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Chicago Tribune THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2008 | SECTION 4

★ CS

Hip clicks

Photographers embrace imperfect images from cheap, retro cameras

By Christopher Borrelli
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Dan Zamudio carries his camera in a gray ski cap, tucked between folds of frayed knitting. The camera once belonged to his mother. She died six years ago. His father found it and considered throwing it out until Dan snapped it up. The lower half is black and faded, though hardly caked with age; the upper half is teal. Surrounding the lens like a half moon are the etched silver letters of a name—"Diana."

Get snapping
How you can get in the picture.
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Zamudio's mom was a Judy. He carries her camera like a rare egg. Every time the shutter clicks he holds his breath.

Every photo with this thing could be its last. "This camera won't survive," he said. "I know that. I don't want anything to happen to it. It was my mother's. I've taken great stuff with it. But I've made peace with myself that something will happen."

Because it's junk. It's a vintage Diana camera—a chunk of Hong Kong plastic. Even the lens is plastic. Holding it steady requires the patience of a sniper. Press down on the shutter and you half expect a rubber flower to spring from the lens. As for the pictures—Zamudio's favorite subject is fading Chicago, the remnants of neighborhoods in the midst of seismic gentrification, and without exception, not a single thing he's ever shot has turned out sharp. Edges fade into soft crescent blackness. Many have that signature smudgy blur of early photography.

And that's the draw. This may contradict every assumption about contemporary photography you have—that digital cameras have auto-corrected out of existence the goofs of the casual picture taker (they can), that more people prefer the immediacy of digital to traditional film



PHOTO BY DAN ZAMUDIO



PHOTO BY JONATHAN MICHAEL JOHNSON



PERRIE SCHAD WITH PINHOLE CAMERA. ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE

Diana
Dan Zamudio uses his mother's Diana camera. It weighs next to nothing. Zamudio, of Logan Square, has a book of photos of old Chicago neon signs (like the image above) coming out this week. And yet he doesn't have the patience to learn how to use a camera. "Someone might say I am impatient, and that I don't know anything about photography, and they would be right. But it's the eye that's important here, not the camera."

Lubitel
This multi-exposure photo, far left, was shot by Jonathan Michael Johnson with a Lubitel camera. The camera's viewfinder is at the top. "I wanted to be part of a tradition," he said, explaining why he gravitates to old, dated cameras. "I wanted to understand what it meant to live at a time when people took these cool fuzzy pictures."

Pinhole
A pinhole camera is the oldest kind of camera, essentially a sealed box, with a pin-prick to allow in light (and expose the negative). Perrie Schad (near left), who works for a fashion studio on the South Side, made her camera from an old Transformers lunch box, bundling it in straps of black tape to keep out light leaks. "I don't think digital will ever be as charming as something like a real tangible print of film. The way I do it though, to get anything at all—that in itself is a success."

Tasting runners' goo is a marathon itself

PLUS: A spectator's guide to Sunday's marathon. PAGE 7

FORTY-FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE are registered to run the Chicago Marathon on Sunday. To wrap your head around this, think of the entire city of Buffalo Grove waking up one morning and running, en masse, to Grant Park. Now imagine what it would take to fuel such a crowd on such a journey. Until someone comes up with something better, they often eat goo, high-energy pseudo food with consistencies that range from paste to snot, don't require athletes to think about chewing and running at the same time, keep their muscles going, replace all those electrolytes and don't taste too hideous. We roped our athletic colleagues (among them, a triathlete, a marathoner and a competitive cyclist) into evaluating 32 flavors of goo that we bought at Fleet Feet (1620 N. Wells St.; 312-587-3338, www.fleetfeetchicago.com). Here's what they said:

—Trine Tsouderos



CLIF SHOT Bloks, \$2.49; www.clifbar.com
Flavors liked: Strawberry
Reactions: Received mostly boos. "How do you bring them along? The whole cellophane bag of six?" wondered one. All despised Margarita W/Salt ("like doing a tequila shot"). But one thought the 33-calorie chews would be good for careful rationing over a run.



CLIF SHOT Energy Gel, \$1.25; www.clifbar.com
Flavors liked: Mango, Strawberry, Vanilla, Mocha
Reactions: One user of GU loved the idea of an organic gel, found the flavors mild and the consistency perfect. "I might switch!" he wrote. Others complained this had too much sugar.



Carb BOOM! Energy Gel, \$1.50; www.carbboom.com
Flavors liked: Vanilla Orange, Apple Cinnamon
Reaction: Props for easy-open tab and slow-burning complex carbs. One called the flavors too intense. "I can't imagine doing the double espresso mid-run."



GU Energy Gel, \$1.13; www.guenergy.com
Flavors liked: Just Plain, Vanilla, Espresso Love
Reactions: Our athletes rate GU highly for its Goldilocks texture. "Good, thick consistency," wrote one. "Others found some flavors too cloying and fake." "The fruity flavors are very synthetic!"



PowerBar Gel, \$1.29; www.powerbar.com
Flavors liked: Vanilla, Chocolate, Green Apple
Reactions: This gel is way too runny, agreed our athletes. "Would make a mess, drool out of your mouth (ew)," wrote one. But, at least one enjoyed the Green Apple flavor.

BONNIE TRAFLET/TRIBUNE

A different point of view



ANTONIO PEREZ/TRIBUNE

"It was my mother's. I've taken great stuff with it."

—Dan Zamudio, on his vintage Diana camera



PHOTO BY CHRISTINE CONNELLY

Fisheye
Christine Connelly shot this with a Fisheye2 camera, whose oblong exposures reduce the world to a keyhole. She's not unusual as collectors go, said Jill Enfield, a judge at the Krappy Kamera Competition. "I think it proves to people they have an artistic bone in their body."

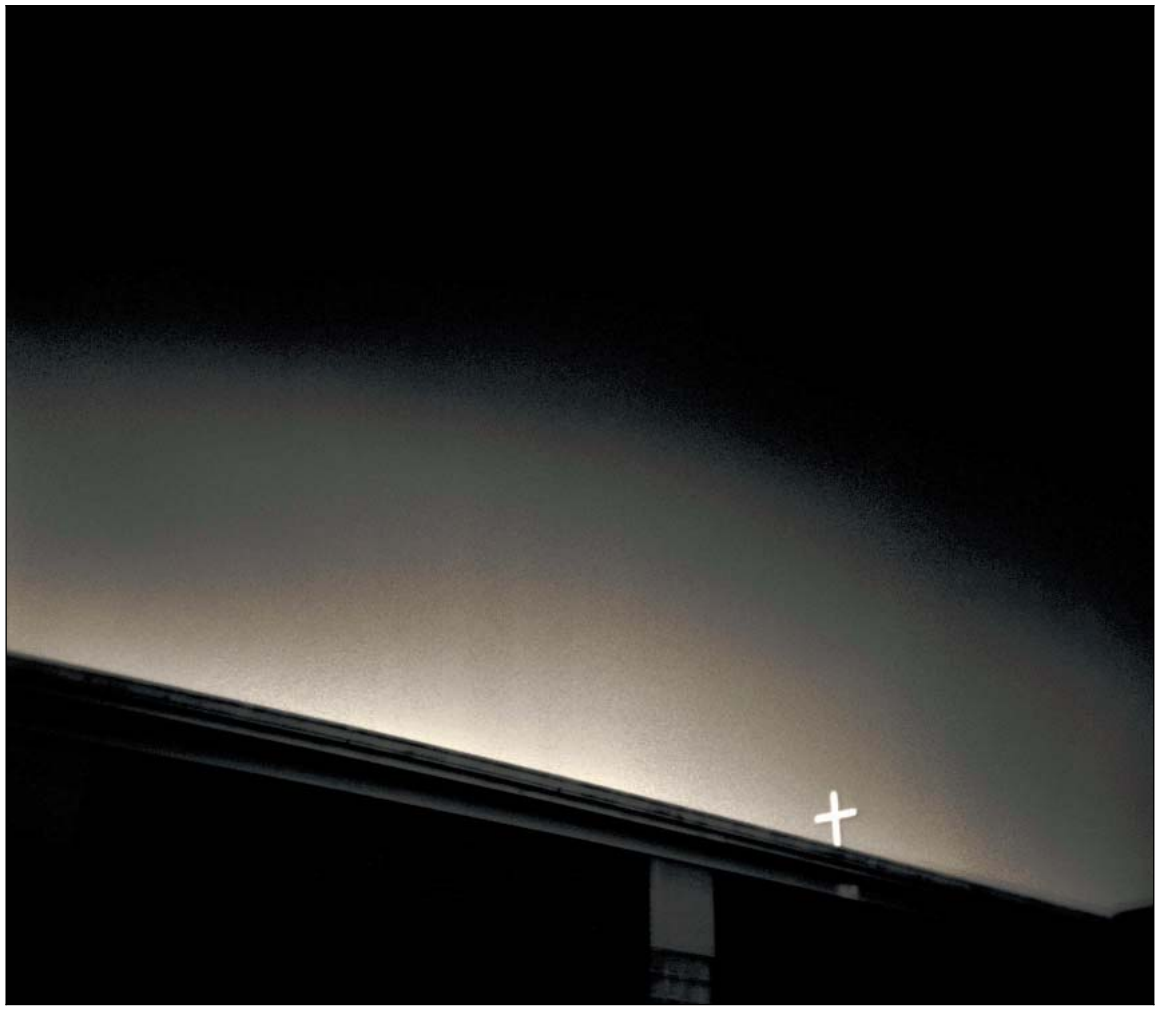


PHOTO BY BILL VACCARO

Holga
Bill Vaccaro, a Rogers Park librarian, had "a torrid three-year affair with digital and it drove me to my true love—film, medium format." Vaccaro and his modified plastic Holga have won contests, and his images have been published in Light Leaks, a new magazine dedicated to low-fi photography. "I love the dreaminess, the fact you don't need to think while shooting—the crappier the camera, the more interesting the image."



Polaroid
Christine Connelly, a 24-year-old Chicago Web designer, prizes her Fisheye2, but sometimes she reaches for a Polaroid instant—which gives everything the gauzy mask of a Fleetwood Mac magazine shoot. "I like that these cameras take a lot of technical stuff out of my hands. They don't do it that well. But they're fun and inexpensive and it's about the image. If I dig it, who cares what [kind of camera] I took it with?"

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE CONNELLY

Flaws add beauty, aficionados say

Continued from Page 1

(they do; 62 percent of U.S. adults have bought a digital camera, according to the Consumer Electronics Association).
Yet a shabby-chic movement has taken hold among everyday picture takers, bored with the perfection of digital, and perhaps a bit nostalgic. They've discovered the warmth of old-fashioned, gaffe-loaded photos shot with cheap plastic cameras.
"And no, I'm not surprised," said Robert Clarke Davis, who teaches photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. "People still want to remind you there's a real person behind an image. They want to remind themselves, I think. You wouldn't write a love letter on a computer, would you? I think it's the return of the craft aspect of what's become a passive activity."
Even more ironic—this low-fi movement is being driven by technology, by fans of junk cameras who flood blogs and social networking sites with blurry, overexposed images. (On Flickr, for instance, there are 250 groups dedicated to the virtues of those fogged-in Diana images.) Indeed, this low-fi trend is even threatening to go mainstream—if you think of Urban Outfitters, the leading retailer of low-fi cameras, as mainstream.
Now gift shops like Paper Source are stocking cheap cameras. And neighborhood camera stores—and museum shops, too. "Artists have always been fascinated by the unusual," said Laura Nealon, chief sales manager for Lomography, the Austrian-based camera society (with offices in Brooklyn) that has become the primary distributor of affordable retro cameras. "But I think we're seeing a shift. I see more regular people—between 18 and 35—falling in love with this stuff."
We're talking toy cameras—the professional photographer term for badly made novelty cameras. We're talking the Diana, the sort of hollow-body giveaway you once

Let yourself go low-fi

So, you say you want to take lousy pictures? Ahem. We mean, rather, you say you want to take interesting pictures with a cheap plastic camera? Climb on the low-fi bandwagon. Here are a few answers to your questions:
1. Where can I find a low-fi camera?
The quick answer is Urban Outfitters (for instance, 20 S. State St.; 312-269-9919), which sells a variety of Lomography branded cameras, including Dianias, Holgas, and the Fisheye2. Central Camera (230 S. Wabash Ave.; 312-427-5580) and Helix (310 S. Racine Ave.; 312-421-6000) carries Holga—as does Paper Source (919 W. Armitage Ave.; 773-525-7300). The shop at the Museum of Contemporary Art (220 E. Chicago Ave.; 312-280-2660) carries a few kinds, in addition to Lomo replicas. Most of these stores

also sell film. For Polaroid instant cameras, try eBay or Craigslist.
2. OK, but can I get the film developed?
Usually at professional labs. Central, for example, says they "develop any kind of film." Another good place: Gamma Imaging (314 W. Superior St.; 312-337-0022).
3. Where can I learn more about low-fi photography?
The Museum of Contemporary Art (mchicago.org) tends to have a class in pinhole camera making every few months. Dan Zamudio's gallery, the Sulzen Fine Art Studio (2720 W. St. Georges Court), shows his Diana pictures. Online, try Light Leaks magazine (lightleaks.org) and Lomography.com.
—Christopher Borrelli

got in the mail for answering a survey. Zamudio's Diana is an original, but Urban Outfitters sells a replica for \$95. And we're talking the Holga, the most popular retro camera, a Chinese-manufactured brick that gravitated east in the 1980s, known for its inevitable light leaks. It's available at the Museum of Contemporary Art store for \$82. We're talking the Lomo, the disposable Soviet-era relic that became a cult favorite in Europe (then North America), thanks to a pair of Lomo-loving Austrian backpackers who later founded Lomography. And we're talking the trusty Polaroid instant camera—simultaneously on the brink of extinction (Polaroid announced in February it was halting production on instant cameras and film) and the verge of something like a revival, appearing routinely at low-fi-friendly competitions such as SlideLuck PotShow (held last month in Chicago) and the Krappy Kamera Competition, held in New York City. Sarah Knopf relates.
She's 24, lives in Hanover Park and always travels with a vintage Horizon. Each image

comes out two negatives wide—vast and panoramic and, in Chicago, few shops will even develop it. "I was at a carnival and I set up my camera, which takes time. But all these people were taking pictures with their digitals and saying like, this is much easier. And I'm like, Oh, my God, what is wrong with the world? Why is the cleanest way of doing something necessarily the best way of doing something?"
Jane Fulton Alt learned this lesson the hard way. For years the Evanston social worker has been making a regular pilgrimage to Mexico with celebrity chef Rick Bayless. Her pictures from Mexico hang in his Frontera Grill and Topolobampo. About 12 years ago, while preparing for the trip, her Hasselblad camera—a prized possession among photographers, costing several grand—broke. She panicked, then she thought "Why not shoot with a Holga?" She paid less than \$20 for one. "It just opened me up to do this incredible body of work," she said. "You can't regulate everything—it has a setting for sunny, and for cloudy. That's it.

It's this total camera of faith. You have no idea what you're going to get."
Junky cameras exist in a limbo, between the casual and aesthetically minded. Interest is at least as old as Janet Malcolm's 1970s New Yorker essays on the Diana (which gave the camera renewed life), and at least as hip as when toy cameras became the tools of choice for Andy Warhol's Factory.
And often—if shoddy construction has given you a hairline split, if streaks of light sneak into the final image—you can get the most ethereal, unpredictable, vaguely apocalyptic results.
It also illustrates a curious selling point about low-fi photography: Take a picture of your cat and you don't need to know much about photography to come back with something poignant, even unsettling. "I'm a little wary of these cameras, to be honest," said Whitney Bradshaw, the curator of the Bank of America's photography collection. "The aesthetic can override everything. I have an issue with people who rely on the unusual—as though that's somehow enough for a body work to be interesting." That said, Mary Warner Marien, a Syracuse University art professor and author of a history of photography, said as long as there have been cameras there have been photographers who say photography is growing soulless, too easy. They crave failure.
Like Adoree Dunn.
On an early September morning, the 27-year-old store clerk stands on Sheridan Road, demonstrating her Holga. She shows off a few pictures of her family. The photos have an enchanted quality. The colors are soft, the shadows velvety. She assembles the camera with reckless speed, snapping plastic against plastic. She points her camera at a garbage can and presses the shutter. "I like that I can take film to the store and get it developed. I miss that." Her camera has a hole in the bottom. Sometimes sand gets in and negatives come back with scratches. "I like that I have no idea what I'll get."
There's a faint click.
She shrugs.
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