

Holga and Polaroid: a new Cult Classic

The Holga camera has been a cult classic for many years now. The Holga was first produced in China in 1982 using the then most popular film format, 120. As the Chinese market opened up, 35 mm began to sweep the country in popularity. Even though it began to wane in popularity in China, western interest began to take hold, eventually selling over a quarter of a million cameras. The name Holga is derived from the Cantonese “ho gwong”, which means “very bright”. Filtering through European and western ears we get “Holga”. It is a twenty-dollar camera using a film format most often used in cameras costing thousands. It is prone to light leaks, vignetting, and less than sharp images. Photo students, fine art photographers, and professional photographers alike have embraced it. Web sites abound with imagery produced with this simple camera. People offer modifications to extend its capabilities for longer exposures, professional flash and even pinhole possibilities.



Hobe Sound, by John Reuter 2004

Why use a Polaroid back on your Holga?

What could possibly make the Holga better? A Polaroid back of course! Polaroid’s Japan subsidiary must be credited with this revelation. Holga has been extremely popular in Japan for many years, and Japanese photographers regard Polaroid photography for its “not digital” identity.



Carmel River Beach, by John Reuter 2004

The Polaroid extension of Holga photography is a natural one. The instant feedback is both a creative advantage and a practical one. Polaroid film offers the artist the obvious instant feedback but also tremendous creative possibilities available in Image Transfer and Emulsion Lifts from PolaColor 88 ER film to dark-room printed or digitally scanned enlargements from Polapan 85 Positive/Negative films. The film line up is rounded out with the vibrant color of PolaColor 89 to beautiful black and white prints from Polapan 84 and Polapan 87. Type 87 offers an ISO of 3000 for capturing images in low light conditions.

From a practical perspective Polaroid allows the artist to know they are getting the results they seek immediately, eliminating the guesswork of using a camera with essentially one shutter speed and two apertures. The tripod mount on the Polaroid back allows for multiple and accumulative exposures, extending the capabilities of the simple shutter.



Add more light to your Holga

Please note that making modifications to your camera may make the warranty from Polaroid null and void. The Holga is renowned for user modifications to extend its capabilities. Owners feel somewhat emboldened by its inexpensive price and experiment in often fearless ways. One simple modification helps to bring the lens aperture better in line with Polaroid's average film speed. Essentially this procedure will convert your aperture from f8 to f5.6. Most Holgas work best with ISOs of 200-400. Outside of Type 87's ISO 3000, the working ISO is between 75 and 100. The Holga's fixed aperture is f8. This is accomplished with a small metal ring glued inside a larger plastic aperture opening.

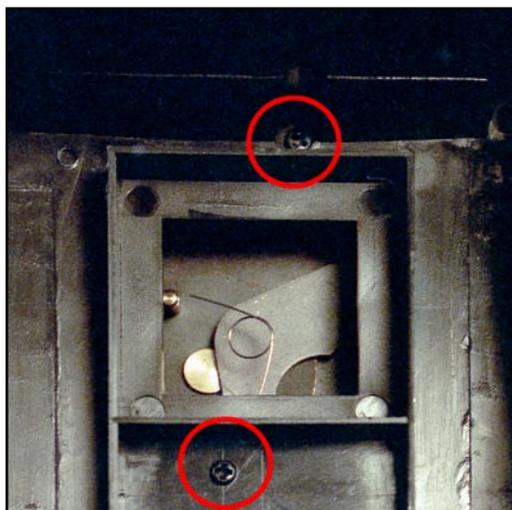


Figure 1

It is possible to remove this ring by taking the lens off the front of the camera. To do this one must first remove the shutter assembly. This is held on with two small Phillips head screws that are accessed from the inside of the camera. (Figure 1) To access them you need to first remove the plastic film mask that covers the screws. Once removed, place them in a safe place, they are quite small and easy to lose. The square shutter assembly

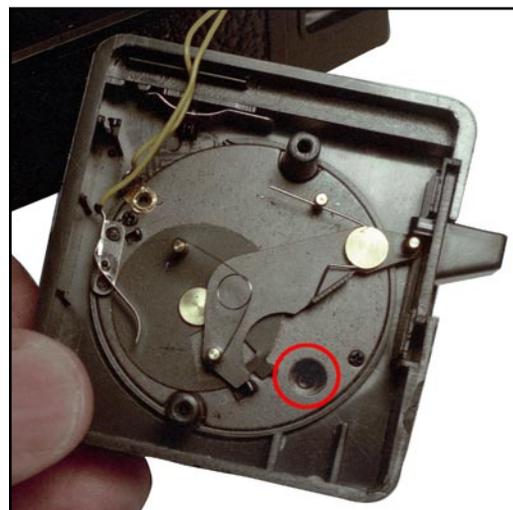


Figure 2

will come a way from the camera body, still held close by two wires that sync the shutter to either the built in flash or hot shoe depending on which model Holga you have. On the back of the shutter is one more screw recessed in a hole. (Figure 2) This screw constrains the lens movement inside the focus range. By unscrewing it slightly (not all the way out) you will now be able to unscrew the lens off the shutter. Once removed turn the lens over and you will see the metal aperture in the center of the lens. With a small slot screwdriver gently pry the ring out from the opening. (Figure 3 & 4) Keep it if you ever think you may wish to replace it, it can be glued back if desired. Now replace the lens back on the shutter assembly. Be careful where you start the rotation so that it ends up in its original position. If you do not have it positioned correctly it may miss the focus stops that the long screw provides. If it does miss try again from a slightly different start point. Now replace the shutter and refasten the two screws. You now have an f5.6 Holga!



Figure 3



Figure 4

Holga into the digital world

One of the attractions of the Holga to many photographers is its simplicity, its lack of sophisticated controls and the sense of freedom it gives one when using it. By coupling the Holga with a Polaroid back the photographer can produce a wide range of prints that can exist on their own as small photographs but also can be scanned, enhanced and manipulated digitally to enlarge them. From Image Transfers, Emulsion Lifts, to finished prints and Polapan85 negatives, Polaroid materials provide an extensive range of analog input that converts beautifully into digital output.



Polacolor 88 Image Transfer by John Reuter



Polacolor 88 Emulsion Lift by John Reuter

Scanning Polaroid Imagery

Today's flatbed scanners offer the Polaroid photographer an inexpensive and high quality method of enlarging and enhancing their instant images. The first step in digitizing Polaroid imagery is to select a resolution appropriate for both the source and the desired print size. Sources such as image transfers and emulsion lifts will have different approaches than Type 85 negatives. With transfers and lifts it is usually best to target your output size and printing resolution. An example would be 12x12 inches at 360 dpi. Since the tonal range of these sources is somewhat limited it is probably sufficient to scan at 24-bit color. With higher resolution negatives it is recommended that you use the highest optical resolution of your scanner and scan the original at 100% magnification. Since T85 negatives have a tremendous tonal range it is desirable to take advantage of 16-bit scanning to get the most shadow and highlight detail. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Correcting and Retouching Polaroid Imagery

Virtually any scanned image will require some tonal correction or retouching. Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements allow the photographer to make corrections from simple to elaborate. For tonal corrections it is recommended that Levels or Curves be used. For 8 bit images Adjustment Layers are best, they take up virtually no file size and do not permanently alter image data. 16 bit images can also use Adjustment Layers in Photoshop CS but file size will increase dramatically.

For dust removal or fixing rips and tears in Emulsion Lifts the rubber stamp and healing brush offer powerful retouching capabilities. Combining these tools with layers will allow even greater flexibility. Color Balance, Hue and Saturation and Colorize can fine tune color possibilities or offer completely new directions from the original. Other tools such as Noise, Un-Sharp Mask and Gaussian Blur will fine-tune the image for enlargement.

[Click here to learn more.](#)

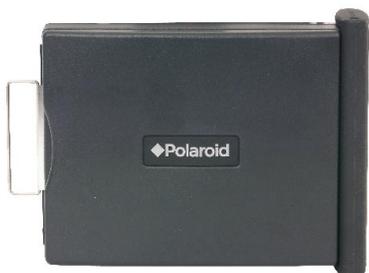
Printing Digitized Polaroid Images

Once you have scanned, retouched, and enhanced your Polaroid output you will want to print it as an enlargement or in an edition. Contemporary printers offer archival inks and a wide variety of paper possibilities. To make the most of these possibilities it is advised that you set up your workflow according to current color management strategies. This involves calibrating your monitor, setting up a color space within Photoshop and properly selecting the appropriate ICC profile for your particular printer and paper combination. It is possible to make small proof prints using Photoshop's Print with Preview feature, saving both time and materials costs. By working with Adjustment Layers minor corrections can be made to arrive at the perfect print. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Many artists choose Polaroid materials for the instant feedback and creative inspiration they give. Many artists choose Holga because it is not sophisticated, has crude optics, and is prone to surprise images. By bringing these two mediums together we get more than the sum of the parts. Polaroid confirmation makes the Holga experience a little more secure without taking away its serendipitous nature. The Holga camera allows creative use aficionados another method of acquiring original imagery for Image Transfer and Emulsion lifts. Fans of Positive/Negative film have a new format to explore, one with quirks and surprises quite unlike what its professional cousins provide. The full format rendering of the image with the new Holga produces an impressive negative for conventional printing or digital scanning. The creative possibilities are indeed endless.



Holga 120SF with Polaroid Back



Polaroid Back for Holga 120S and 120SF



Holga Auxiliary Viewfinder