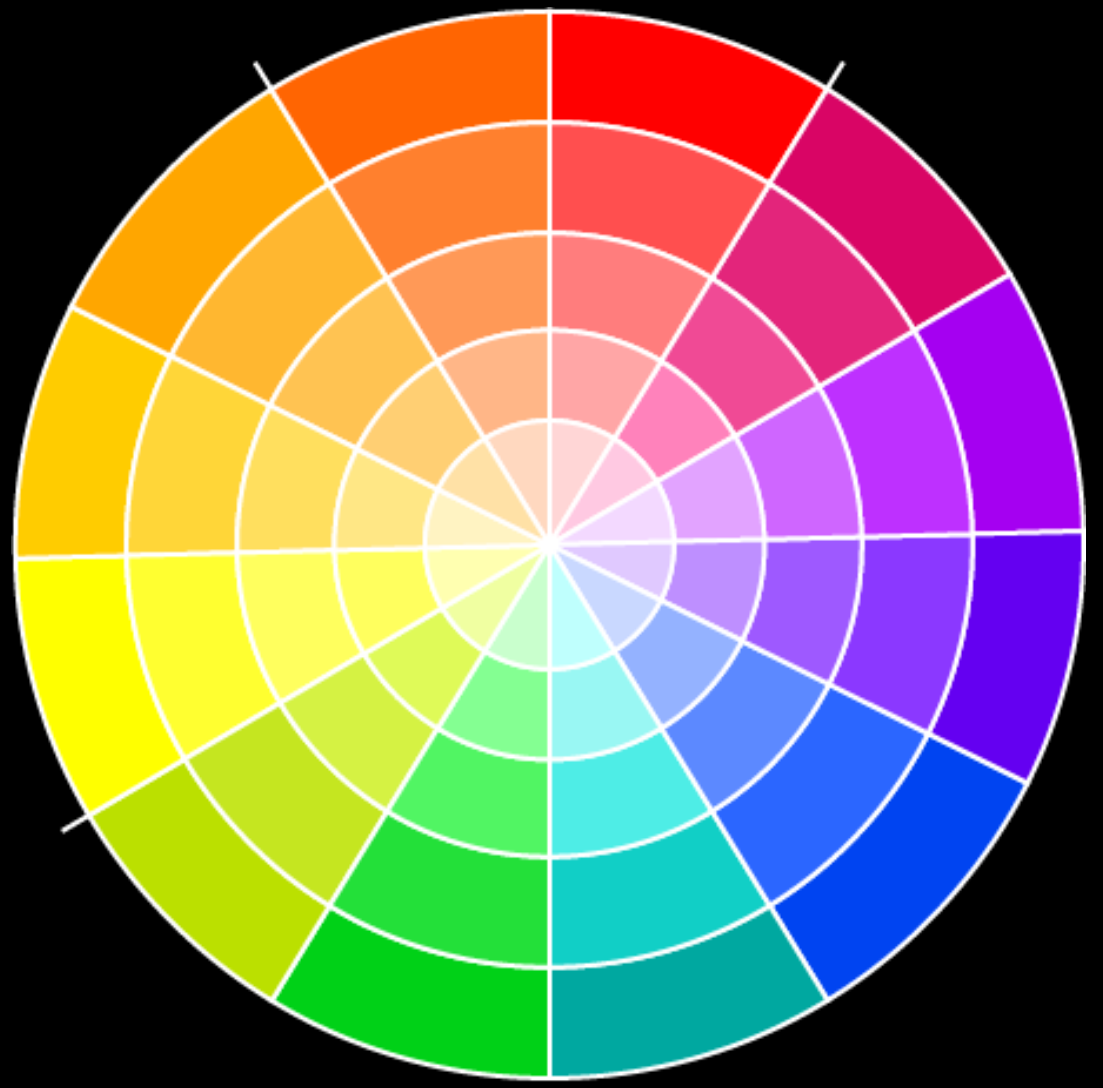
Making Colour the Hero of Your Photography

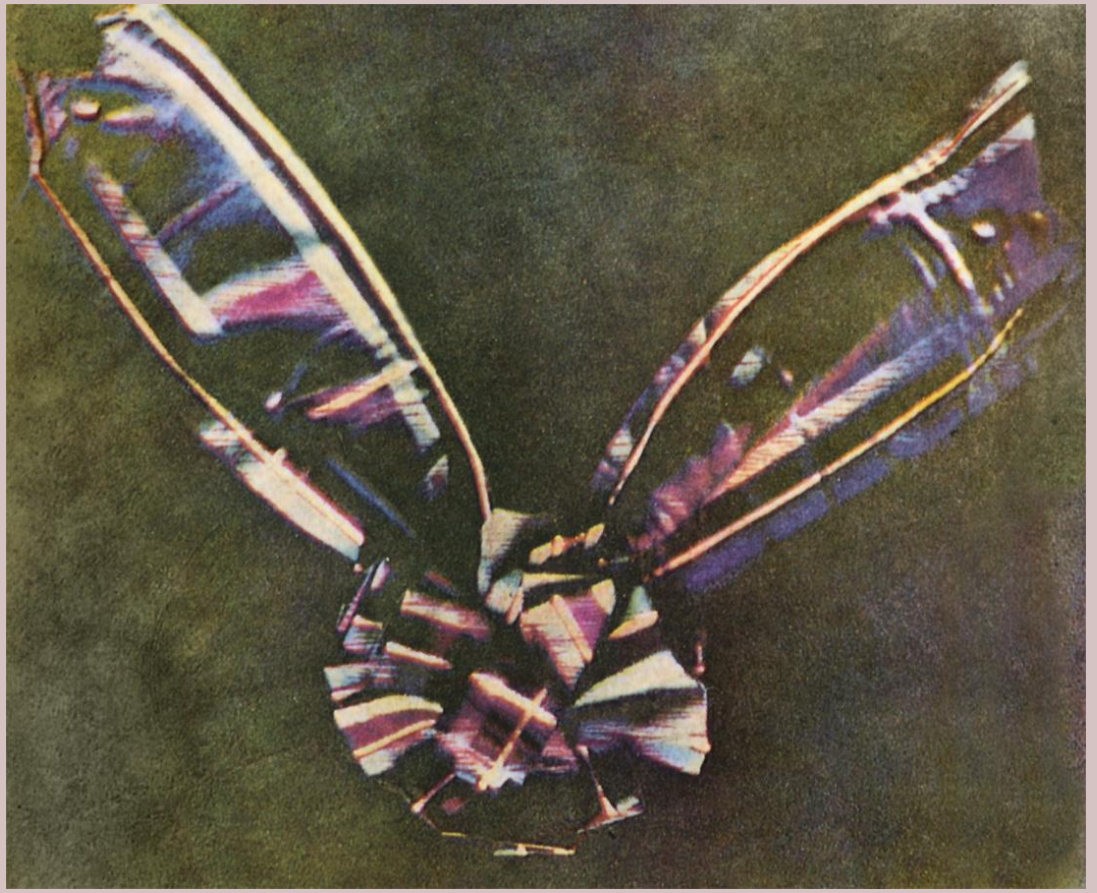


Mastering colour photography in all genres A1 Camera Club

Wizard of Oz 1939

Overview

- A brief History of Colour Photography
- Understanding Colour Theory in Photography
- Techniques for Focusing on Colour
- Post-Processing colour photography



1st colour photograph using three colour process 1861

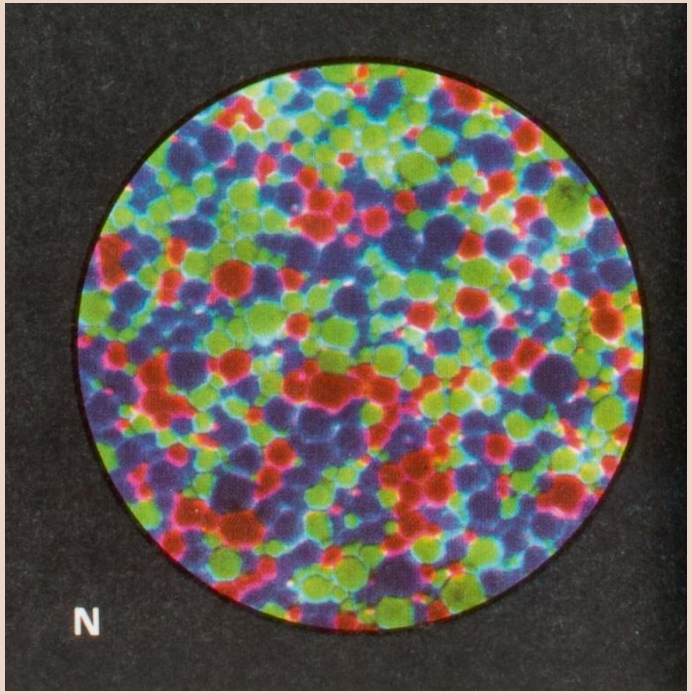
The next competition theme will be ‘Make Colour the Hero’ This section will be print.
Deadline 20th / 27th January

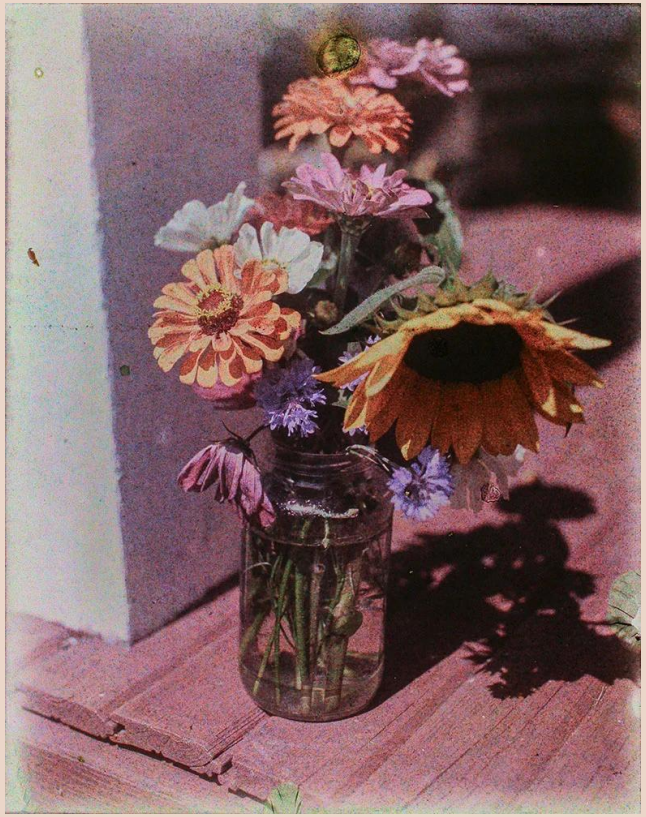
Hand Colouring 1900s

Loie Fuller film 1905

Tinting and Toning 1910s

1907 Autochrome

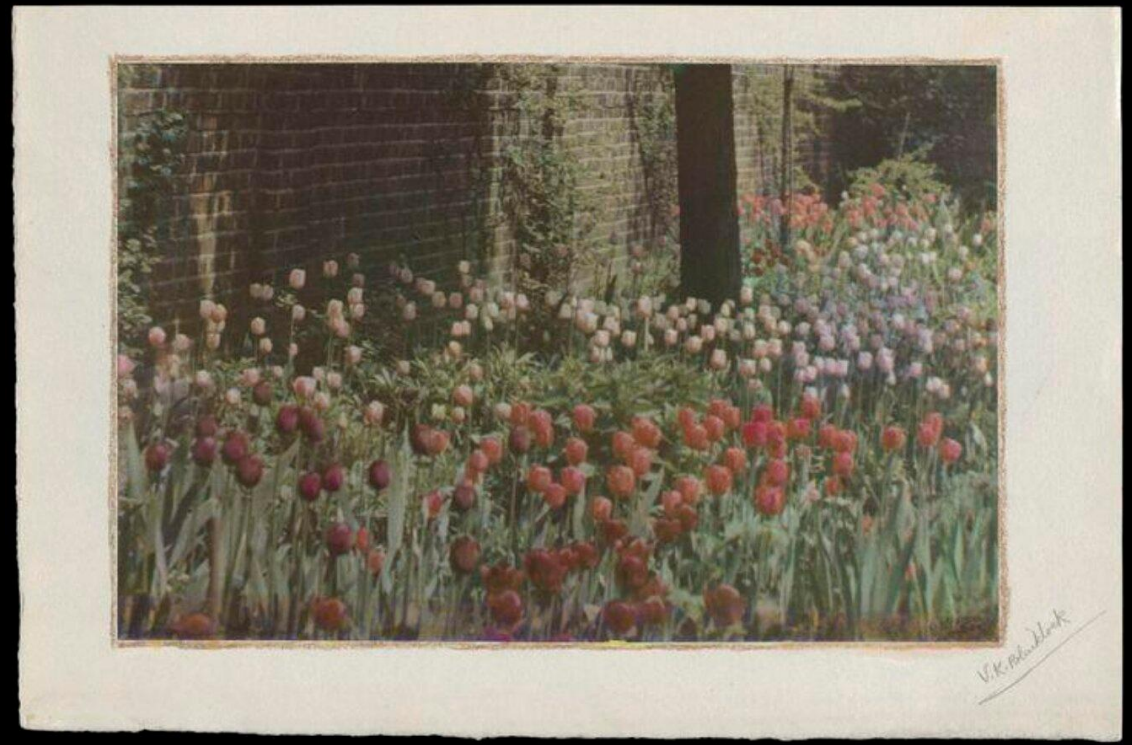




Tiny grains of potato starch dyed red, green and blue are dusted over a photographic plate, in between emulsions.

When exposed to light the fine mosaic of grains result in an illusion of colour. This process lasted from 1907 to 1935

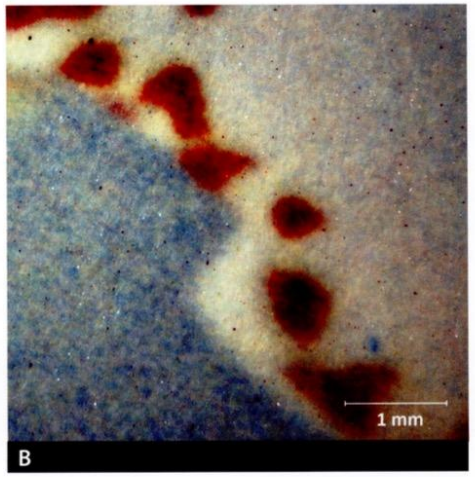
1920s Hand Tinted and early 3 colour process



Violet Blaiklock V&A

Film Colours .org

1930s Vivex Process
Madame Yvonde



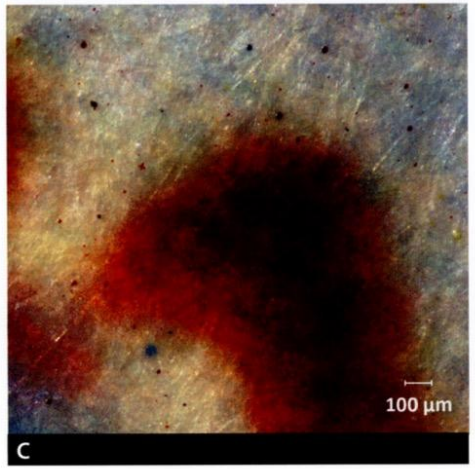
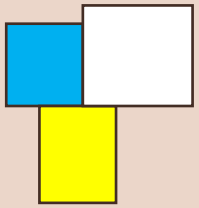


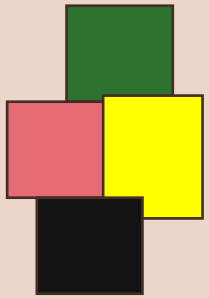
Figure 3.22 VIVEX PRINT
a) Madame Yevonde, *Orchids*, ca. 1933. Vivex print. National Media Museum, Bradford, U.K. (inv. 2003-5001-2-20713).
b) Detail (10×). c) Detail (50×).

Cyan, Magenta, Yellow & Black – 3 colour process producing vibrant colour from black and white filtered negatives

1930s - 3 colour Carbro Process – vibrant colour

3 black and white negatives, each with a blue, red or green filter are combined to produce a colour print.





Still Life by Paul Outerbridge and Frida Khalo by Nikolas Muray

Kodachrome 1935 - 2009

A colour negative film achieving vibrant high contrast colour in processing.

John Hinde Circus 1943 using Kodachrome

1950s The golden age of vibrant colour

Fred Herzog 1958

Richard Avendon Funny Face 1958

1960s

Gordon Parks
Contrast and Harmony

1970s Softer tones, faster kodachome (higher iso) more light.

James Barnor Ghana 1971

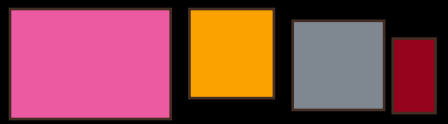
Joel Meyerowitz Cape Light 1977

1980s

Colour Clashing

Guy Bourdin – Charles Jourdan Ad

Raghubir Singh - Kashmir



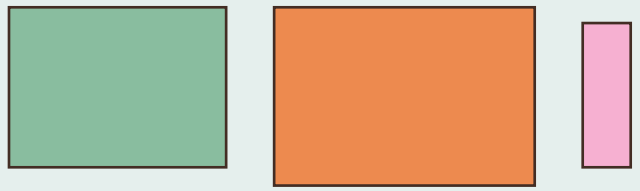
1990s

Alex Webb

Using Low light and street lights and faster film. Orange and teal

Istanbul 2001

Cuba 1993

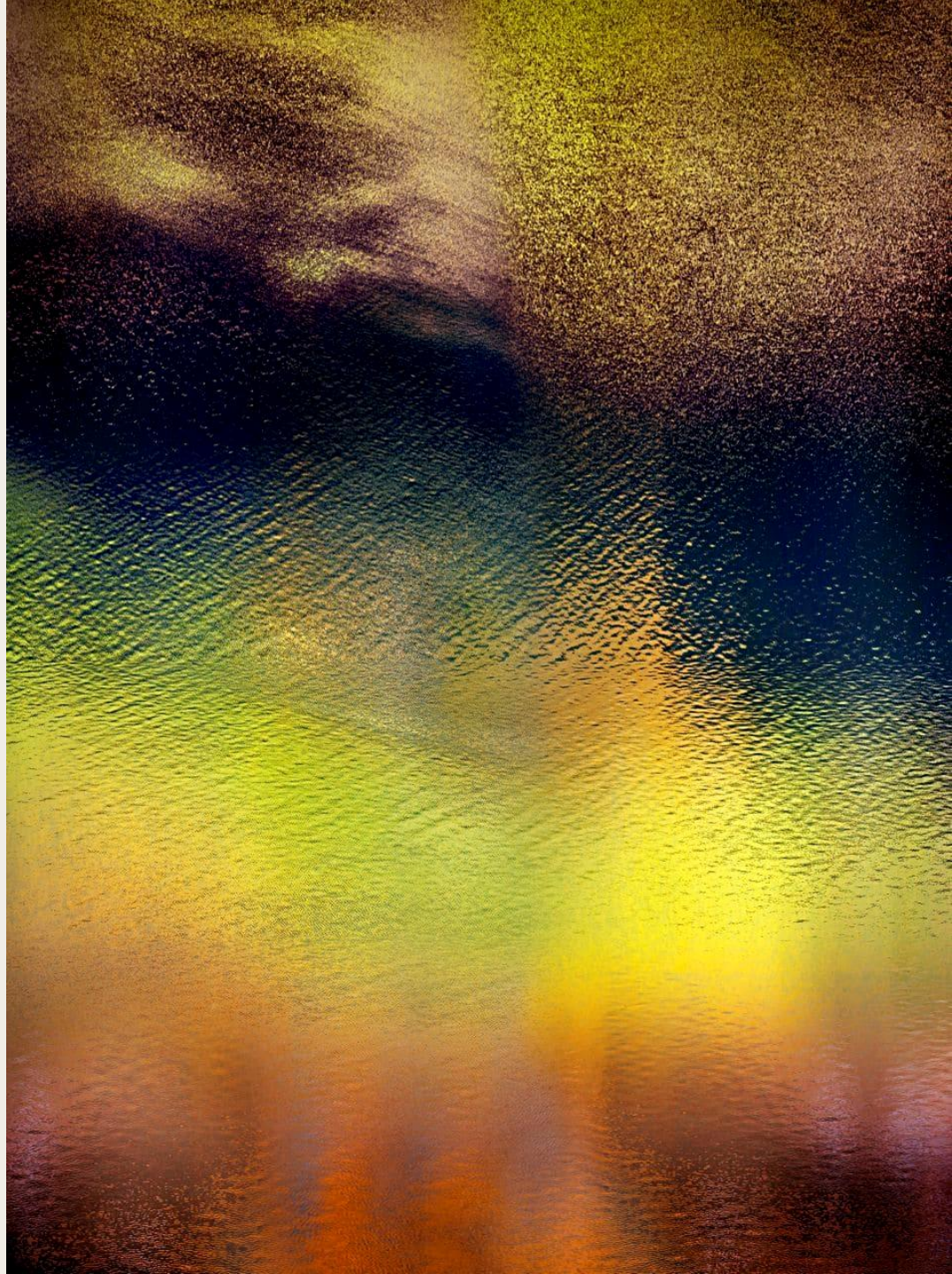


2000s

Nick Knight

Colorizing and powder pop freeze action with flash

2010s Digital Photography
Albert Watson – Ilse of Skye



Martin Parr 2020s

Colour Documentary Photography with flash

https://martinparrfoundation.org/

Colour Theory in Photography

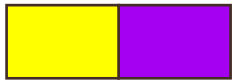
The Colour Wheel

Opposites attract!

Complementary colours sit opposite each other on the colour wheel.

Reds and Greens

Blues and Oranges

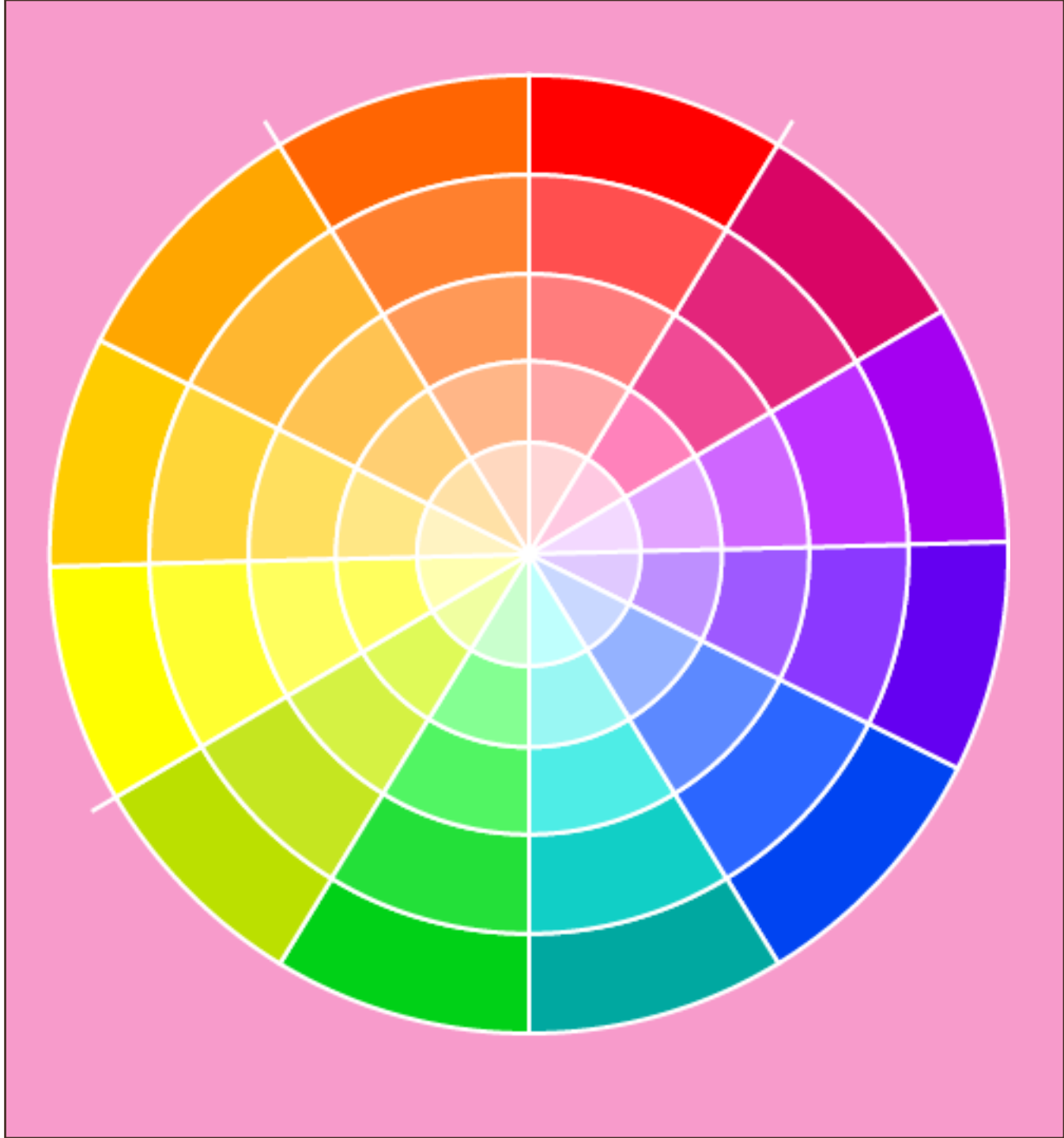
Yellows and Purples 

You can also think of it as **Hot and Cold** colours.

Reds, yellows and oranges work with purples, blues and greens

Tonal Harmony

Tones of one colour also work together.

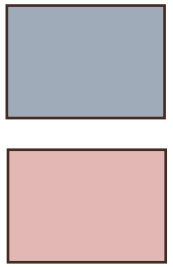


Warm and Cool Tones

Push the colours of your image to a cool or warm tone depending on the mood you want to convey.

Soft calm colour is just as purposeful as vibrant energetic colour.

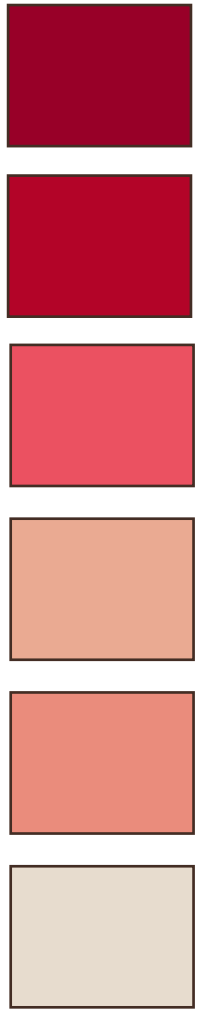
Steve McCurry



Cig Harvey

Using a Single Colour

One colour many tones.

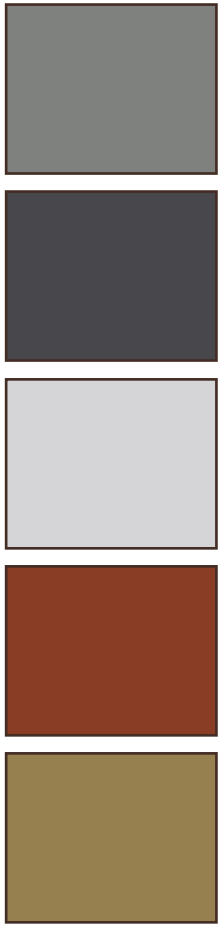


Milton Greene Siren 1952

Spot Colouring

Use natural monochrome in a scene with pops of colour.

If removing background colour, try leaving just a hint of muted tones to allow your hero colour to pop softly.



Steve McCurry

Raghubir Singh - Kashmir

Techniques

Pick your colours first .....

Plan the image ahead and gather colours for a still life scene or portrait including your backdrop.

For street, landscape or nature focus on looking for one colour. It could be red, a tone of green, pink etc.

Once you've picked, you'll be surprised how your eye tunes to that colour.

Cig Harvey

Backgrounds!

Black to pop! White to pop!

Contrast to pop!

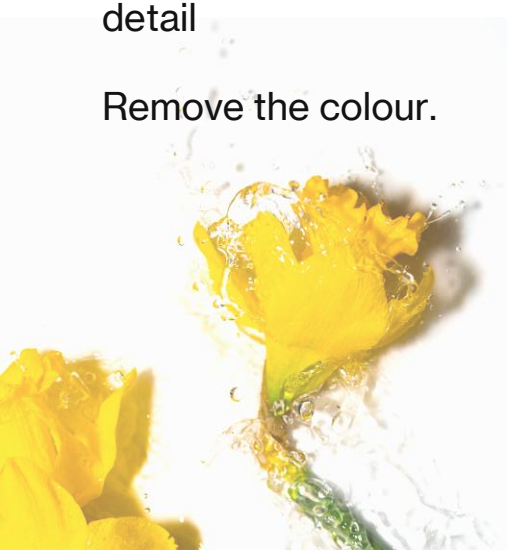
Matching to be bold.

Use the sky.

Soft Focus, blurred background for pastels and to remove distractions.
f1.8 – f5.6

Use a voile to soften background colour and detail

Remove the colour.



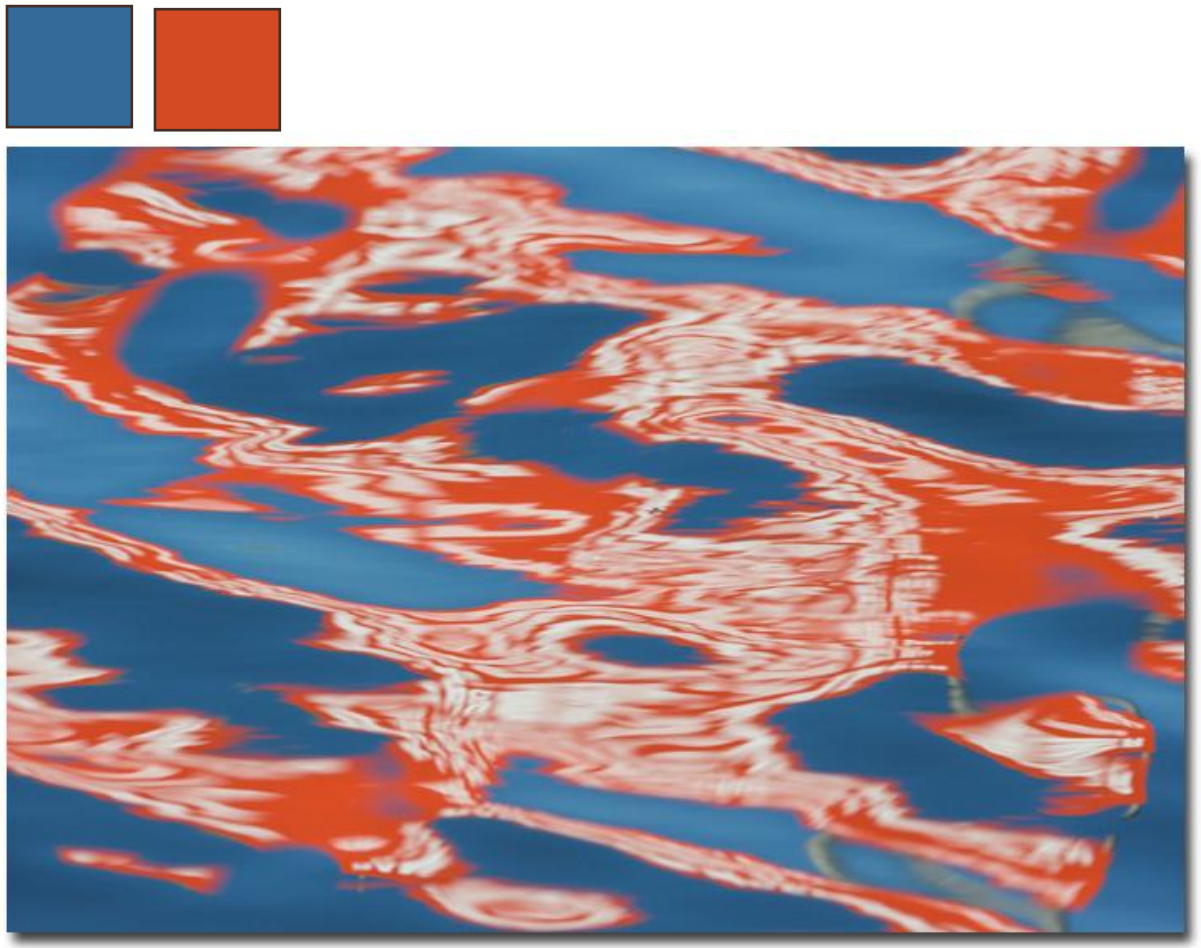
Weston is full of colour!

Our seaside town is such a colourful place, we have vintage signage, classic car meets, seaside merchandise, incredible sunsets, colourful dressers, vibrant gardens, neons, murals, stained glass .....

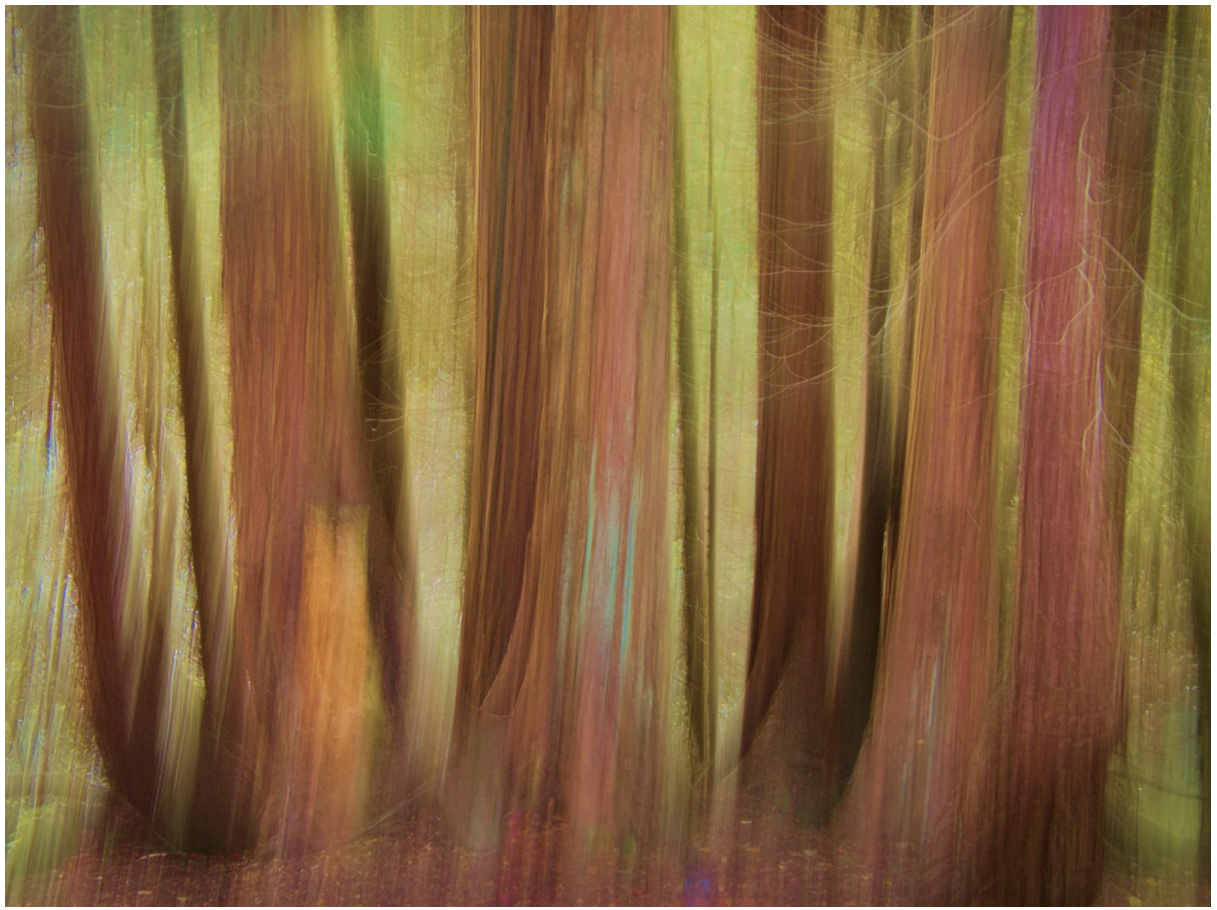
This is why its one of the best places for street photography!

Abstract

Use colours in a scene to paint a new image. ICM, Soft Focus, Close Ups, Reflections



Oliver Smart



Jane Richardson 2025

Camera Settings to Enhance Colour

Shoot in RAW to get all the colour data.

Underexpose in bright light for vibrant colours

Use a **flash.**
Use gels over your flash to cast a colour.

Try **colour filters.**

Overcast, damp days can also produce richer colours.

For blocks of colours aim for a **low iso** to avoid digital noise.

Use slow shutter speeds, soft focusing and low f stops to soften colours.

Try a polariser to enhance colour.

Jim Brandenberg

Controlled Colour

- Still Life
- Portrait
- Abstract

Plan everything about your image beforehand, chose a backdrop, subject and colours that work together.

Most of your image can be achieved in camera.

**** If shooting analogue, choose a film stock with colour tones you think will work best for your scene.**

vs

Uncontrolled Colour

- Street
- Landscape
- Wildlife

You have no control over the colour and have to find the colours you are looking for the in the wild.
Once you pick a colour it will be easier to tune your images to that tone.

Post processing will be key for these images.

Post Processing Colour

Black Point

Deepen your blacks for richer more vibrant colour

Lighten your blacks point for a softer palette.

Colour Grading

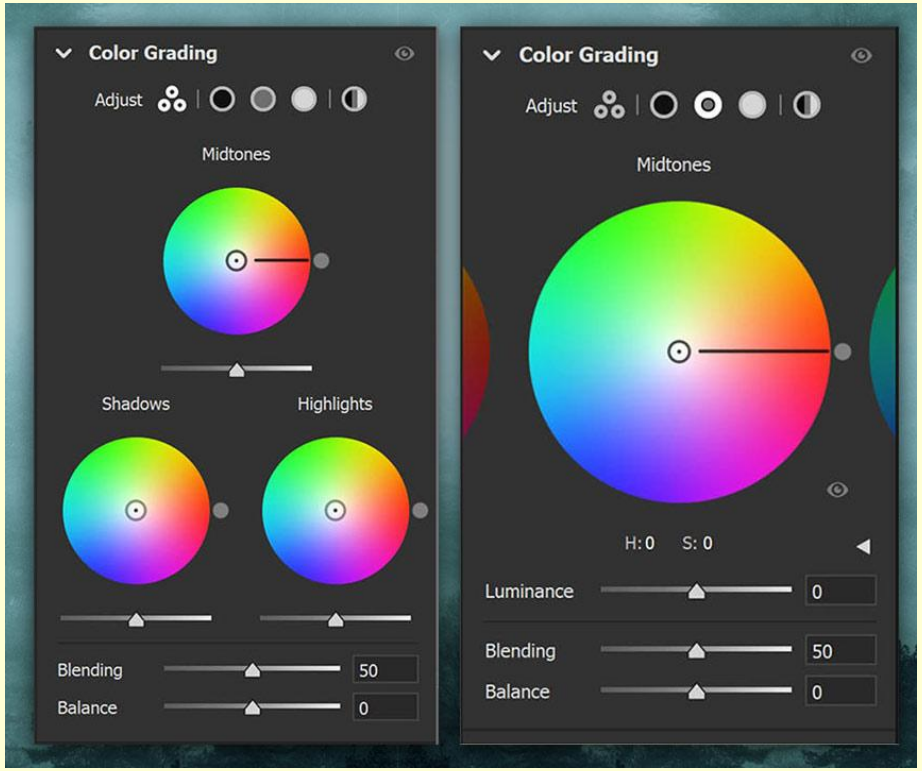
In most post processing software you can grade the colour of your image.

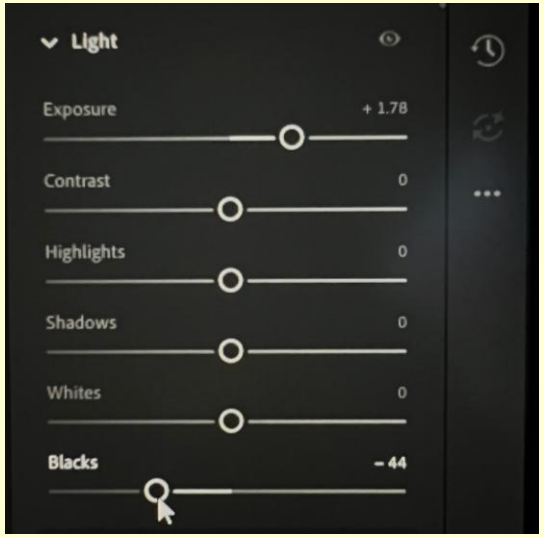
Cool or warm – adjust the warmth of the image

Colour channels – use the colour channels to enhance or reduce certain colours

Highlights and shadows – try adjusting the colour of the highlights and shadows to complimentary colours or similar tones.

Saturation – go easy! Try the above first and oversaturation doesn't always work.





Using Presets & Filters

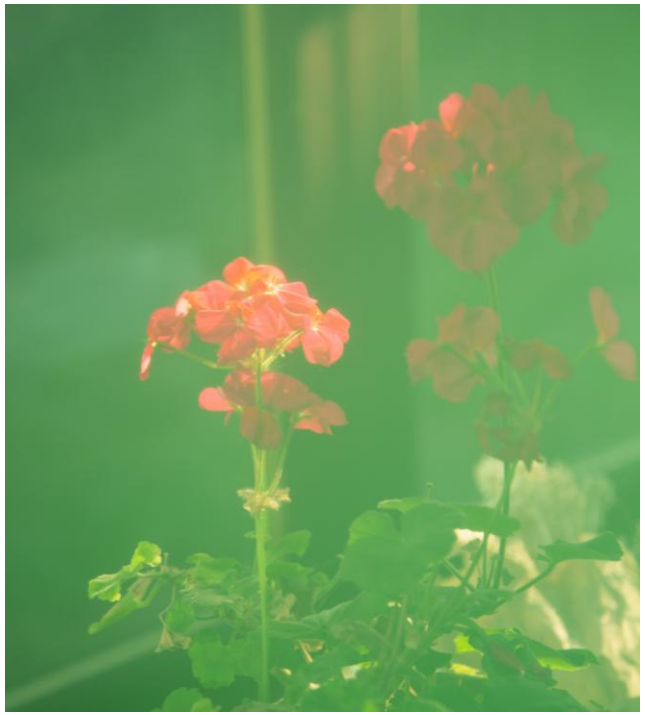
Try presets as a starting point.

Develop your own colour styles and save as presets.

Replicate certain film stocks like Kodachrome

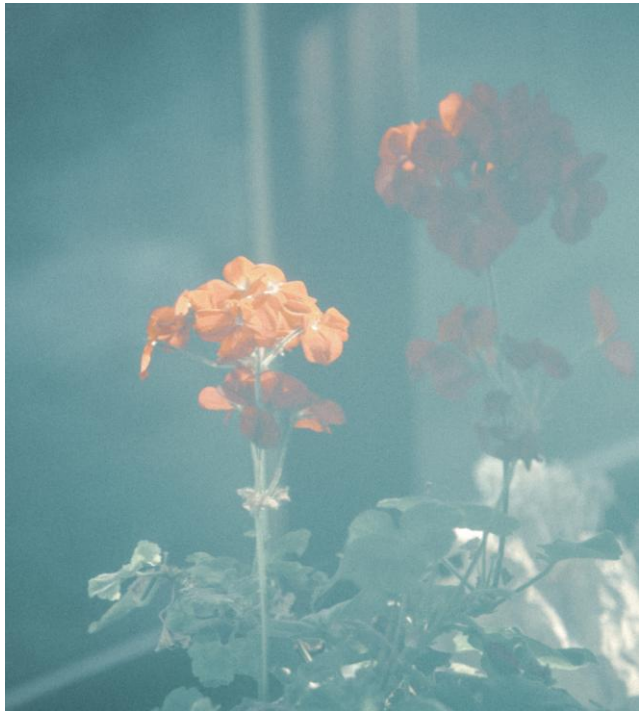
Use analogue colour filters in front of the lens.

Original



Yellow gel filter

Kodachrome preset



Muted tones preset

Adding colour in Photoshop.

Use layers in photoshop to create ....

Coloured backdrops

Filters and tones over your image

To paint your image.

Replace or remove colours

Think of photoshop just like a physical canvas or print.

Layers are just like layers of paint, transparent films, dyes and brushes.

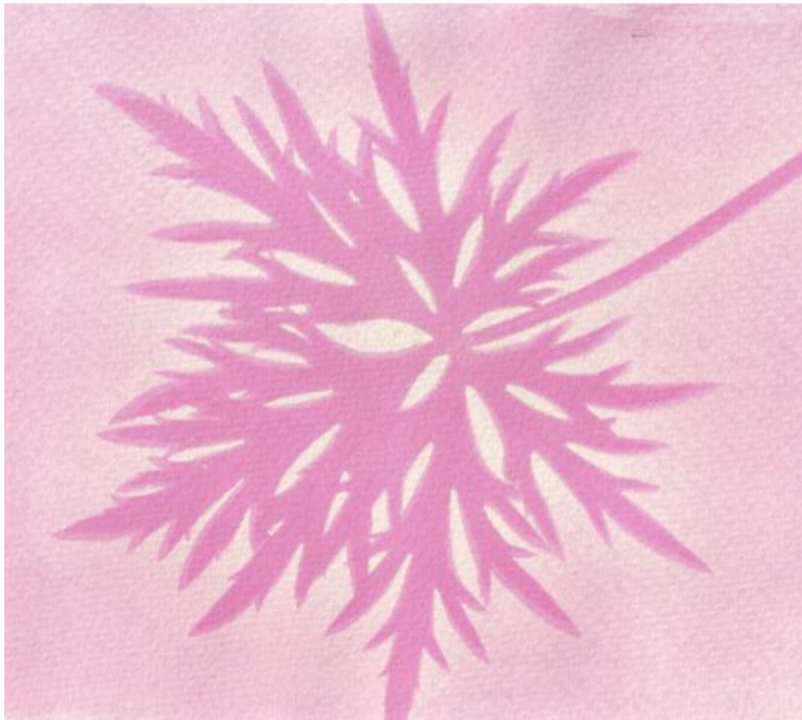
Dora Maar 1930

Go Analogue!

Paint over a black and white image

Cyanotypes

Anthotypes using natural dyes



Conclusion

Plan ahead!

Understand the impact of colour and tone.

Making colour the hero doesn’t have to bright and bold, it can be subtle and soft.

Be Purposeful with your colour.

Autochrome V&A Museum

Erwin Blumenfeld

Next Competition

Print Section
'Make colour the hero'
&
Open Digital Section

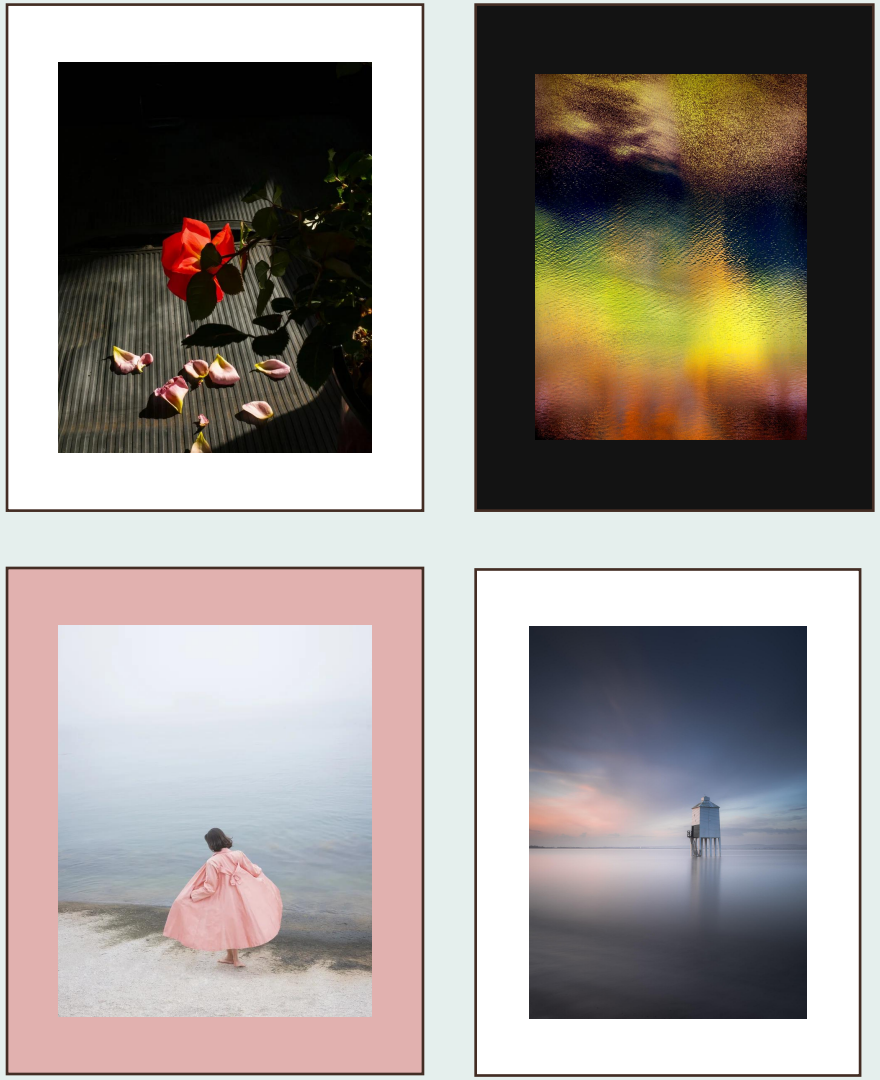
Digital deadline – Tuesday 20th January (all submissions!)
Print deadline – Tuesday 27th January

email to a1cccompetition@gmail.com

Prints must be in a 400mm x 500mm mount

Digital files must be **within** 1200px high and 1920px wide

Save JPEGs at Highest Quality (turn off compression)



Cig Harvey, Albert Watson, Sam Binding

Links and Further Reading

- History and Mysteries of Colour photography Chris Budd in members area of website
  https://www.a1cameraclubweston.org/
- Science and Media Museum – Short history of colour photography
  https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/history-colour-photography
- Film Colors
  https://filmcolors.org/
- Gordon Parks Foundation archive
  https://www.gordonparksfoundation.org/education/features/gordon-parks-and-vogue#14
- Madame Yvonde Vivex
  https://www.npg.org.uk/whatson/exhibitions/2023/yevonde-life-and-colour/photographs-by-yevonde
- Colour grading your image Jamie Windsor
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-4KRPoErBI
- 3 colour process in digital
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6GSVIJCOXA
- Autochromes at the V&A
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKINhG0g3kk
- What is Kodachrome V&A
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xTF83HqrXI&t=1