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Why do large format photos look 3D and hyper-real?

Thornton Sasha , Nov 24, 2011; 08:08 a.m.

I saw a large print of what was presumably a medium/large format Martin Parr photo at an exhibition in which one of the people's faces looked almost 3D. I've seen a similar effect with a few other medium/large format exhibition photos. Obviously the prints are extremely detailed but why would that make them look 3D? Quite apart from the 3D effect, some of these pictures look more real than reality, in a way I can't put my finger on. Does anyone know why? There must be some good perceptual psychology stuff on this somewhere!

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Luis G , Nov 24, 2011; 08:20 a.m.

What were the pictures of, besides human faces? What was the context?

John MacPherson , Nov 24, 2011; 08:39 a.m.

Martin Parr uses a very careful amount of fill flash on many of his pictures, and pushes the exposure quite close to the edge of being into overexposure but not quite, and this can give the effect you mention.

Luis G , Nov 24, 2011; 09:03 a.m.

If they are the close-ups done of faces at the beach, they were done with a macro dental lens (Nikon, I believe, but I could be wrong) and 35mm film. The lenses have been made in something like 120mm and 200mm and have their own built-in ring flash.

Maciek Stankiewicz , Nov 24, 2011; 09:06 a.m.

Probably because of microcontrast, since in Medium or Large format grain is almost non existent. Also Lens design/quality may be responsible for that. Some of the pictures from my little Minox 35 GT have that Three dimensional quality and I can't explain that.



3D effect from Minox GT (look at girl's right arm)

Maciek Stankiewicz , Nov 24, 2011; 09:15 a.m.

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Minox 35 GT 3d effect (look at the shirt and tie)

Ron Andrews 📷👤, Nov 24, 2011; 09:24 a.m.

Several years ago, I saw an exhibition by Michael Fatiali. He shoots landscapes with an 8x10 view camera. The prints were mostly 30x45. They had that ultra-reality look you are talking about. I believe there are several factors at work. Large prints allow you to get up close and view the scene as if through a window. With most large prints there are clues like grain and fuzziness that demonstrate that this is a print. If you remove all of the grain and have tack sharp prints, the images take on this alternate reality look as if the picture frame was only a window.

Arthur Plumpton 📷👤, Nov 24, 2011; 10:09 a.m.

In addition to the comment of John regarding fill flash, I think that it is likely due to a combination of several things, including the higher resolution possible (even though prints themselves have much less maximum resolution than films or lenses), the contrast of the lighting and/or the visual effects of limited depth of field and focus. 3-D appearance or that of a hyper-reality is often a perceived effect, incited by those factors.

John Wilson , Nov 24, 2011; 11:31 a.m.

I think a lot of it has to do with the inherently shallower depth of field combined with tonal gradation from the big real estate of the film. Actual separation (distance from the subject to the background) plays a part due to light ratios. All of these things can be done in smaller formats, but the effect is much more apparent as the film gets larger. These first two were shot in 6x4.5



From [Civil War - Brooksville Raid](#)

I get this effect a lot with a 75mm lens (normal for 6x4.5) Same lens. Same film. Same day.



From [Civil War - Brooksville Raid](#)

The effect is not so pronounced. Below photo was taken with an APS-C sensor camera and 70mm prime.



From [2009 Pine Island kids_K2od_in cam BW](#)

Same effect or not quite? All three shots are set up pretty much the same. Close subject in the foreground, distant background. Strong lighting and lots of contrast.

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by [Matt Laur](#)



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