



Barbara Davidson, *Rangerette Hopefuls*, 2001

To get this amusing view of an audition for the Kilgore Rangerettes, America's oldest drill team, Davidson may have looked a little funny herself as she turned her back to the try-outs and concentrated instead on the audience. Good photojournalists like Davidson must focus on the action, but still keep an eye out for less obvious details that help tell the story.

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Camera Types

You can make good pictures with inexpensive and even primitive equipment; you don't need a costly camera or camera system.

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There are many different types of cameras for you to choose from, ranging from cheap generic models used by millions of snapshooters to costly specialized models used by very few advanced amateurs and professionals. Most modern cameras are quite sophisticated; they are controlled by small computerized circuitry, and they offer more features than you will ever need or even learn how to use. Such models are often linked to a **camera system**, an array of lenses, flash units, and other accessories made by one manufacturer, designed to work together with the camera for maximum effect and automation.

Good pictures are made by photographers, not cameras, so don't worry if a complicated camera doesn't suit your budget or your creative goals. You don't need the most expensive model or fancy features; many wonderful pictures are made with simple, even primitive equipment. Still, it helps to understand the various types of available cameras, so you can evaluate your options and make informed choices.

One way to categorize cameras is according to the size film they use: 35mm cameras use 35mm film, for example, and medium-format cameras use size 120 (or 220) film. Another way is according to the viewing and focusing systems they use, such as single-lens-reflex (SLR) or rangefinder. This chapter describes the different categories of cameras and how to use them.

A **single-lens-reflex (SLR) camera** is so named because you view, compose, focus, and take a picture through a single lens with the help of a reflex mirror. You can't see directly through the lens, because the film and shutter are in the way; they have to be positioned right behind the lens to do their job. So the SLR redirects the light from the lens to your eye with a reflex mirror, focusing screen, pentaprism, and viewfinder (see the illustration on the following page).

Reflex mirror. The **reflex mirror** is located in the camera body right behind the lens and in front of the film. It's positioned at a 45-degree angle; when light comes through the lens, the mirror reflects it upward. The mirror also is hinged; when you press the shutter button, it flips up and out of the way as the

The Holga

In recent years, a number of simple, plastic “toy” cameras have become surprisingly popular among fine-art and professional photographers, who embrace them for their flaws rather than their technical quality. There have been several models of such cameras, such as the Lomo and the Diana, but the most popular is the Holga.

The crudely-made Holga will cost you no more than a few rolls of film. It has a cheap plastic lens that doesn’t distribute light evenly to the film and a body prone to light leaks. It does take relatively large-size 120 medium-format film (pages 28–29), which means that you can enlarge Holga negatives with less quality loss than with 35mm negatives. However, because the lens is so poorly made, image sharpness falls off drastically at the edges and corners, which are likely to be quite soft, distorted, and even vignetted (darkened around the edges)—all part of the characteristically quirky Holga look. Some photographers even like the random streaks of light caused by unwanted exposure from light leaks in the camera.

Another part of the Holga look is that it produces 2¼" x 2¼" square images (though it comes with an insert for rectangular results); while many good medium-format cameras produce square pictures, most cameras produce rectangular pictures. But for Holga users this is another positive feature; they are drawn to the camera in great part because it is not like every other camera.

To some degree photographing with a Holga is a hit-or-miss affair. Results are hard to control or predict, so it’s best to just go with your instincts and take more pictures than you normally would, with the understanding that even your best efforts might be ruined because of inadequate light, poor lens quality, or excessive light leaks. Still there are a few things you can do to increase your chances of success. Here are a few tips:

- Holgas need fairly bright light to produce well-exposed negatives. You also should use fast film (ISO 400), because the lens has a small lens aperture (which you can adjust for sunny and cloudy days). Some Holga models have a primitive flash unit built in that provides decent illumination when you’re photographing in low light, close to the subject.
- Because Holgas leak light, load your film in low light or even in the dark, if possible. After loading, immediately seal potential sources of light leaks, such as the camera’s seams, joints, and the red-filtered window used for counting exposures, with black electrician’s tape.
- Although 120 films use a tightly wound paper backing with the film to keep light out, Holgas often don’t wind the paper (or the film) tightly enough. When you remove film from the camera, it’s a good idea to immediately wrap it in aluminum foil or some other opaque material for protection.
- The Holga records a lot more of the subject than its viewfinder shows, so get closer to the subject than you normally would when composing your picture.





Thomas Gearty, *Near Columbia, South Carolina, 1995*

Most modern cameras are highly sophisticated tools, but some photographers deliberately take a low-tech path. To make this moody landscape, Gearty used a Holga, a cheap plastic camera known for its soft focus and unpredictability. Because the Holga has limited focus and exposure control, it allows photographers to work more spontaneously with less concern for technique. © Thomas Gearty; courtesy of the artist.