

Report: Fascination Traditional Brands

Fall of the Berlin Wall 25 years ago: Exhibition "Time of Change" and Leica Adventure Days
Documentary Photographer Herbert Piel relies on Leica and Ilford for 39 years

Ilford Imaging Europe, Bergisch Gladbach/West Germany, December 2014

Ilford, traditional brand in the market of photography, thanks Herbert Piel, a renowned documentary photographer, for his longtime loyalty and for using Ilford media for his exhibition "Time of Change" and at the adventure days of Leica Academy.

"Time of Change"

Forty black and white photos documented the time after the turning point in East Germany which Piel visited many times, making photos after the fall of the Berlin wall. The exhibition – a retrospect into past times shows the partially dull everyday life in eastern Germany, whereat his black and white photo technique ideally expresses this dull ambience. Piel's photos document the east about one year after the fall of the wall and also show snapshots, e.g. of Willy Brandt at the window of the Erfurter Hof or of Helmut Kohl – celebrated on the Erfurter cathedral square.

Huge Media Response

His vernissages received a huge media response. Newspapers titled from: „Unforgotten Moments“ right up to: „Madness! Madness! Madness!“.

A Journey through Time: Herbert Piel documents History

During preparation and investigation for his upcoming four photo exhibitions "Time of Change" which took place parallel on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall, next to the name Leica one other name repeatedly popped up which had accompanied him throughout his entire working life since 1975: ILFORD. Just like his camera brand a term that had been present during his photographic career, whether as film or as paper, as normal paper, as multigrade or today as Ilford Galerie Inkjet. These two brand names always accompanied him – shaping his personal style since mid of the 1970s.

Uncompromising Enlargements and Development of Images

Piel says he never handled his material with care, films like the 400 Ilford HP5 onto 1600 ISO needed to be pushed, sometimes onto 3200 ISO, with almost 30 degrees Celsius warm developer in any room available like cellars or dark rooms for development – being fast and up-to-date was the key factor in the fast moving press agency time, e.g. for Associated Press.

He remembers having made proofs himself taking seven minutes from exposed negative to wet print on a mobile analog facsimile transmission device, which he – whenever it was possible and he could find a telephone socket – connected to an analog telephone socket using crocodile clips.

At that time Piel took photos for example at a large protest movement in 1981 against a nuclear power plant, the AKW Brokdorf where he had many suitcases with him carrying in one of them a mobile laboratory, a small Durst enlarger with excellent Schneider lenses and various bottles for developer, fixing bath and stop bath as for diverse small parts, pliers, clamps, scissors and film wiper, in the other case the Hell facsimile transmission device TS 1086.

The Brokdorf Photo: Prints of the scans today have the same Look & Feel of the Cellar Productions

With this equipment he was able to directly send the famous "Brokdorf photo" – out of a cellar from a farm which its residents had left because of the protest movement – up-to-date onto the drawing table of AP to Frankfurt. There it was edited and sent out internationally into the whole world: exposed on Ilford film and paper. That is how image transmission worked back then, without iPhone, iPad or laptop.

First the device was connected to the electrical network and to an analog telephone wire before the image was clamped onto an image roll. The usable image area was 355 mm x 200 mm respectively 355 mm x 260 mm.

ILFORD

PRESS INFORMATION Ilford Imaging Europe

Buchholzstrasse 79
D-51469 Bergisch Gladbach
Sheldon S. Nazaré
s.nazare@iford.com
+49 (0) 151 125 80 888

While scanning the photo a light spot was projected onto the image surface of the photo rotating on the drum. The light reflecting from the surface finds its way through the lens to the photo sensor. Here an electrical signal is generated from the optical signal and amplified thereafter. As is generally known white image parts reflect a lot of light, black very little. All continuous tone in the photo therefore reflect according to lighter or darker gray level sometimes more sometimes less light. The photo sensor in the scanning system of the transmitter produces a signal identical to the scanned reflected light. On the receiving side the electrical signal evolved into a facsimile of the original photo. Due to the continuous feed of the scanning system the photo rotating on the drum was scanned in spiral form till the end.

The fact that the films and thereafter also the papers were "cooked" during the development process led to a strong break up of the film grains and of the overall contrast ratio. At that time it was of no importance to the daily newspaper and magazine production – main issue was that the image got to the editorial department fast.

Also his favourite film was soon found: first for a short time the HP4 then from 1976 the Ilford HP5. It allowed a bit of carelessness referring to exposure and development. Piel used converted media as well as on roll. Just as the paper: Ilfospeed. And thereby also the legendary dryer ILFORD ILFOSPEED 4250.

Digital meets Analog: Challenge and Solution

This former way of work was to challenge him almost 35 years later leaving him with a head ache: a few years ago he started preparing the best photos he had ever made during his news area for exhibitions. He bought modern paper and developer and moved into a laboratory of a photographer friend. After the first 20 prints he gave up disillusioned. These were not "his" photos enlarged from old negatives. "I had all levels of gray and finest nuances the world offers in my prints, I did not recognize my photos – this was not ME!", said Herbert Piel.

Then an idea struck him – he had stored almost every photo he had ever transmitted in a box – to scan them using a professional highres scanner. He then made photos and large prints on the finest Ilford inkjet paper from 30x45cm up to 50x70cm – almost 25 years later – which perfectly reflected his former intuition. "There must have been reasons for me to brighten or darken specific areas, using certain sections, all together important factors for the photo which I do not remember today but which made the difference in "my" photos reproducing them as I had remembered them" said Piel. "It really is seldom when you are bound for 39 years of your working life with two great traditional brands, loyal and reliable until today: Ilford and Leica."

About Ilford

Founded in 1879, Ilford is a leading manufacturer of high quality premium photo media with an excellent reputation in the photo market.

Photo Caption (1-3©Herbert Piel)

Photo1: Expulsion of protesters with CH53 helicopters at the largest German anti nuclear protest movement against building the nuclear plant in Brokdorf, 1981.

Photo2: Joseph Beuys in the Eiffel, 1984.

Photo3: Contaminated child, Chernobyl region, Minsk, 1992

Photo4: (©Lili, 14 year old daughter of Herbert Piel) 39 years with Leica and ILFORD – Photographer Herbert Piel signs copies of his book "Time of Change" at an exhibition.

For Publication: Contact and Info

<http://www.pielmedia.blogspot.de>; <http://uk.leica-camera.com/World-of-Leica/Leica-Akademie/About-the-Leica-Akademie>; <http://www.ilford.com>