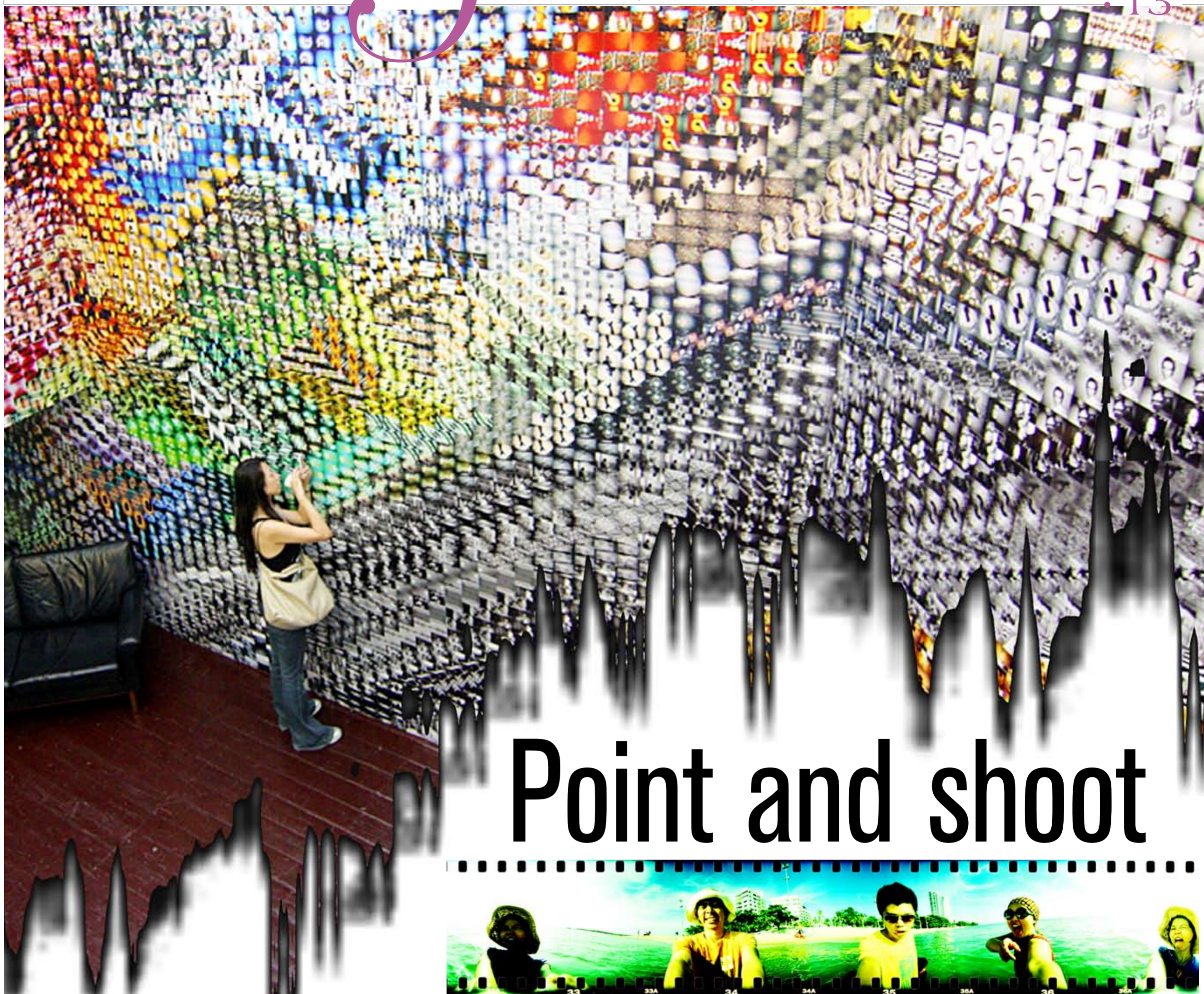


STYLE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2010

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Point and shoot

Lomography, a Vienna-based company that specializes in film cameras and an irreverent approach to photography, opened its first store in Taipei last month

BY CATHERINE SHU
FEATURES REPORTER



The Lomography Gallery store in the East District sells the company's film cameras.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES, AND COURTESY OF LOMOGRAPHY

STORE NOTES

► Lomography Gallery Store
— Taipei
35, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Ln 187, Taipei
City (台北市敦化南路一段187巷35號).
Tel: (02) 2773-6111

► Lomography Embassy Taichung
1 Jingjheng 24th St, Taichung City (台
中市精誠24街1號). Tel: (04) 2471-4830

ON THE NET: www.lomography.tw,
www.lomography.com



ON a recent Saturday afternoon, a group of 25 photography enthusiasts gathered at the new Lomography Gallery Store in Taipei's East District to learn about the Diana F+ camera.

The Diana F+ is based on the Diana, a camera that was first introduced in the early 1960s, decades before any of the workshop participants, most of whom were in their twenties, were born.

Each was lent a Diana F+ and guided through the process of loading 120mm film. Afterward, the photographers were unleashed into the neighborhood with a mission — to take photos that represented each passing minute of the hour.

Lafi Hsu (許韻芬) attended the workshop with her own Diana F+ in tow. The camera's "cute" and "retro" appearance first caught her eye, but Hsu was also taken with the images it produces.

"[The Diana F+] is just plastic, but I think the photos it takes are very unusual. The focus is on what you want to create, not the camera's functions," Hsu said.

Since 1992, Vienna-based Lomography has built its brand around an irreverent approach to film photography, encapsulated in its "10 Golden Rules," which includes maxims such as "Lomography is not an interference in your life, but part of it" and "Try the shot from the hip."

"A lot of people think of the photos when they hear 'Lomography,' but that's just the result. The important part is the process and we want to tell people about how to use that as a way to develop their own creativity," says Jeansman Lee (李裕豐), the general manager of Lomography Taiwan.

The company's cameras range in price from NT\$1,300 to about NT\$20,000. Some, like the Diana F+, are new versions of older cameras that have gained a cult

following. Made entirely of plastic, the Diana is prone to producing photos with light leaks, darkened corners and hazy images. But photographers have embraced these optical distortions.

Other cameras, such as Lomography's namesake Lomo L-CA+, based on a camera first manufactured in the Soviet Union, are also known for creating offbeat visual effects, including vivid colors. Multi-lens cameras, including the Supersampler and Oktomat, capture up to nine images on a single frame. The Fisheye produces super-wide-angle photos, while the Spinner, Lomography's newest release, takes 360-degree panoramic photos with the pull of a string.

Most customers are in their twenties to early forties and some of the youngest "lomographers" have never used film before.

"They are surprised at how many different things you can do with film that you can't do with digital cameras," says Lee.

Suggestions in books published by Lomography would make many archivists recoil in horror. They include dropping rolls of film in salt water or stretching negatives over heat to create distortions in photographs.

Cross processing, or developing film in chemicals meant for another type of film, is also popular among fans of Lomography. The end result includes highly saturated colors.

Taiwanese consumers first became familiar with Lomography about 10 years ago, thanks to buzz among hobbyists and photos shared on the Internet, says Lee. Before the Lomography Gallery Store opened, photographers purchased Lomography-brand cameras at licensed retailers, Eslite or the Lomography Embassy store in Taichung, which was opened two years ago by a fan. The month-old Lomography Gallery store is the first retail

outlet directly operated by the company in Taiwan.

Lee himself first became interested in Lomography seven years ago after his younger sister asked him to buy a Colorsplash camera for her. After she neglected to use the camera, a 35mm point and shoot with changeable gel filters attached to its flash, Lee picked it up and got hooked. He met his wife, a fellow Lomography enthusiast, five years ago at a photography event (she is now the director of marketing for Lomography Taiwan).

"Lomographers like to say that 'Lomo brings people together,'" says Lee.

Over the past decade, the terms Lomography and its fans, or "lomographers," have become almost synonymous with alternative photography among consumers, something that annoys some photographers. Chief among their complaints are that secondhand cameras, including the Lomo L-CA and Diana, can be purchased on eBay for less than Lomography's versions.

Lee says the company does not worry too much about such criticisms.

"I think that wherever people want to buy their cameras is okay," he says. "The point of our brand is to provide people with more ways to be creative and try different kinds of analog photography."

The company has recently expanded its product line to lifestyle items, including accessories, T-shirts and bags. In the future, Lee hopes fans of Lomography's products and analog photography will see the Lomography Gallery store, which features a small cafe and a gallery plastered with thousands of photos taken with the brand's cameras (or Lomo Wall), as a "home base."

"Using a digital camera is straightforward. Lomographers have to spend more time thinking about the process of taking a photo," says Lee. "It helps them find inspiration in their daily lives."