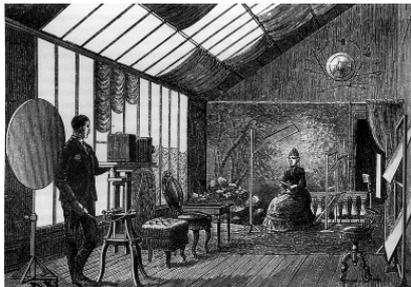




This documentary series, produced by Ibisatv for TVG (the regional Galician television station) and directed by Valentín Carrera, recounts the recent history of Galicia through the memory of its elderly who still remember it as a lived experience. A historical memory narrated in contrast to the youth of today who introduce each of the sections narrated by the elderly. Since it was a television series, we wanted to apply tools already used in film shoots, tools such as LUTs for grading or on set color correction.



A 19th century photography studio



Lee Brothers Studio. Singapore 1910-1925

In late 19th and early 20th century studio portraiture, the sitter was imbued with the importance of being immortalized, fixed forever in an image that, far from being a true representation, aspired to be the desired one, thus responding to the standards of the day, not only aesthetically but also morally and ethically. Many photographers, clearly influenced by painting, made their models pose before more or less elaborate backdrops, using soft lights in glassed rooms. But not all photographers had their own studio; many traveled to villages and hamlets making portraits with painted, shabby backdrops or simple, white cloths placed behind the sitter. We wanted to emulate that photographic spirit, not just in the form but also in the results, by means of video for TV. Even though the formats- video and photography- are physically very different, we think we have approximated that way of working, not just because we traveled miles with our painted, 3x3 backdrops and our lighting equipment on our backs, but also because we've maintained that particular way of seeing the "old folks".

The references shown here in black and white helped us capture the tone of the portrait, both in the photographer's vision and the sitter's. As for the colors used, we wanted them to be in line with the painted images of the Kajima Seibei studio and the work of photographer Joel Stenfield; in other words, in harmony with the simplicity and elegance expressed by black and white photography. At no time did we ever think of using saturated, loud or garish colors or images with overexposed whites.



Photos by Pedro Brey and Virxilio Vieitez



In the images on the left, you can see the tones used by the Japanese studio to paint the Kajima Seibei portraits between 1866 and 1924, as well as the soft colors and moderate contrast used by Joel Stenfield



Our film shoot

The cameras. Filming.

The interviews with the elderly were shot in digital Betacam with a Sony 970 WSP camera, modifying some of its parameters, including the gamma curve- we used the gamma Film n° 2 to obtain greater latitude; we reduced the detail; the Knee; the white clip level and the linear Matrix to obtain soft color tones.

Using this configuration, we photographed the Macbeth chart, shown here in these images, overexposing and underexposing in 1 Stop steps.

As you can see, the camera responds much better in the shadows than in high lights. At three points underexposed we have enough detail in shadows, you can still tell the difference between the darkest patches in the chart and there is still good color information. Notice that with three underexposed stops the image is slightly green dominated, but this is perfectly rectifiable in the grading. You can see that, in the graded frames, the detail is recovered at one point underexposed without any problems. Notice that at two and three points, there is an increase in noise. The camera's good performance in shadows led me to underexpose the image by one stop to gain detail in high lights, so I situated my reference grey in the waveform monitor at around 35% and therefore the faces were between 45 and 50%. In the frames, you can see the little latitude in high lights. We start to lose detail in high lights with just one overexposed stop; with two, the highest areas are irrecoverable. You can also see how certain colors disappear when overexposed, like skin tones, yellows and greens. Like all video cameras, the latitude is scarce even with specific gamma curves like the Film. We thus concluded that the camera could handle between five and six stops, in other words, a maximum dynamic range of 64:1, way below that of HD video systems which exceed 200:1 and still further from negative emulsion, which is around 1000:1. That's why the exposure was critical and the help of a waveform monitor was totally necessary for correct exposure.

Modification of the camera's parameters was determined by the attempt to approximate the photographic image mentioned earlier. For example, by reducing the camera's detail we obtained a softer image, which we also supported by using the Classic Soft, Black and White Promist filters.

In opposition to the interviews of the elderly, which are withdrawn from everyday life, the group of young people was filmed in their natural environments, where we sought backgrounds with intense colors. To generate a contrast between the elderly and the adolescents we filmed the latter using a Panasonic HVX200, applied the "Filmic" scene designed by Barry W. Green, recorded on DV and worked with greater depth of field and used a more angular zoom lens than the one used on the elderly.

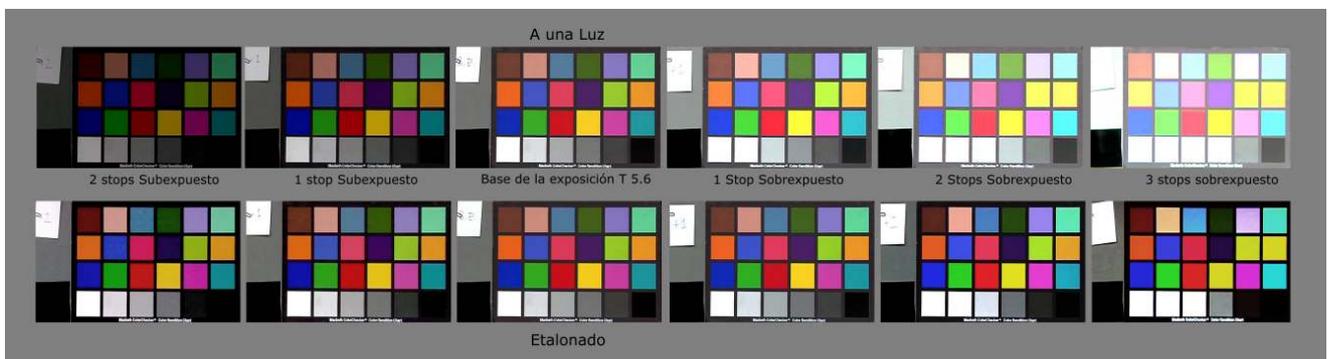


Given the camera's special configuration, during shooting we used the Iridas on set program to grade some frames with the interviewees captured from the camera and transferred by means of a MovieBox to a laptop. After correcting the frames, they were exported in JPEG format as a reference for the grading, apart from making the different proposals to the producers and the director for greater control of the final result..



Color correction with the Iridas on set while shooting

We filmed the adolescents, as mentioned before, with the Panasonic AG-HVX200 camera on DV 576i/25p tape. The menu configuration was done using the "Filmic" scene as the starting point, which uses the Cine-Like D curve with the cine-like color matrix. This scene also involved modifying the Detail, the chroma phase and the black pedestal, among others. In our test, you can see how the colors are intense with dense blacks. As expected, the latitude was around five points of diaphragm. There was a high level of noise in the shadows, if we wanted to recover detail in them and some compression effects. There was a moderate recovery of detail in the high lights in the mid tones with two diaphragms; with three we lost some color and the mid tones. However, for a camera of its specifications, its performance in high lights was very good. In general, it must be said that the exposure had to be very accurate with small margins for corrections.

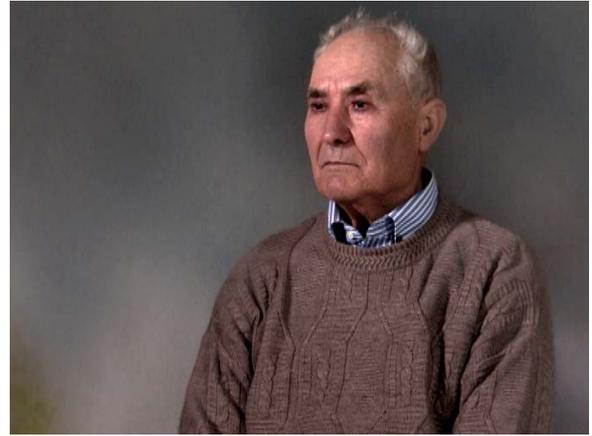


These images show some of the adolescents filmed with the Panasonic camera. We used a waveform monitor to measure the exposure.

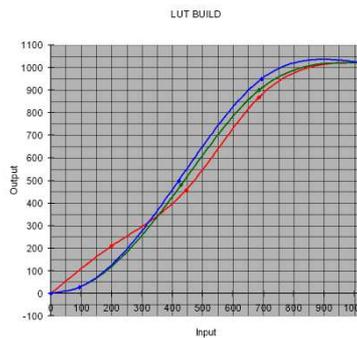


Grading

Grading was a very important aspect of the image creation process. We configured a specific image for each elderly person (and there were nearly 40 elderly people interviewed!), always seeking to maintain the maximum detail in the face and that intimate ambience needed to tell a story, both for the narrator and the spectator listening.



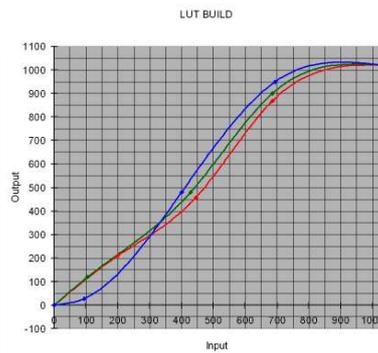
The grading process is visible in these frames. The original camera material had no contrast; it was underexposed and had a slight dominant magenta. Using the Film 2 curve with a slight modification of the black gamma, the Knee and the White Clip, I captured the maximum detail in shadows and high lights that the camera could handle and recovered them later in the grading. It was possible to gain some more detail in the high lights by underexposing the image up to one point, as we have already seen in the test chart. The image thus configured and with careful lighting we were able to maintain the detail in the hair, clothes and the backgrounds. In the grading process, we separated the interviewee from the background by means of a simple mask that allowed us to independently correct one from the other and apply a slight soft focus to the background, leaving, in some cases, as in the example shown here, a slight halo around the old man. All this allowed us to not only separate the subject more from the background but also to imitate the photographers from yesteryear more precisely. There were also slight color corrections in some cases, depending on the interviewee's skin tone, like saturating background colors by 10% and desaturating certain others, especially the reds.



Original frame

LUT applied to background

Graded image



Original frame

LUT applied to background

Graded image

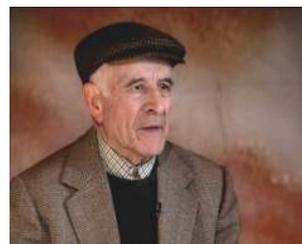
In these images, you can see the LUTs we created to apply to some of the backgrounds. In the first image, we applied an LUT that colors the shadows red, more of a "sang de boeuf" tone, leaving the mid tones and high lights slightly cold. In the second image, we applied an LUT to the background that left yellow shadows and the mid tones and high lights also slightly cold. We created these LUTs using Digital Praxis' LUTBuilder, which can be exported to the AVID.

I was able to visualize the creation of these LUTs in my computer using Combustion, fine tuning the curves until I obtained the desired one.

A large part of the images that illustrate the memory of the old folks are pictures and old objects; for this part, we wanted to respect the passage of time over these and leave the faded colors that evoke another era. Only in some cases, for example, like in old pictures, did we adjust the black and white values and added a slight proportional yellow coloring in high, mid and low lights.



Applying an LUT to a background with combustion



The frames shown here are only for reference, since some were captured in low resolution, not to mention the changes undergone when transferred to CMYK for printing.

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