

A Simple Technique For Polaroid Image Transfers



Jacqueline Poutasse

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Please feel free to email me at the above email address with questions about the techniques in this document.
(jackie@tjbookarts.com)

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Part 1: Overview

Let me start off by stating that I am in no way an expert on Polaroid transfers. I do transfers for my own enjoyment and don't really plan on selling them. This said, I have worked out a simplified process that works well for me and hopefully for anyone else following these instructions.

In a nutshell, Polaroid transfers are made by exposing the film and letting it partially develop before peeling the emulsion from the receptor and discarding the picture side. Next, the emulsion side gets pressed down onto a piece of moist watercolor paper or other receptor to finish developing. A combination of heat and moisture helps the emulsion adhere to the receptor.

For the technique described in this booklet you will need a Polaroid camera that takes Polaroid Type 59 pack film. There are many types that can be found from older folding type pack film models such as the 100, 200, 300 & 400 series as well as the newer Reporter & Propack cameras to the all plastic bodied ones such as the Big Shot. The Big Shot is mainly a portrait camera and needs flash cubes to get enough light for a picture. Unless you have a very bright sunny day it doesn't take very good outdoor pictures like the other models do. As an FYI, the Big Shot is the type of Polaroid camera that Andy Warhol used exclusively for his artwork.

You should be able to find old Polaroid cameras at yard sales, thrift stores, auctions, granny's attic, etc. Ebay is a great resource for buying old Polaroid cameras (and flash cubes) suitable for doing transfers. It definitely pays to do a little research on camera styles before you go out looking to buy. See the resources section for a link to The Land List which will give you tons of information about Polaroid cameras. One point that I'll stress is don't buy outdated film. The fresher the film the better your pictures will look and your transfers will be. If you do buy old film you can expect to get unexpected results. Check the resources section for where to buy film.

Part 2: Materials

If you bought a kit from me you will have most of the materials that you need to create Polaroid transfers.

If not, below is a list of supplies that you should gather before starting.

- ❖ A camera that uses Polaroid Type 59 pack film
- ❖ Polaroid Type 59 color film (see resources for where to buy)
- ❖ D'Arches watercolor paper (I've found this works the best but definitely experiment with other types/brands)
- ❖ Small square or rectangle heat resistant container (glass, plastic or metal)
- ❖ Tongs (for getting paper out of boiling water)
- ❖ Tin sheet big enough to fit on the tray with a little overhang all around (a small cookie sheet without sides works well)
- ❖ Roller (the kind you would use for block printing. Any art supply store will have them)
- ❖ Some type of timer. A clock/watch with a second hand for counting seconds is all you need.
- ❖ Paper towels for blotting
- ❖ Wax paper or blank printer paper for drying transfers
- ❖ (Optional) Some kind of weight for pressing (a clean brick works good)
- ❖ (Optional) A plastic box with lid for keeping all your supplies together is handy.

Part 3: Preparing the Work Area

Before you take any pictures, you'll want to gather your materials and prepare your work area. I keep all my transfer supplies in a plastic box so that all I have to do is lay out my tools and boil some water and I'm ready to start taking pictures and transferring them.

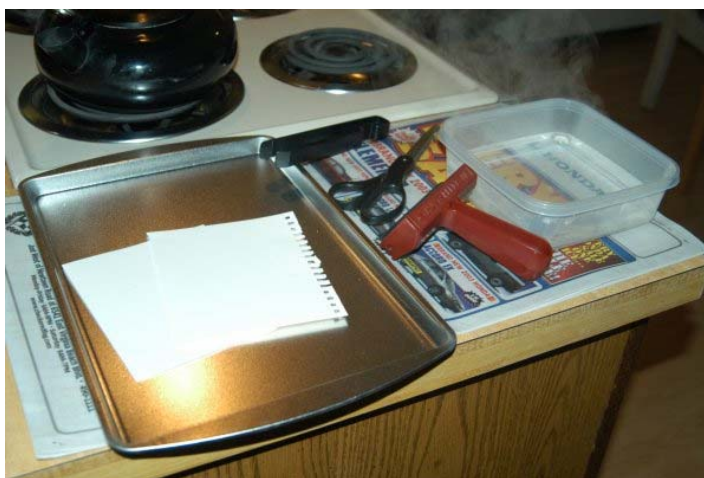
The first thing you'll want to do is put on a pot of water to boil.

Next, cover a counter or table with newspaper and layout your tray, tongs, roller and tin sheet. Make sure you cut more than enough sheets

of receptor paper than you think you'll need so you don't run out while you're working.

Once the water has come to a boil fill your tray about half full and insert 2 or 3 sheets of the receptor paper into the water (taking care not to burn yourself) making sure that they are well submerged and cover the tray with the tin sheet.

You're now ready to go take a picture.



Note: A word or two about safety.

The gel used to develop the Polaroid film is caustic. If your skin has a tendency to get irritated easily you may want to wear latex gloves for protection while working. Make sure that you wash your hands immediately with soap and water if you get any gel on them and keep your transfer tools separate using them only for doing transfers. Always discard the waste from Polaroids in a proper container and keep away from children and animals.

Part 4: Creating The Transfer

Once you have your work area prepared you're ready to take your pictures. After you choose a subject and set your camera settings you may want to take a test shot for exposure. This is an optional step which I normally don't do but I don't mind repeating a transfer if it comes out too light or dark or with too many areas

missing. I've found that lighter subjects transfer much better than darker ones. For some reason the darker areas of the emulsion have a harder time adhering to the paper than the light areas do.

When ready, take your picture for transferring but don't pull it out of the camera yet.

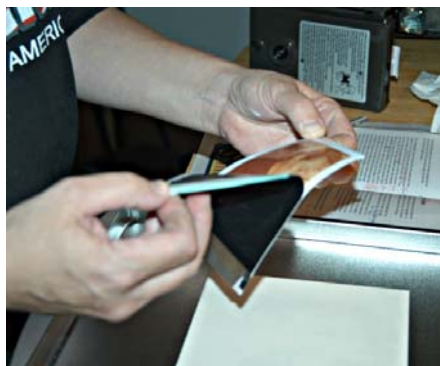
Put the camera aside and take the tin sheet off of the tray filled with water. Be careful as it will be hot. Using the tongs take a sheet of watercolor paper from the tray and let it drain a bit. Put the tin sheet back on top of the tray and lay the paper in the middle of the tin sheet. Take your roller and roll out the excess water from your paper. Use paper towels to soak up the excess that comes out of the paper.



You do not want the paper to be too wet or too dry. Keeping the tin tray on top of the tray full of hot water helps supply the heat that you'll need for the transfer process.



Now, working quickly, remove the picture from the camera and time it approx. 10-15 secs. Trim off the end with the developer packet and peel the emulsion away from the print and put the print aside.



You will want to peel all the paper backing from around the emulsion sheet. (This gives the final image that cool funky border that transfers have.) Lay the emulsion face down on the receptor paper and gently press with your hand being careful not to shift the emulsion. Once down you



can roll over the entire surface of the emulsion being careful to use firm pressure but not too hard. Roll just up to the edges of the emulsion sheet but not over them. Roll in all diff. directions applying even pressure. If the paper is too moist you may see black goop seeping out around the edges of your emulsion. Wipe it up carefully

with a paper towel (be careful not to shift the emulsion) and ease up on the pressure in this area. Keep a paper towel handy to wipe off the roller if any developer should happen to seep out get on it during the rolling process. The developer is a brownish looking substance. (Please see safety note above)

You will want to roll for about 30 secs. or so then you can place a piece of wax paper over the emulsion sheet and then place a heavy object such as a brick over that. Leave it set for approx. 60-90 secs. before peeling away the emulsion.



When you're ready to peel you can pick up the edge of the emulsion sheet and peel the emulsion sheet away from the receptor sheet slowly but smoothly.



This is to help prevent tearing of the emulsion. Discard the emulsion sheet. When done, you can peel the receptor paper from the tin sheet and inspect it. Is it too dark or too light? Are there too many empty spaces where the emulsion didn't stick to the receptor paper? After looking the transfer over, lay it on a piece of wax paper or printer paper to dry. Once dry you can fill in areas that didn't transfer successfully using watercolor pencils or scan them into your computer to play with and enlarge.



Part 5: A Few Helpful Tips

1. Select a receptor sheet that will help you get the type of results you want. The tooth of the paper has a big role in the image quality. I've found D'arches 140 lb watercolor paper to work the best so far. Feel free to experiment with different papers and textures. That's half the fun.
2. Make sure that you soak the receptor sheet well. After soaking, make sure to roll/squeegee out as much excess water as possible. Be careful to eliminate excess water from the receptor sheet. If the receptor sheet is too wet, excess developer will remain on the transferred image, causing the dyes to liquify and run. Thus the black goop that appears at the edges.
3. As a rule, the sooner you peel the emulsion from the original receptor paper, the better the colors. 10-15 seconds is the optimum development time. Pulling any sooner than that the dyes might not have had enough time to begin migration. Pulling later than that, the migration of dyes will alter the color balance of the image. After about ten seconds, the negative has almost all of the cyan dye, about half of the magenta dye, and very little of the yellow dye. This explains why most transfers have a cyan bias. The best idea is to experiment with the times a little.
4. Press the negative against the receptor sheet evenly. In areas where the pressure wasn't applied evenly, the emulsion may peel away from the receptor more easily.
5. Soft rollers work better than rough ones. When rolling your image, don't press too hard. If you use too much pressure, the image will not stick well to the receptor sheet. For best results, start at one end and roll smoothly, with even and moderate pressure.
6. If you do not peel the paper from around the edges of the emulsion your edges on the final print will be cleaner but will lack that cool funky look.

7. Film should be as fresh as possible and storage of film should be around 70F with normal humidity. Adverse conditions can affect transfer capabilities of the film. Fresh film makes the process more hassle free and more consistent results will occur.

8. If you're having a lot of problems with the images adhering to the receptor sheets you might try to use distilled water for consistent results. Water PH has an effect on transfers. Images do not adhere as well with water of low PH. For best results, water PH should be seven or higher.

9. Don't wait too long before placing the negative on the receptor sheet. The dyes will dry out and affect transfer and adhesion. Also, don't leave the emulsion on the receptor paper too long as the heat from the hot water in the tray will dry out the paper after too long and the emulsion will stick to the paper.

Part 6: A Few Ideas

Transfers outdoors:

You could take your transfer setup on the road. The biggest problem would be the hot water. You could boil water and carry with you in a thermos or you could take a can of Sterno or a small propane camp stove and a small pot to boil water in.

Dry transfers:

They are a lot harder to get consistent results with as transfers depend on heat and moisture for good adhesion. Definitely try some experiments with it. You might come up with a new technique for doing it or a combination that works well for you.

Fixing transfers:

Watercolor pencils can be used to fix spots that didn't transfer. Best thing to do is test the pencils that you are going to use out on a throw-away transfer before you work on your good original.

Scanning transfers:

Scan your transfers into your computer and fix or manipulate them in a graphics program. I use Paint Shop Pro and PhotoShop. It's easy to clean them up and enlarge them as well as being able to adjust the color for more desired results. (See example below)



Part 7: Resources

Materials:

All of the materials you need for this process should be fairly easy to find locally.

The dollar store has inexpensive trays, cookie sheets and tongs.

Any art supply store will carry rubber rollers

Local camera shops should carry Polaroid Type 59 color pack film or be able to order it for you. There are also many online resources for film. You can find film on Ebay but most of the time it is outdated and not the best for transfers.

Cameras can be found on Ebay, at flea markets, yard sales or thrift stores, your grandmas attic, etc. expect to pay anywhere from \$1 to \$5 for a nice basic older model. Add shipping if you get them off of Ebay. Some of the newer models will go for much more like the Reporter and ProPak. The 600se will be \$\$\$ but if you've got some expendable cash you'll get the advantage of more control over your exposures and interchangeable lenses too.



A few camera models: (L-R)
the Big Shot, ProPak & Polaroid 215

Books:

Kathleen Thormand Carr

Polaroid Transfers: A Complete Visual Guide to Creating Image and Emulsion Transfers

Polaroid Manipulation: A Complete Visual Guide to Creating SX-70, Transfer and Digital Prints

Christopher Grey

Photographer's Guide to Polaroid Transfer Step-By-Step

Holly Dupre

Polaroid Image- Transfers tools and Techniques

This is an online book in PDF format available for free download.
(See links section below)

Links:

Holly Dupre's excellent and free PDF book on Polaroid Transfers
<http://www.pacificsites.com/~hdupre/trans.html>

The Land List – All the info you'll ever need on Polaroid cameras
<http://www.rwhirled.com/landlist/landhome.htm>

For information on transfers and other creative ideas check out the Polaroid website:

<http://www.polaroidwork.com>

Other:

Polaroid offers free technical assistance as well as a free booklet on transfers. You can call the Polaroid Technical Assistance Hotline at 800-225-1618

You can also order replacement batteries for some of the older models of cameras that don't use the typical AA batteries from Polaroid.

Part 8: Basic Camera Care

There are no major bells and whistles on the older Polaroid cameras. Some have batteries that control the shutter. Some don't. Most are point and shoot with a knob that allows you to vary the lightness or darkness of the shot. Some models have better lenses that let you have more control over the exposure. They cost a bit more. Even to get on Ebay.

The major maintenance items of the older Polaroids are:

- If your camera uses batteries change them at least once a year and check for corrosion. Replacing the batteries and cleaning the terminals is especially important when you first get your camera. Most of the newer cameras use standard AA batteries but some of the oldest models use a proprietary battery that can only be gotten from Polaroid. Sometimes the batteries have been sitting in the cameras for years and have corroded. Be careful when removing them. Battery acid is caustic. Use alcohol on Q-tips to clean all the battery contacts.
- Keep the lens clean and free of scratches. You can get a lens cleaning solution from anywhere that sells camera supplies. A little Windex or alcohol on a tissue works just fine too.
- Keep the developing rollers clean and gook free. In all the cameras the rollers can be removed. Directions for this are on the inside of the film cover. Clean camera rollers routinely. After every pack of film is best. Goo on the rollers will show up on the transfers and can cause the film packet to jam when pulling it out of the camera. Rollers can be cleaned with hot running water and dried thoroughly or can be cleaned with alcohol and a soft tissue or cloth. I sometimes use both. If you've just gotten your camera make sure to clean the rollers before putting any film in. Also, be careful not to scratch the rollers as the scratches will show up on the transfers too.

Even though some of the cameras are pretty old most have seen very little use and are still in very good condition. If taken care of properly your Polaroid will provide you with many years of service.

In Conclusion

There is tons of good information on Polaroid transfers in book stores and out on the Net. There's also more ways to make pictures for transfers other than taking them with a camera. The instructions that I've given you are very basic and not necessarily meant to be used if you are planning on doing transfers to sell as originals. If you enjoy the process and want to get into it in any depth please look into some of the resources that I have provided. The main thing about transfers is to experiment to find what suits your needs and definitely have fun with it.