

Twelve key ideas for double exposure and film swaps



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1. Film swap is making art with chance

When we do film swaps we have to be very consistent technically but also understand the importance of chance in the final result. Our 36 photos will be mixed in any way and order with 36 others that we can not control in any way, in these combinations new images will be born. The film swaps produces double exposures (or triple or quadruples or whatever we want) and this is part of experimental photography, is a game.

The techniques that we use to do these kinds of photos are not very complex but there are several issues to consider that I will try to summarize in this text.

2. Which are the best film rolls for film swap?

In the market there are many kinds of film rolls currently, although in general in the stores where we live, they have very few. You have to think that analogue photography was, 20 years ago, the only kind and now just few people as us use it. We have gone from having more than 50 development shops in Barcelona to only 8 and a lot of them are new, products of this new vintage wave. In the market usually you can get 3 brands, Kodak that are the most trusty to reality, Ilford that are also good but recommended for black and white photography and Lomography that have normal movies (which are worse than Kodak one's) and experimental. Obviously you have to buy it according to your budget, but we have also have to decide what kind of film rolls we need for what we want to express.

Personally, I think it is not a good idea to make double exposure and film swap with experimental Lomography films or reversal film with inverted processing because we already have a lot of things that we cannot control, we can't left the film to decide the tones and colors for us. On the other hand, this type of photography is very difficult to interpret, if we want to mix a building with a face, we have to recognize both and that is very difficult if the film has a magenta virage that explodes the colors. If we do abstract or vintage photography is different, you can do it with Lomo films and they will be great, but for double exposure and film swap I do not consider it a good idea in terms of the result you will get.

My choice is related with the experimental realism, that what you see is a reality that has been mixed with another reality, so I use Kodak ISO 400 (they are the most stable in all conditions) or 200 if I assure that we both will take photos at daytime. I buy them from Barcelona online and that lowers the price from 6.50 to 4 Euros in Photo R3, there are options for quantity in other pages also that are very good. Finally, if you scan them, it's not going to be expensive.

3. The light, just use half of it



Think that between the two photographs that make up the final double exposure, the amount of light we give it has to be the normal for an ISO 100, 200 or 400 film roll. That means that in my photos I have to give half of the light and that is achieved according to the camera by setting the -1, taking pictures at -1 of the photometer or directly putting the camera at ISO 200 when you have a 100 film, ISO 400 when you have a film 200 or ISO 800 when you have a film 400 and shoot normal, the camera will calculate half the light. If you are going to do portraits, we want them to predominate; in that case we have to give them a little more light than the normal half that we would give them in double exposure. Also, if you can put a black background or backlight, much better, because this way the face will be even more highlighted. As in the photo above, if you make one in full day, without shadows and with the light that you would normally use, the other photograph will not have space or light to print on.

4. My photography will be in your shadow



Photography is made up of light, double exposure requires shadows and transitions of light to make space for the combinations of both photographs. In addition to looking for the object, framing and calculating the light, for a good double exposure we have to know how to find the shadows and the backlight, look for them, because there is where the other photo will come in. As the title says and you can see in this photo, my photography will be in your shadow, you have to take pictures of shadows and backlights to create and space for the other photo. The lights are yours and the shadows are mine in your composition, think about that, it is not a normal photo, it is half a photo in terms of the amount of light and the objects, because half of them have to be shadow or darker objects.

5. We must share the frame



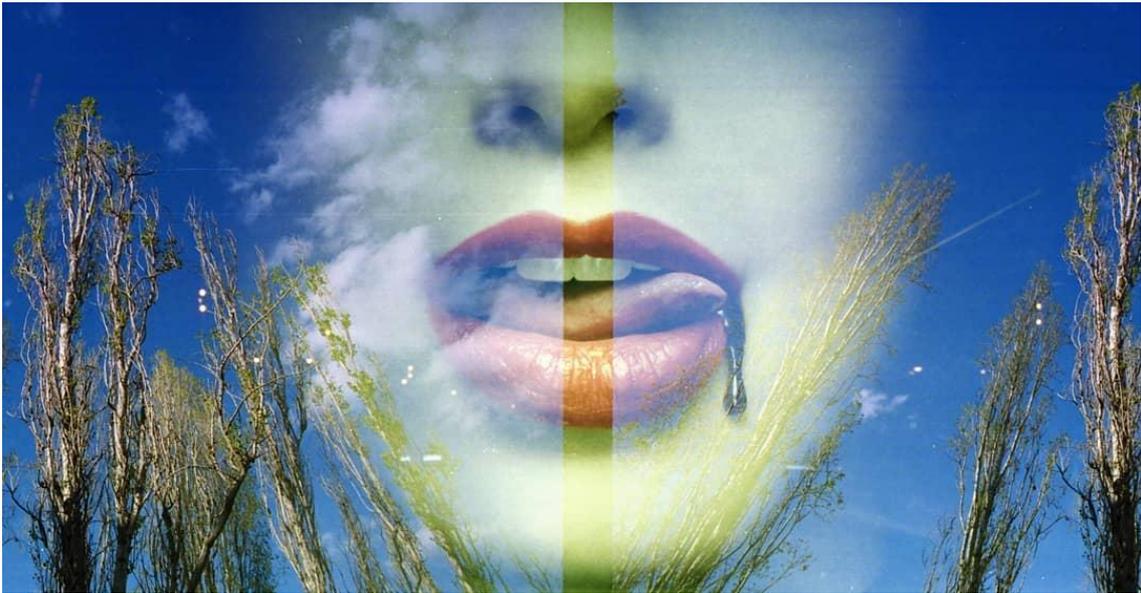
When you take a picture, think that the frame is composed of the sum of the two photos, that the frame should be shared half and half. Normally the frame is what dictates the place of the objects, in our case, they are the backlights and the shadows which allows to enter the frame to the other photo: in your composition you have to leave a half free, and that means dark, for the other photograph. It is the light that makes up the frame, not the inside or outside of the field, so think that the object you want to give predominance does not necessarily have to go in the center, because you do not know how it will be combined with the other photograph or where its lights and shadows are found.

6. Always look for black backgrounds and minimalist photographs



When we think about doing a double exposure photograph we have to know that the information (objects, narrations, textures) that we choose for each photo must also be half, the other photograph will also bring their information. If we both give the information that we would give for a normal photograph, the final result would be very overloaded and very difficult to interpret. We have to look for simple, minimalist themes and black backgrounds because they tend to merge with the other photo unlike the white background, as in the case of the photo above, which puts a patina of white light that ruins the photo. Never photograph objects that are difficult to understand (like graffiti), you have to think that people already have problems interpreting a photo, especially if we mix two different or unrelated parts of objects that people cannot understand in their parts.

7. Two cameras, two frames



If the cameras do not allow us to mark the frames to align them (put them in the same place when loading the impeller), one solution is to repeat the images a couple of times, that assures you that the subjects, the colors, the background and the horizon lines will look good and be coherent. If you mix themes that have nothing to do in your film roll, probably the combinations between the 3 photos are not going to be good. For example, if in this photograph that we have up here we had shoot a building in the photo on the right and not twice the same row of trees, it would have been very difficult to interpret the photo and it would be aesthetically inconsistent.

8. The themes that are going to shoot



To start working with double exposures it is always easier to shoot textures and figures, and do backlighting of objects with textures. Mixing plants and plants, for example, does not make sense because people will not see the differences between them, you have to look for things that make sense in the combination, double exposure is a metaphor that arises from the contrast of different objects. It is always good to comment with the other photograph on what is going to be photographed or what is on the film rolls before sharing it to try to choose topics that may be suggestive in the dialogue. When these more classical themes, backlights and textures have already been worked on, you can begin to experiment with other forms of combinatory.

9. There is not an up and a down or a right and a reverse in the photos



One of the things you can start experimenting with is the formats and compositions of the frames, in the double exposures there is no up and down or right and a reverse side or horizontal and vertical. From all these combinations and the spaces that we are leaving between photographers you can come up with very interesting results. In addition, in general we talk about film swap because we have exchanged film rolls between two photographers but that does not means they are all double exposure, you can experiment and do 3, 4, 5 or 10 exposures, you only need to divide your half of the light into the quantity of exposures you want to do. Think that the more exposures the more recharged of objects the image will be but it can make sense, for example, if you make a frame with 4 times the same row of houses on the edges of your frame. In that case, if the normal light is 125, your light is 60, if you take 4 photos, you have to give 12.5 each.

10. Every photography is special, but not in the way you think it



Sometimes we get obsessed with the perfect photography and that great but with the film swap and double exposure (as we do not know how they are going to be mix and the result is a product of chance) it is best to choose four or five themes and work with them throughout the film roll. That allows you to have six or seven different photography's of each theme, which in the mix with those of the other person can give great results; in general one will be the best of all. If you like a photo very much, repeat it and give it more options so that it fits in the mix, keep in mind the idea of film swap and double exposure when you are making, and repeating, each photo, as many times as you think is right.

11. 3 good photos of 36 is a great success



As we have seen, there are so many things that we cannot control that if we get 10% of interesting photographs, we have to be happy. We must understand that we are doing experimental photography and that we use two different cameras (with photometers and very variable technologies), at different times of the day and with two photographers with different levels of experience and knowledge in this subject. If a film roll has nothing interesting, do not get discouraged, study it and think what has not gone well to improve it next time, think that the following can be great, something you had never even thought about. Play, take a chance, that's film swap.

12. Ask them not to cut the film roll and, if it's possible, scan it yourself

Finally, when you have your double exposure film or film swap and send it to develop, tell them it is a double exposure and ask the store not to cut them! The automatic machines have a standard format and do not accept the double frames created by the double exposure, as well as the frames usually come out mixed, the images have to be re-framed. For this same reason, if you can scan them looking for the best frames, it will always look much better. Before, the photographers develop and threw the copies following personal guidelines, if we scan it we can control that and not let a store decide for us!