

Resistance: Laboratory



Roland Dufau: 100% slide, 100% Ciba!

Don't look the other way: Slide film is doubtless the most threatened silver base. Yet, Roland Dufau only develops slides. And for this, the same photographic paper and chemical products have been used for 30 years. In other words, he is the last one.

Yes, but the thing is, the combination of this paper and this unique chemical process is called "Cibachrome" and Roland Dufau is the uncontested master of it. For artists and collectors' pleasure, this name keeps its appeal.

The Cibachrome over and over again.

Cibachrome: this word remains magic and most enlightened person say colloquially "CIBA". Rare are those who use the real current designation: "Ilfochrome Classic". In fact, since 1991, the Cibachrome does not officially exist! Due to a management buyout and a marketing issue Ilford had to find, at its great displeasure, a new name to its flagship product. "Cibachrome" has been renamed "ilfochrome classic". However, 18 years later, the original name is still used, even at the Ilford Marly's plant in Switzerland which carry on to coated this unique photo paper on its polyester base.

Generation & preservation

We are not going to tell about the excellent saga of the Cibachrome (itself resulting from the Gasparcolor film system, developed in 1930 by the Hungarian chemist Dr. Bella Gaspar). No, what is matter is to meet Roland Dufau and to appraise the situation with him about his atypical occupation. Many photographers think probably that the Cibachrome has ceased to exist. Yet, Ilford has never stopped its production. The head of the technical color's department, Jean Noel Geix, has declared in *Le Photographe* magazine that the production is ensured until 2020. In fact, the first use of the rilfochrome-Cibachrome is the microfilm, still very utilized in the military domain. The contract has just been renewed with the army until 2020. On the way, we touch here one of the essential characteristic of this process: its preservation. Only enemy: an excessive humidity (higher than 60%). All that, Roland Dufau knows it exactly. About this topic, he is a fount of knowledge. His little Laboratory in the Quartier de L' Odeon in Paris (45m² counting the workshop and the reception desk) is the enamored temple of the CIBA's God. Dufau is not the only one in France to offer Cibachrome printing (see next page). But he is

the unique one to only offer CIBA printing. In his laboratory, no negative films, and of course no digital files. Moreover, Dufau is not a simple printer. He is enthralled by photography, a friend of photographers and a great book collector. Since 1980, he works alone and welcome himself everyone who rings the doorbell. Sometimes, we have to wait a bit, the time he gets out from his dark room. "I work alone because I like to have a direct contact with photographers, he says. My clientele has built up little by little, by word of mouth. My first great client was John Batho. Nowadays, I develop the ektas of Stephane Duroy, Yan Charbonnier, Olivier föllmi, Didier Gou-py, Roland and Sabrina Michaud, and Lucien Clergue...."

A daily challenge

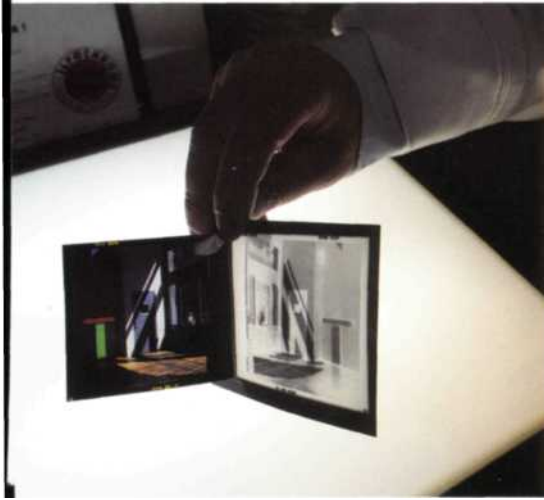
At Dufau's place, it's not a question of "productivity", of "rapidity", of "concession". For him, even everything is not possible on a Cibachrome print. He can't resign himself and do not try to satisfy, photographers' wishes. Mr. Dufau says proudly that any photographers have gone disappointed from his laboratory. Of course, some photographers do not like the Cibachrome process itself, with its bright rendered, metallic and its proclivity to

saturate colors, especially the red. But even those ones are often astonished in front of a Cibachrome made by Dufau. So much the contrast is controlled, colors are contained, highlight never holed and shadow zones are miraculously detailed. Here is the daily challenge of Dufau: to show, with a technical mastery and with a sharpened eye, that we can mould a Cibachrome print, far from the snazzy cliché which has discredited this process a bit too bling bling.

Eulogy of the slide

Since the release of the lambda or lightjet digital enlarger 4/5 years ago, it is possible to print automatically digital file using a cibachrome process. Two laboratories in Paris do it: Dupont and Cyclope. But the historical cibachrome, the real one, is done by hand under an enlarger using filters, film tests, long time exposure and these famous contrast masks which were the nightmare of photography students during the eighties (I know what I am talking about).

However, Roland Dufau has never hesitated about the idea to purchase a digital enlarger: He has not the space for that, neither the money, nor ... the willingness.



What is the particularity of an ilfochrome-cibachrome print?
 For me, the Ciba is the real thing. It's a demand inside the strictness: we start from a slide which is already a final work of art: contrary to negative film, we know already colors, its matrix density and moreover, we often see it in optimum conditions of projection. Then, the printer has to prove that he is able to get the same thing, or better, on a paper, even if there are high contrasts and colors are very specific, very delicate to obtain.

He prefers his old enlargers, a Durst 138S frames and a HK 667 for flat film 8x10". In his laboratory, nothing has changed for 20 years and his enlarger Contimat Autopan two feet wide is still reliable. Regularly, Mr. Dufau works simultaneously on four workstations. In fact, a Cibachrome paper takes 20min. to be processed by the printer. He has to work on another one while the first print is being printed. Otherwise, orders would not be delivered in time.

Ciba: How it works?

Some of you have known the joy of the cibachrome in their bathrooms. In fact, during the eighties and the nineties, it was possible to do at home cibachrome prints with a simple color enlarger, an opaque drum, and an endless patience. For each print, it took nearly 45 minutes for a film test, ninety if two of them were done, and 45 more minutes for the final print. In brief, the cibachrome was the anti-digital: if you developed two right prints in an afternoon, you would be jovial. This amateur Cibachrome doesn't exist anymore. Other disappearance: the not widespread matte finishing. Today, for last resistant to the shiny version, Roland Dufau offers a matte finishing using a spray can. The result is quite

amazing. The cibachrome today is done only by professional with an impressive seventeen feet long printer which develops the paper, fixes it and then dries it. When the picture goes out the printer, it is already dried, ready to be given to the customer. From this side, the cibachrome is easier to handle than the baryte paper. In fact, most of the work is done before; when the slide is analyzed and eventually when contrast masks are made. It is one of the reasons of the Roland Dufau success. Because he sometimes makes two masks: one for the contrast and one for the highlight. Explanations.

Roland's masks

Mask principle is easy: if your slide is uniformly lighted, with a narrow density range, the Cibachrome print could be done directly. However, if your picture has a wide contrast with light and dark area, it will need a mask. In fact, the cibachrome process is much contrasted and reacts very slowly to the exposure variations. As a result, when a slide is contrasted, it is sandwiched in a blurry mask which is nothing other than a B&W negative. Thus, light zones are associated to grey zone whereas dark zones are

not affected since there are associated with mask transparent zones. The mask increase the exposure time and homogenize the print. Mr. Dufau goes much further away by making a first negative mask using an Orthoplus Ilford film to protect highlight zones, and then a blurry contact on a flat-film Ilford FP4. Thanks to these two successive sandwiches, it gives a real modeled to the cibachrome print.

Of course, it takes a lot of time. From 1 to 3 hours for a print with a mask, it depends on its difficulty. Prices feel the effects of that but remain sensible in view of the time spent and the technical expertise of the artist. Thus, a 12x16" cibachrome print is charged 62€ (subject to VAT) and if the double mask is necessary, extra 20€ will be charged. It is a bit more expensive than on the internet but for this price you have a work signed Dufau with, if you desire, his seal on the back of the print. And as our artist will retire within few years, it is not foolish to afford a Dufau as long as it is possible.



How to explain the currently popularity of the Ciba whereas you are very few to do it?
 I think this is due to the intensity of its color, at its high resolution, and to its deep black. Bearing in mind its preservation: up to five centuries in museum conditions. I have prints in my window display which have 20 or 30 years and there are still the same. Moreover, nowadays CIBA is ideal with Diasac, because, this coating convene two polyester bases which blend safely perfectly together.

Info and prices on the website:
www.rolanddufau.com