Tips	169
<i>Using filters, fancy films and flash with plastic cameras</i>	
CHAPTER 8: Holga Camera Modifications	189
<i>Fussing with your Holga</i>	
CHAPTER 9: Film Handling and Processing.....	199
<i>Processing, handling, and storage of exposed film</i>	
CHAPTER 10: Prints and Pixels.....	211
<i>Reviewing and printing your images</i>	
CHAPTER 11: Alternative Processes and Presentations.....	231
<i>Alternative printing techniques, and information about matting, framing and presenting your photographs to the world</i>	
RESOURCES	245
<i>Plastic camera websites, publications, and suppliers</i>	
INDEX	263

foreword

When a *New York Times* reporter asked Albert Einstein to comment upon one of his books, Einstein replied, “What I have to say about this book can be found inside the book.” Unlike erudite texts aimed at academics, or handbooks that bombard the senses with visuals, *Plastic Cameras: Toying with Creativity* has as foundation the spirited voice of its author, photographer and plastic-camera evangelist, Michelle Bates. As for this New York-born, Seattle resident’s unquenchable enthusiasm while leading the tour of the low-tech world—if at times it seems over the top, this can be forgiven. View it as a concession to the energy that drives her—that of the importance of play as a vital ingredient of both culture and creativity.

Once seduced by the unexpected delights of affordable, uncomplicated camera equipment, there’s usually no forsaking it. Think of high-tech versus low-tech as the difference between piloting a jet aircraft and hang gliding: There can be times for both. Bates had a 35 mm camera in college and still uses both film and digital Nikons for certain assignments, but it was a Holga plastic camera, in 1991, that unleashed her passion for photography: Ultimately it led her away from her career as a bio technician, to become a fulltime photographer and teacher. Knowing that the parallel plastic subculture is still virgin land for many, Bates has made it her self-appointed mission to introduce others to the joy of using plastic cameras. In sharing her bliss, and even trade secrets, Bates offers an alternative to what she refers to as “those cultural tapes people have running in their heads about what makes a photograph good.”

Those who pick up plastic and toy cameras are ready to push boundaries, disregard rules, experiment, intermingle low-tech and high-tech equipment and simultaneously move in both analog and digital worlds. Plastic camera images created as fine art and for other professional uses are widely embraced by photographers and educators, though no parallel critical attention has yet evolved. *Plastic Cameras* serves many audiences and uses by comprehensively covering both a wide range of imagery and cameras along with history, the diverse styles of profiled photographers, technical tips, and resources. It may also be a nudge to those who write about fine-art photography to seek out excellence within this realm, while considering the influence of that work upon the larger art world. This is fascinating territory ripe for exploration.

There’s a second aspect to the appeal of these cameras, which accounts for the swelling numbers of their users: Communities form around them, and globally active ones at that. Unlike complicated equipment that can confound the brain and cost thousands of dollars, plastic cameras free up the spirit to let loose and play, to see what gifts the universe

may bestow. Those hungry for a social scene can find them in this subculture. Groups spring up overnight, blog, exchange images online, or arrange daylong shoot-ins and all-night screenings, such as those infamously held by the Lomographic community. If this book had a mantra, it would likely be “Let’s toy with creativity.”

As for those photographers not seeking communities, but working with plastic cameras for fine art and professional uses, in 2008 Holga Limited created the *Holga Inspire* initiative, sponsoring traveling exhibits of works by selected photographers to educate the public on artistic possibilities using their cameras. Moreover, in dire economic times, what could be better news than the existence of affordable cameras, whatever their intended use? In many areas, this includes teaching photography to children. The influence and appeal of toy cameras is also spreading to other realms.

Plastic Cameras: Toying with Creativity, when first published in 2006, soared out of the gate, garnering sales, enthusiastic press, and fan mail from throughout the world. Bates had broken new ground in contemporary photographic literature and found a ready audience. With the combined efforts of her book, workshops, lectures, and personal appearances, she helps to propel this dynamic subculture, where taking a break from “the tyranny of technology” is not just okay but healthy. *Plastic Cameras* is still the only comprehensive book that, with its content, makes a convincing argument for placing the low-tech and high-tech photography worlds on equal footing—so far as their possibilities for personal pleasure, commercial, professional, and artistic expression, and fine art. Whatever the camera, the outcome ultimately depends upon the intent, vision, and capabilities of the photographer.

When Bates approached me about working on the first edition, I agreed, knowing her to be the ideal author for this book. She is of the Holga tidal wave, still surging, but her purview grows to encompass new developments. This expanded second edition is another knockout. The present tsunami, of course, is digital, which is rapidly pulling many away from film (analog) completely, whether done with low- or high-tech equipment. And yet, there are increasing numbers of 21st century photographers who switch easily from analog to digital, valuing their respective social virtues and different characteristics. More and more of these semi-Luddites are bound to be pulled into the plastic camera camp, and as long as cameras such as the Holga, the newly reintroduced Diana+, and other toys offer opportunities for shooting film, that intimate golden-lit darkroom will still await those who choose to do their own developing and breathlessly wait for the image to appear.

Mary Ann Lynch
July 2010

acknowledgements

My ride in the world of plastic cameras has been tons of fun since it began in 1991. In addition to playing with the cameras, getting to know so many wonderful people has kept me going.

In the early days of my interest in photography, my parents, Mimi and Harold Bates, Richie Lasansky, Jim Hogan, and the Maine Photographic Workshops got me on the road to life with Holga by my side.

Over the years since, many people have been my companions and mentors, supporting my endeavors, including Ludmila Kudinova, Larry Busacca, Ike Royer, Llyle Morgan, Elizabeth Opalenik, James Wood, Richard Newman, Victoria Haas, Jennifer Loomis, Patrick Dellibovi, Marita Holdaway, Ray Pfortner, Angela Faris Belt, and Ctein. Freestyle Photographic Supply (Ike, Patrick, Geri Carmeli, and many others) has helped me more than I can say, and it's been great working with them.

This book, in its first and second editions, was made possible by my editors, Diane Heppner and Cara Anderson St Hilaire, Paul Gottherer (who came back for seconds!), and many other people at Focal Press.

Many people have lent technical advice, shared tips and favorite photographers, and given me cameras, among other things. My gratitude to Randy Smith of HolgaMods, Christine So and Don Knodt of Holga Limited, Cameratechs, Michael Barnes & toycamera.com, Nic Nichols, C Gary Moyer, Liad Cohen of the Lomographic Society, Nick Dangerfield of Superheadz, Mark Sink, Connie Begg, and many others. It's been especially thrilling to work with Holga Inspire and Christine. Mary Ann Lynch has contributed to both editions most generously by sharing photographers, advice, and her invaluable expertise in reviewing, editing and fine-tuning the manuscript and proofs; I can't overstate how appreciative I am.

I love teaching and speaking, and am thrilled to have had the chance to spread the Holga love at photographic schools and centers, bookstores, and conferences nationwide. Thanks to all of them, especially my home base, and the place where I first taught, Photographic Center Northwest, and to James Wood for helping me find my voice.

Thanks for the support of my family and community: Dad, Rob, and the Susans, my dear friends in Seattle and beyond (Mik, Tiberio, Peggy, Andrea, and so many more...), and to Tim Furst, Lighthouse Roasters, and Office Nomads for creating comfortable spaces to be and to work.

Thanks to all the photographers who contributed images to this book. I am in awe of what they create and am thrilled to have the opportunity to show their work to a wider audience.

And, most of all, my dad, who is always behind me 1000%.



Helter Skelter, © Michelle Bates, 1991, at the Skowhegan State Fair, Maine. This was made with my first Holga. I made my hand-cut cardboard negative carrier for this photograph so I could include the entire image in the print.

introduction

Since the publication of the first edition of *Plastic Cameras: Toying with Creativity* in 2006, the world of these playful cameras has not only kept growing—it has exploded. At the time the first edition was done, it was meant to be a comprehensive collection of the cameras, photographers, publications, and exhibitions that had made up the genre to that point—and we accomplished that, without feeling we had omitted a vast amount of information, in terms of what had happened up to that point.

However, a brief 4 years later, so many people have fallen in love with the magic of low-tech photography that it would be impossible to even touch the surface of all the articles, books, and exhibitions throughout the world that show off the work of photographers who travel this jaunty plastic path. While the first edition stands as a snapshot of the history of plastic cameras to 2006, this updated edition is a survey of what led us up to today's exhilarating times. The heart of the second edition is a sampling of some of the best work being done with plastic cameras right now. There's also a snazzy collection of the most interesting and popular cameras on the market, a guide to shooting with plastic cameras in general, and specific Holga-related information, tips, and modifications.

The Holga is what launched me into the world of photography, nearly 20 years ago. I was first handed a Holga in 1991 at the Maine Photographic Workshops, now Maine Media Workshops. It was there that I created my own vision through the plastic lens, aided by a negative carrier that I self-fashioned out of cardboard, to allow printing the whole of a Holga image. I continued to shoot with my Holga after that summer in Maine, and, before long, I started exhibiting my Holga work, publishing Holga images in weekly newspapers, and even had an image on a CD cover.

In those early years I first met Mary Ann Lynch, Mark Sink, Gordon Stettinius, and Ann Arden McDonald, along with many other Holga and Diana photographers, at the openings of group exhibitions we all were in. At that time, the toy camera community was small, and it was always exciting to meet other people with similar interests and the inspired enthusiasm that characterizes all of us.

Socially, as well as professionally, the plastic camera culture has changed greatly now that the Internet allows us to connect from the comfort of home. Low-tech photography lovers have, since the early days of the Internet, taken advantage of its wonders to share work, advertise competitions, and meet one other. I found many of the book's contributors by tooling around the web, Googling, following links, and perusing many of the toy camera websites listed in the Resources section.

Ever since publication of the first edition, I've had the immense pleasure of taking my toy camera show on the road—teaching workshops and lecturing around the country. In fact, I went back to Maine Media Workshops after 15 years to teach at the place that gave me my start. I have also taught my toy camera workshops at many other art and photography centers and schools and have sat in with university photography classes. I've lectured at bookstores, photography conferences, photographic art centers, and other venues for photo fanatics and have juried toy camera exhibitions. While of course I love showing my own images, I especially enjoy opening my audiences to new outlooks on creativity by showing them the wide variety of works of photographers from *Plastic Cameras: Tying with Creativity*. Lecture attendees and workshop participants are wowed by what they see people doing with these simple instruments and are often inspired to pick up a plastic camera and take it for a spin.

It's an exciting challenge for me to entice photographers away from using only the latest technology and to instead take a photographic journey with the simplest of film devices. These toys become tools for them to learn, or perhaps relearn, the basic principles of photography, the art of composition, and how to create a cohesive body of work. Oh yes, some of them will first need to learn how to work with film, as a whole new generation of photographers has grown up using only digital cameras; our plastic cameras are firmly planted in the analog realm.

The awareness of toy cameras has reached far beyond the world of fine-art photography in the last few years. It is only recently that friends and people I meet have any idea what a toy camera is all about. Now it's common for them to even interrupt me as I'm explaining, with, "Oh, you mean the Holga?" After so many years in a plastic camera arena that was, to most outsiders, obscure, it still surprises me when this happens.

This revised edition is meant for two audiences, both those new to the world of these cameras and those who have already spent time with them and might already own one, or even a whole collection. The detailed history and technical information in the following pages will be of use and enjoyment to both newcomers and more experienced photographers.

This updated collection adds a large assortment of new material to the previous one. Images in these pages represent some of the most outstanding photography being done today, along with compelling images of historical interest, especially some from the earliest days of the plastic camera uproar, in the 1960s and 1970s. The photographs herein represent not only fine-art images, but commercial, wedding, editorial, and documentary photography, as well as photojournalism. This edition also highlights some newly added photographers who use plastic cameras almost exclusively, including Brigitte Grignet, Jennifer Shaw, Thomas Michael Alleman, and fotovitamina, as well as those who use them as just one photographic tool among many, including photo luminaries Sylvia Plachy, Michael Kenna, Nancy Siesel, and Louviere + Vanessa. All are stellar additions to the group of photographers we began with in the first edition, such as David Burnett, Teru Kuwayama, Pauline St. Denis, Ted Orland, Franco Salmoiraghi, and Harvey Stein.

Among all the photographers who make up this edition, there's great diversity in their work: Some create imagery in a straightforward manner, while others combine technologies, manipulate prints, or otherwise mix things up. In this world of alternative technology, there is no right way to go about any stage of the process; it's all about experimenting and finding your own artistic vision.

Plastic Cameras: Toying with Creativity can be read straight through or perused as needed when looking for specific information. Chapter 1 starts things off with a history of the genre, with examples of some of the earliest toy camera images made with the ground-breaking Diana cameras. Chapter 2 features 30 portfolios, with work from the 1960s to today, covering a wide range of styles and subject matter. Chapter 3 is a guide to the cameras, old and new, and Chapter 4 discusses film options. After that, the book is a guide to image making. Chapters 5 and 8 are specific to the Holga, while Chapters 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 cover shooting, processing, printing, and presentation with any low-tech camera. Finally, the Resources section provides information to help you continue your creative journey in the world of plastic cameras. Enjoy, and happy shooting!



Mountain, © Nancy Rexroth, 1973, Route 50, Albany, Ohio, 4-inch-square silver-gelatin print. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery.

chapter one

What are Plastic Cameras?

Welcome to the exuberant world of plastic cameras! Beginning with the legendary Diana, to one of today's favorites, the Holga, these lightweight, simple-to-use, and inexpensive cameras conjure up an atmosphere of joy around image-making, create intriguing photographs, and make photographers as well as their subjects smile. Even better, the images you make can proudly take their place alongside photographs made with the most sophisticated cameras and lenses. Once you've mastered the art of photographing with a plastic camera, the possibilities of what to shoot and where to share, exhibit, or publish images are endless. Some might pick up one of the many varieties of plastic cameras for the first time and think "This can't be a real camera" or "How can this possibly produce good photographs?" And yet, images from these inspiring toys are being used in a wide range of commercial and noncommercial settings, from gallery exhibitions to magazines, newspapers, and advertising campaigns to fundraising for nonprofit causes. While we aficionados might still draw stares and exclamations of disbelief from digital camera users, for those of us who've been magically drawn into the world of these delightful image-making toys, there's often no going back.

Photographic technology has continually marched forward since its inception in the mid-1800s. While the advances made have been extraordinary, the basics of photography are still relevant, and even very old cameras can still function today. Like these relics, our plastic cameras totally ignore all the current camera features, but instead of this hurting their appeal, they are in fact gaining in popularity. Holga cameras, vintage Dianas, and new creations, such as the “Blackbird, Fly” and Diana+, lack meters, autofocus, auto film advance, adjustable shutters, and, of course, digital sensors. In an age when just about everyone has a digital camera and most people upgrade regularly to take advantage of the newest version’s capabilities, it’s astounding that anyone would choose a camera made of flimsy plastic, has a little spring for a shutter, and requires taping to keep the back from falling off. And yet, both experienced and novice photographers alike continue to adopt these toys as serious picture-making tools and as an important part of their collection of cameras.

The ways plastic cameras have managed to infiltrate the world of photography over the past 40 years have surprised even their champions. Since their discovery by American photographers in the late 1960s, they’ve been used by teachers at varied levels to simplify teaching the basics of photography. The ingenuity of their users has kept them from getting stuck in the realm of artist’s toy though, and in the 21st century, professionals regularly use Holgas and other toys for serious photojournalism, commercial and editorial photography, portraiture, and weddings, often without even identifying their published images’ humble origins.

Plastic cameras can be a surprisingly inexpensive way to get into photography. Although Holgas aren’t the \$17 they once were, they can still ring in at an affordable \$30. Vintage Dianas are now collector’s items, and newer creations tend to be priced at a premium. But with the most basic Holga 120N and some 120 film, you’re ready to roll. The 120 Holgas and Dianas are a great introduction to medium-format photography, but 35 mm versions are also gaining in popularity, especially as processing options for 120 film become harder to find.

Another reason photographers love these cameras is the positive side of their flimsiness—they are lightweight. Medium-format cameras and film and digital SLRs will weigh you down far more than a 7-ounce Holga. With the proliferation of tiny digital point-n-shoot cameras, weight is less of a concern, but plastic cameras have other draws that set them apart.

Shooting with a Holga, Diana, plastic 35 mm, or even toy digital camera is a very different experience from using a “real” camera, for both photographers and their subjects. Giving a portrait subject my Holga to hold for a moment is a great way to break the ice and get them to smile, as they register with surprise that the camera weighs so little. Their experience of being photographed will always be different when the tool is a toy versus being accosted with an intimidating, complex piece of equipment. The cameras’ affordability also makes them accessible for programs and classes that serve groups of youths, both in the United States and elsewhere.

Of course, the core reason for using any particular camera is the way the images will look in the end. Each camera and lens interprets the world in its own way, and the photographer needs to find the ones that complement his or her artistic vision. Negatives created with a Holga or Diana plastic lens are very distinctive; in fact, it’s often possible to identify which camera made a particular image. The newer cameras and accessories are opening up even more avenues for photographers to explore their artistic vision and discover unique styles.

So-called reverse technology also has the power to bring people together, almost the opposite of the often competitive world of photography. Communities have sprung up among plastic camera aficionados, resulting in a multitude of projects, from group exhibitions, web sites, and forums to World Toy Camera Day, involving photographers from across the globe.

Since I first held a Holga in 1991, the demise of their popularity has been repeatedly predicted, but they have continued to grow in popularity to a degree that no one could have imagined. In recent years, the toy camera experience has attracted enormous numbers of people worldwide. These include both experienced photographers and novices, drawn in by the cameras’ simplicity and cuteness, the perceived rebellion against more complex and expensive digital equipment, and the love of being part of a movement. The camera manufacturers have cultivated this movement and built on it. By releasing more types of cameras, colored and souped-up versions of old classics, and lots of accessories, they create choices for their widening demographic.

As long as these cameras and film are available, no one need ever be without an image-making device. In this era of more complexity, more megapixels, and more money—for some—all-manual plastic cameras provide a lifeline to pure photographic pleasure, a creative outlet for inspired artistic



Boarding School, 1965, © Michael Kenna. Taken with Kenna's first camera, a Diana, at age 13 while at St. Joseph's College, Upholland, Lancashire, England.

vision, and an antidote to the tyranny of technology.

WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

How did such unassuming toys turn into invaluable tools for serious photographers? Diana cameras first appeared in the United States in the late 1960s. They were manufactured by the Great Wall Plastics Company in Hong Kong and sold for anywhere between 69¢ and \$3.00. With three apertures, one shutter speed, a difficult-to-control bulb setting, and three pictographic focus settings, the Diana barely held together and only almost kept light out. Originally stumbled upon in drugstores by curious photographers, Dianas were also discovered by educators at university photography programs,

including Jerry Burchard at the San Francisco Art Institute and Arnold Gassan at Ohio University. By adopting the Diana in their beginning photography classes, they immediately leveled the equipment field for their students. Using these simple cameras, students learned the same skills in composition and creative vision that they would have learned with more expensive cameras, without the distraction of having to make complex camera adjustments. Because both the cameras and the film were cheap,

students were encouraged to shoot with abandon. Dianas in hand, students and faculty alike loosened up.

This early history is discussed by those who were part of it in “\$1 Toy Teaches Photography” by Elizabeth Truxell of Ohio University in the January 1971 issue of *Popular Photography* and in several issues of *SHOTS Magazine* during the 1990s (see Resources). Dianas appeared on the scene at a time when photography was expanding its reach, just beginning to be accepted in the academic and fine art worlds. The cameras fit in with the cultural explosion of the times, and photographers came at their imagery from a broad range of perspectives and experiences. The first work to be recognized by the fine art world was Nancy Rexroth’s series *Iowa*, which was shown at the Corcoran Museum in 1971, excerpted in *Aperture’s* 1974 publication *The Snapshot*, and published by Violet Press in 1977 as the first monograph of images made with a plastic camera.

In 1977, *Popular Photography* published two extensive articles devoted to the Diana camera written by Don Cyr. Included in special issues of the magazine, these must have opened up a whole new audience to the joys of the Diana. In 1979, the Friends of Photography put together *The Diana Show*, a juried exhibition that attracted more than 100 entrants. A catalog of the show, the first published collection of toy camera imagery, featured the essay, “Pictures through a Plastic Lens,” by David Featherstone, which became the classic treatise on the subject. Diana cameras weren’t manufactured for very long; Featherstone mentions that they had already stopped being made before *The Diana Show* catalog was published. The Arrow, Banner, Dories, and several dozen other Diana clones continued to be made, usually in a shade of blue similar to the Diana, but in varying degrees of quality. The last of the line, the Lina, ceased to be made in the late 1980s, but for the photographer willing to troll yard sales or eBay, there are still many Dianas and her kin floating around.

Without knowing about the legacy of the Diana, Mr. T. M. Lee ushered us into the Holga dynasty. Invented in 1982 for his Hong Kong company Tokina Corporation, part of Universal Electronics, Holgas were meant to feed the vast Chinese market for affordable medium-format cameras. The name Holga came from the Cantonese term hol-gon, meaning “very bright.” Shifted a little, for easier English pronunciation, the word resulted in Holga. Within a few years, 35 mm film took over, and the Chinese demand for the larger format fizzled. The Holga’s saving grace was the United States market, where



*T. M. Lee, Inventor of the Holga, © Skorj. This portrait was taken with a Fujipet camera during a visit to the Universal Electronics factory by Tony Lim and Skorj in 2005 for an interview for *Lightleaks Magazine*, Issue 2.*

Holga soon found a new realm of popularity with American photographers. In the early 1980s, Holgas were introduced at the Maine Photographic Workshops (MPW; now Maine Media Workshops), where they took the place of Diana and Dorics cameras as low-tech educational tools for the workshops'



Leona Rostenberg and Madeleine Stern, 1995, © Sylvia Plachy, photographed for the Village Voice. Antiquarian book dealers and companions. "We still end each other's sentences. Together we look to the future—to our next find, to our next book, to our next adventure." Holga camera with Tri-X film and flash.

students. Holga's availability at MPW and through their store, The Resource, made them accessible to photographers at large, and word spread quickly throughout the photographic community. As their popularity grew, imports increased, surprising even their manufacturers. Sales soon topped 10,000 per year in the United States and currently about 200,000 Holgas are sold per year worldwide. Well over 1,000,000 Holgas have made their way into the hands of adoring photographers.

In 1986, Dan Price launched *SHOTS* Magazine, and introduced an entire generation of fine art photographers to Diana and Holga imagery. In the 1980s and 1990s, some established professional photographers started using plastic cameras in their work. The breakthrough into the editorial realm came with the publication of

photographic community, and the demand has spurred new innovation and interest. It seems the more we are all overwhelmed by digital technology, the more popular throwbacks become, including plastic cameras, which are accepted both as serious photographic tools and as funky cultural objects. Their ever-burgeoning popularity has spawned the creation of more styles of plastic cameras, as well as other tools that create imagery reminiscent of their low-tech look, but within the digital realm.

In the early 1990s, Lomographic Society International began its bid to introduce the world to low-tech cameras with the Lomo LC-A. While neither plastic nor cheap, the simplicity and gaudy, contrasty color rendition of the LC-A endeared it to the Austrian students who stumbled upon it. They then decided that everyone should adopt their Golden Rules of Lomography, creating “Lomographers” who “shoot as many impossible pictures as possible in the most impossible of situations from the most impossible of positions.” Their main tag line is “Don’t think, just shoot,” gifting photographers with a liberating manifesto. While the original LC-A is no more, now Lomographic makes the LC-A+, in addition to the Action Sampler, Super Sampler, and other multi-lens cameras. Lomographic’s newest creation is the Diana+, along with its entire line of accessories. The huge success of this reinvented classic has converted many thousands of people worldwide into plastic camera enthusiasts.

To keep up the interest of those who buy their products, and to win new converts, the Lomographic Society has created a new angle on the natural congregating that tends to happen among toy users. Since 1994, the society, based in Europe, has thrown parties and events all over the world, including the LomOlymPics. LC-A, Holga, and Diana+-crazed photographers are sent out on missions of documentation, encouraged to not actually look through the lens when they shoot, and rewarded with exhibits made up of thousands of images, along with all-night parties.

The Lomographic Society regularly produces publications of images made with their stable of cameras, and their web site (www.lomography.com) provides an enormous number of opportunities to post images, chat online, and collect the latest in cameras or related gear. Lomographic showrooms in major cities around the world display the entire line of cameras and accessories, and they pioneered a relationship with Urban Outfitters, which now carries a wide selection of toy cameras in its stores throughout the United States, and has exposed a whole new generation of shoppers to the allure of brightly packaged, low-tech cameras.

In 2008, Tokina, which manufactured Holgas for over 25 years, but hadn't otherwise interacted with the photography world, broke out by bringing Christine So on board. With her passion and enthusiasm for photography, So reached beyond her original job description and connected the company with the enormous international community of photographers who had been enamored with their products for decades. I was contacted by So in the summer of 2008 and was absolutely thrilled to finally have a relationship with the company. I sent them a copy of the first edition of this book and was able to pay my respects and send suggestions to Mr. T. M. Lee himself.

Propelled in part by information So generated, a major decision was made to change the company name to Holga Limited to reduce confusion of the Tokina name with the Japanese lens company of the same name. Led by So's enthusiasm and connections, the company also created "Holga Inspire," an initiative that comprises a Web site and collection of top-notch Holga photographers, including several contributors to this book. The first "Holga Inspire" exhibition debuted in Bangkok, Thailand, in March 2009 and continues to tour in the United States. The company has also begun sponsoring educational programs, photo shows, and competitions, encouraging the adoration their cameras already induce. In addition, Holga Limited has expanded their line to include Holgas in a variety of shapes, versions, and colors, along with an ever-growing collection of accessories. The back and forth between the company and those who use their products has been fruitful and exciting and promises to continue as they generate new ways to respond to the community.

The newest entry into the manufacturer's field is Superheadz, a Japanese company, which has wowed the toy camera community with its original offerings, including the Golden Half, the "Blackbird, Fly," and the Digital Harinezumi. Their sister company, Powershovel, produces books and music, and together they are providing toy cameras and imagery for the enormous Japanese market, and worldwide. Learn about the history of Superheadz from an interview with its founder, Hideki Ohmori, on FourCornersDark.com and view more of their offerings at www.superheadz.com.

As the look of toy camera images has gained a widespread following, creative types who want to combine this low-tech aesthetic with their high-tech equipment have been busy. Craig Strong invented the Lensbaby, which has blossomed into a series of lenses for SLRs that, in

some ways, echo the look of a Holga, but have their own characteristics and can be used with digital as well as film bodies. Meanwhile, in the digital world, a wide variety of tools are now available to make standard image files look like they were made with a Holga, Diana, Lomo, or Polaroid; these include Photoshop actions and an ever-expanding array of iPhone applications.

Bringing all of these products together, Freestyle Photographic Supply has become a champion of traditional photographic methods and is the U.S. distributor of the Holga. Its mission is to keep students and photographic enthusiasts awash in Holgas, film, and darkroom gear and supplies, and its colorful, informative catalogs have increased the popularity of the entire family of plastic cameras.

Plastic camera history continues to evolve in its journey into the future.



Jocotán, Guatemala, 2004, © Brigitte Grignet/Agence VU'. Holga camera with Fuji 400 color negative film.

chapter two

Plastic Portfolios

Introduction

This chapter presents a unique collection of plastic camera images gathered from dedicated photographers far and wide specifically for this book. You'll see here some of the earliest images made with the Diana, in the late 1960s, as well as contemporary work showing a wide range of approaches and sensibilities. Some of the photographers in this section shoot exclusively with their plastic camera of choice, while others keep them as just one tool in their array of camera equipment. Some are champions of low-tech photography, whereas others publish their images without calling attention to their source. Images here have been used for fine art, advertising, to communicate the news and humanitarian crises, and to spread joy through the magic of photographic imagery. What all the photographers have in common is a natural talent for creating beautiful photographs and a passion for their work. Many of the contributors have images elsewhere in the book. You can find out more about all of them through links listed in the Resources section.

Nancy Rexroth—Plastic Pioneer

Nancy Rexroth was part of the beginning wave of plastic camera photography, although she wasn't aware of it at the time. As a graduate student at Ohio University, she discovered the Diana camera,



A Woman's Bed, © Nancy Rexroth, 1970, Logan, Ohio. The first Diana image that struck a chord with Rexroth; after this, images came “like a string of pearls” to create the *Iowa* series. 4”-square silver-gelatin print. Courtesy of Robert Mann Gallery.

which was being used as a photographic teaching tool. Soon she had fashioned the style of imagery that would earn her national acclaim barely out of college. Unlike the highly conceptual photography then in vogue, Rexroth's Diana images arose from what she calls “an almost obsessive love of the classic face of beauty.”

With the Diana she created “a melancholic landscape of dark and visceral longing,” as she refers to it. She named this series *Iowa*. Taken primarily in southeastern Ohio, these images flowed from her memories of summer visits to her relatives in Iowa. “I began to see Iowa everywhere.”

Luminous, emotionally charged, and poetic, Rexroth's *Iowa* photographs were included in Aperture's publication *The*