# Looking at the world in a new way
by Malcolm McElvaney

If it is shiny or reflects I tend to collect it. Christmas tree ornaments like the silver ball pictured here are not ideal to photograph but within the qualities it does posses the view point created resembles that of squinting. Overall only larger masses are seen and tonal values are lost in general. It could also be compared to a fisheye equivalent of a thumbnail preview. So what could I see for selecting a scene by if it was always in front of me and so was born the rig to hold the silver ball just in front me as a type of rear view mirror. What I took a picture of is the rig in front of the camera but while not impractical it wasn't exactly useful either. Was the concept of any use at all I don't know but it was worth a try to see if it would work.

An alternative view of the world
by Malcolm McElvaney
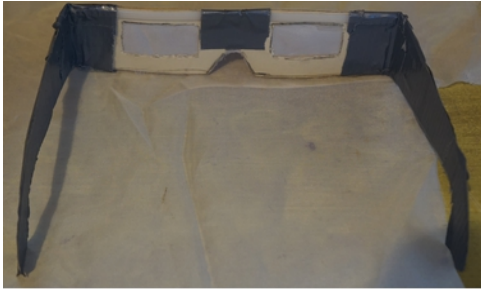
My penchant for embracing the strange ideas that cross my mind, appearances aside when in public, has been of some benefit to me. The creativity is expressed as a photograph but I pull from many non-photography sources to get that results and my tools come from this mixing of ideas as well. What you see is based on paper 3D glasses in form but I have two layers of see through cloth as my lens to obscure details and merge shapes in the scene together. On Saturday, the 16th of January, I walked the Monahans Sandhills State Park testing these make shift glasses to see what they could be useful for. I made some interesting discoveries as I walked around and worked out what information I could actually use.

Clarity of subject - The primary reason I made these was to facilitate a specific way of looking at the scene as if more abstracted, which is to say, merge detail into overall shapes to simplify the scene in question. In drawing abstraction is used to simplify a scene and pick the importance of details to be rendered by the artist. Not a problem in photography as the camera renders more or less exactly what it sees but consider the selection of your subject as you compose the scene. The subject may clearly stand out because it strongly contrast against the background but if it closely blends in too much that creates issues to deal with later. The artist drawing a scene would squint their eyes to be almost closed losing most the details they could actually see; however, my glasses obscure enough detail to emulate this effect and the reduction of detail is further enhanced by squinting my eyes as well. Discovery number one was I can use this tool to see if my subject will get lost in the "noise" or stand out in the photograph.

As it is seen.

As seen thru the filter.

As it is seen.

As seen thru the filter.

The example on the previous page shows how the subject stands out in both views. The example on this page while maybe not the best composition choice has the concrete visible in one but more obscure when filtered.

Where is the sun – It should be obvious without the glasses on but I did find the nature of the lens material I used did visibly wash out if exposed to more direct light and areas I could still see through was in indirect light. The solution I found was putting my hand out to block the sun and in the process I get the angle of the sun to my position. So if I put this observation into practice like a panoramic that used the same camera setting for all the pictures then at least I can find the part with the most light and contrast to expose for. Another option I considered is finding the scene with the most direct lighting to obtain the light rays a higher f/stop can potentially create on purpose. Due to the design of this particular pair of glasses I found a brimmed hat actually interferes with the "function" and also found if the washed out area looked like the weave pattern the sun was behind me and if I saw a moire pattern it was actually in front as it was going through two, misaligned weave patterns.

A matter of scale – For black and white I look for lines, shapes, and textures with color being another element I stay aware of as I compose a photograph. What if shapes and textures are the same exact thing made of up of lines composing them but by being separated by distance become those two distinct elements I look for. Consider a tree on the hill side and how we see it; if close enough to see all the details then we see the shape it creates but if far enough back in the distance that same tree merges into the details barely seen as a shape but becomes part of the texture. The other thought I had was shapes and textures work in contrast to each other in a composition but beyond that statement I am still working on this one. What factors influence the shapes we capture and how would I use that knowledge to include in my composition?

Focus – The image and therefore shapes captured will be sharpest in that focal plane with details outside of it blurring together more. A choice of composition by

the photographer.

F/Stop – A decision that effects the depth of field in the image so a lower f/stop produces a shallow depth of field and shapes will merge more. A higher f/stop will keep a deeper depth of field and shapes will maintain more sharpness overall.

Shutter speed – How fast is the action stopped. The slower the speed the more motion will blur the lines creating the shapes captured.

Shadows and Highlights – Lets talk about the light source as it will help create the shadows and highlights in the scene; however, it also effectively alters the color of objects adding new shapes in the process as new colors are created. The shadows cast are also new shapes.

Is there an actual practical use for this new tool or not? I know it doesn't hinder my efforts so at least it isn't useless but these odd devices I try do help me to focus on a problem in a new way and it succeeded this time around to think in a new way. Drawing and painting was my initial side quest of other art forms to understand, then came along comics and video games to add to the mix but I'm still a photographer at heart so hopefully this article made some sense. Be yourself and explore photography in your own unique way since you never know where it might lead you.

DIY gear – colored filters
by Malcolm McElvaney

03/08/2021 - This should be the first of a few articles to highlight some do it yourself projects I'm working on for advancing my photography via cheap supplies and as an added bonus I don't know the outcome yet so how will my vague plans develop. First on my list is colored filters via school crafting supplies but before I work on them another day how about some history and usage of filters.

The filters we use in photography today, although not so common since the digital age, has been around since about 1906. I'm not absolutely sure about that date but it is close and the manufacturer of these filters was a company called Wratten and Wain Wright which operated from 1878 – 1912. They were the first photographic supply store to help make the photographer's life easier. Kodak Eastman bought them out and carried on from that point. Filters have wratten numbers for a reason, at least to pay some respect at least I would assume. Those first filters were designed for panchromatic plates also being produced and used a yellow color. I couldn't find much information on this aspect of our craft so if you know more about this maybe post it and share it.

Filters have a variety of uses like the neutral density to stop light down, specialty effects, colored variations to correct color or alter contrast in black and white to name a few uses but that added piece of glass or gel is incorporated into the final image captured and becomes part of what is recorded. Digitally we can capture raw data so correct many issues with no need of some of these filters but like getting cheaper lenses for vintage effects in camera effects can be a good quality to seek out I suppose.
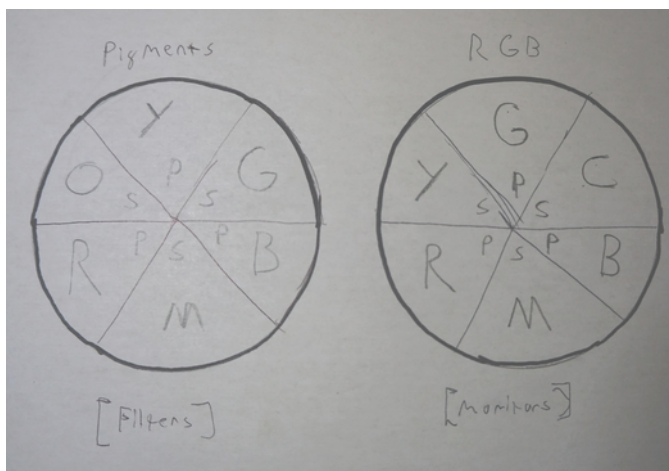

Color is complex and I understand enough about it to appreciate it and respect those with the ability to paint. In photography color plays an important role as well but the physical filters and the digitally captured image use two distinct systems. As you can see the primary colors are mixed to form the more complex ones but both have red and blue in common. The third primary color is either yellow or green on each color wheel and so not interchangeable. Pigments absorb certain wavelengths of light and reflect back others but in RGB we start

with a black screen and three colors at various intensities combine to form the colors we see. Thankfully we don't have to dive too deep in order to take color photographs but look up color theory if you would to take that deeper dive.

In black and white photography a monochromatic image is produced and color isn't the primary focus; however, it shouldn't be overlooked and ignored. The various colors present translate into the shades of grey captured. The color of the filter influences the color range translating to the lighter values and which ones get darker. Because filters are pigment based refer to that color wheel. The color range opposite the color of the filter will be darker so, for example, a yellow filter will darken the blue of the sky for higher contrast and bring out the clouds. I do not have any of these colored filters and work in post-processing for my black and white results but understanding other options exist is a good thing. Better explanations can be found online but in my quest to understand color the homemade filter offers some unique artistic options and the theory presented may fill in some blank details.
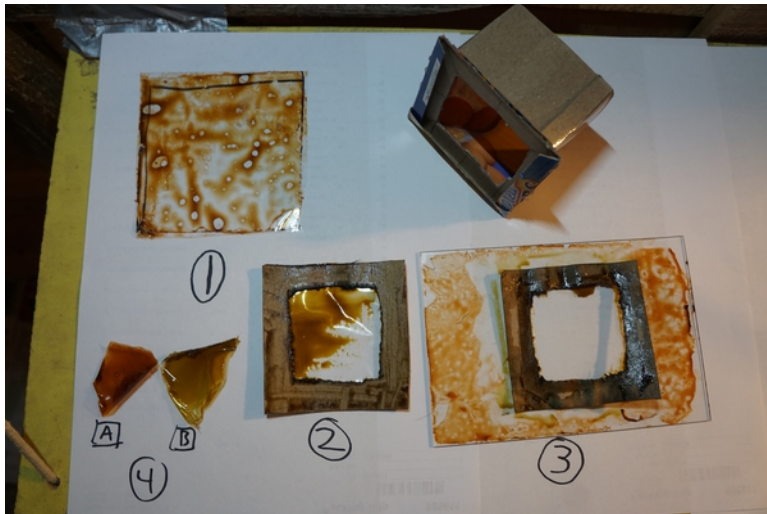
03/13/2021 – Now is the time to share some of the initial attempts to make the actual colored filters; however, the choice of material is most challenging and not quite working but a glimmer of hope at least as the concept is viable. Food coloring is working well and the colors I'm getting is great but school glue as a medium to apply it is another story. I have not given up and with an established gadget to hold the gels I have my starting point. My first assumption was to evenly distribute my colored glue between two sheets of thin plastic sheets (sheet protectors) but as you see [1] is clearly not usable. I created the medium used from two spoons of glue and mixing in two drops of yellow and red plus one drop of blue food coloring. The result is a darker orange range [4A] but I'm also using a darker yellow ("sepia") by using two drops of yellow and one drop of red and blue [4B] for my next attempts. Attempt [2] I secured a cardboard support to one layer of plastic and spread the glue on. The thought then occurred to me to dilute the thick glue with rubbing alcohol to see what happens. Attempt [3] didn't use plastic but was a worst result and the addition ingredient didn't help either. In summary I have a ways to go but I did get a picture through the filter [2] to give you some idea of the potential use.

Not the greatest result but shows some promise overall; however, why would I be selecting the colors I am and not more pure colors. Commercially you can buy yellow, orange, blue, green, and even red but sepia and other color possibilities once I figure out how to manufacturer an usable filter will give me some options to be more artistic with. The biggest question I could be asking myself is how much could be achieved in post-processing and avoid any filters at all,

yet, there is a difference between optically introduced in camera verses digitally added in software. This is a good place to end the article and maybe you will see the results of my overactive imagination with a more successful filter on facebook; however, reality is a cunning nemesis.

DIY gear – light dial
by Malcolm McElvaney

I took these pictures on 03/09/2021 so the device is built and untested but what was the niche this fills? It fits in the hot shoe of my camera flat enough that I can get a consistent reading and zero will be in the direction of the lens. Hand numbered and prototyped with junk yet an useful purpose does exist.

When you take a picture EXIF data is stored in the file to record the focal length, f/stop, iso, metering program, and much more but there are visual elements that can't be quantified yet we as the viewer know even if unaware of it. Taken for granted and unappreciated how we see visually when only one photograph is involved isn't so critical; however, combine more than one photograph and these anomalies will be important. Recording manually the direction of the light sources and how many is one way to better match unlike reference photos.

Cutting out elements of one photo and properly blending it in to another requires a practiced eye to pull off "flawlessly" so all the help you can get will make it easier in the final process. Those who paint usually have this skill set out of necessity due to the medium of choice but as photographers it may not be so practiced or my in my case exist at all. Consider sky replacement as an example, if the direction of the sun at least matched then it will be believed more readily.

Ultimately I built this tool to help build an image with the end goal of accomplishing what my imagination is capable of seeing. This modified sun dial may or may not prove useful but perhaps you may also see a use for the concept.