How To Solarize Black and White Photography
The Sabattier Effect

Solarization or the Sabattier Effect

Solarization is the process of re-exposing photographic paper during the development process. The result is an eerie silver image which contains light lines between the shadows and the highlighted areas.

Areas that have been exposed the least are affected the most during the re-exposure of the print. The darker areas or shadows on the prints show little change during the solarization process.

The Sabattier effect is a fairly easy process to achieve and can be done in a few easy steps.

The Process of Solarization

1. To begin the process, do a test strip to determine the exposure time for a good print. Once that is determined, expose the photo paper as you would a normal print. For best results, use a slightly shorter exposure time (by 10-20 percent) than you would if you were not planning to solarize, i.e. than what the test strip suggests.

2. Develop and agitate your paper normally. When the image begins to appear, remove the print from the developer and place it into a tray of water for about ten seconds. This will slow the development process.

3. The next step is to re-expose the paper to light. This exposure should last only about two seconds. The light source should be a low watt bulb, 15 to 20 watt, and should be three to four feet away from the print.

4. The final step is to put the paper back into the developer for the remaining development time. Complete the process of development using your stop bath, fixer and final wash.

Tips for gaining maximum results.

In order to achieve the desired effects you may need to experiment with different exposure times. Two seconds is a good starting point, but you may need to vary the tone up or down depending on the print and the type of paper used.

- Since re-exposure effects the highlights, use a print with a lot of light areas to achieve the most dramatic results.

- You will get different results even with the same print if you vary the initial time of exposure, the time spent in the tray of developer, and the time of re-exposure. You should vary these one at a time to vary the end result.

- Cut down on the initial exposure if your final print is too dark; add to the initial exposure if too light.

- Use of the # 5 filter results in blacker black areas so you may want to try this with a lower contrast filter or even no filter at all and compare results.

By spending a little bit of extra time in the darkroom and experimenting with exposure times, you can turn your black and white prints into dramatic works of art.