



INFRA-RED PHOTOGRAPHY - THE FASCINATING, INTRIGUING WORLD

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Infra-Red (I.R.) photography, until the digital era, was confined to using special film, with 35mm being the most popular, to capture wonderfully surreal images. It is possible that you can capture an I.R. image on some digital cameras. With this in mind we will break the discussion into two areas: Film and Digital.

We will start with Film

I.R. photography is not new it has been around for the past 80 years or more. What is new is that more people have found, and are becoming aware of, the wonderful black and white (B&W) tonal ranges that the I.R. subject offers. I think the awareness has been partly brought about by the increased interest in B&W photography all around the world. Infra-Red photography uses films that are sensitive to both the light we see and some of the longer length light (above 700nm) infra-red radiation. Infra-red film is also sensitive in the UV region (below 400nm). There are many scientific uses for I.R. film, which include medical and forensic applications. It is also used in restoration work and the investigation of paintings.

Our focus, though, is using I.R. for our photographic art.

Some people try I.R. photography just once as a novelty; others see a range of possibilities and get hooked. I put myself in the latter category and got hooked, some 2 years ago.

There are several I.R. films on the market, KODAK, KONICA, ILFORD, AGFA and more recently, MACO. The most commonly used film, is KODAK HIE. If you have your own processing facilities, formulae are readily available. Otherwise, there are processing labs around that will do the work for you. Most people use I.R. negative film, but I.R. slide film is also available. For really interesting results there is also an I.R. colour KODAK film available. Apart from graphic uses for this film, it is also used for crop disease indication and other scientific purposes. The emulsion layers are sensitive to green, blue and infra red wavelengths, and different colour filters are used for specific purposes or to create different colour effects,

Now that you have your film and processing sorted, all you need now is a camera and opaque red I.R. filters. (These filter all other wave lengths) Most SLR cameras are suitable. Care needs to be taken when loading and unloading film. This must be done in total darkness. An insulated carry bag, or a changing bag, is handy. Also remember that the red filter you will be using is opaque.

So, with an SLR camera, all the focusing needs to be done before you place the filter over the lens.

Your through the lens viewing becomes black once the I.R. filter is in place. An early model camera with a rangefinder is an ideal camera for I.R. work.

I.R. film is supposed to be shot and processed as soon as possible after loading, and kept in the fridge between times, as it is susceptible to heat damage. So a well-insulated carry bag for your film and camera is advisable.

As I.R. film is not rated there is great excitement and anticipation experimenting within a wide film speed range setting and seeing the effects achieved. I have used the film rated up to ASA1600, and can recommend it if it's a nice grainy look you are wanting.

There is a range of filters that work in the I.R. nm range. These vary in opaqueness and give varying degrees of lightness and darkness. You will need to experiment to find what will suit your needs. You will find that vegetation and skies appear different in I.R. Clear blue skies become dark black, vegetation and clouds become intense white, human skin looks gray, while veins can be revealed. Eyes appear black, which can look alien or surreal. For most people landscapes are the major subject for the I.R. photographer.

Digital

With the advent of the Digital era it has become known that some digital cameras are able to capture infra-red images and a number of formulae have been developed in some software programmes that gave a "FAUX" I.R. result. A lot of experimenting went on, and still continues, with the use of digital cameras for I.R. photography.

The same red opaque filters are used, but the captured digital image is processed in a computer to help bring out the detail of the I.R. image. This is, basically, little different from darkroom processing.

Something extra to consider is that a good time to do I.R. photography is outside the normally considered best photography light hours. Thus, give it a go in the late morning, noon and the early afternoon. The more light you have, the better the conditions are for infra-red photography.

I do hope I have whetted your appetite to have a try. I can assure you that there are many exciting hours ahead if you decide to have a go.

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