

Portraiture with the Rolleiflex 6008 professional

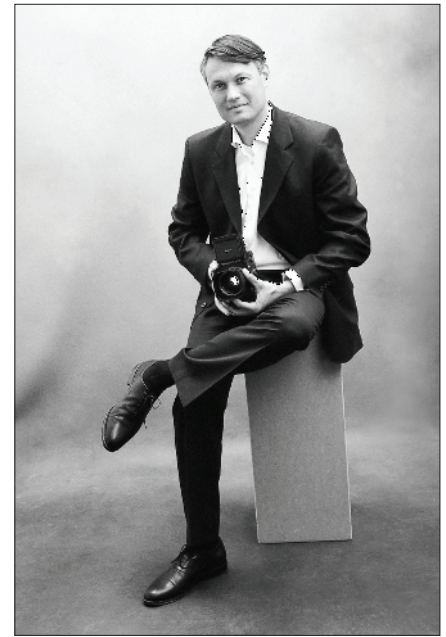
- a field report

by *Volker Muth*

A lot of photographers have the opinion that an investment in new equipment will solve their photographic problems and let them make better photos. In most cases this is an illusion. I am still amazed how little you actually need for a good photo. On the other hand it is true that there are some cameras that enable a photographer to break new ground. For example without the Ermanox and its fast Ernostar f/1.8 lens the available light photography and famous candids of Dr. Erich Salomon would not have been possible. To a certain degree this is the case with the Rolleiflex 6008 professional for me. This camera allows me a

tos. My approach to portraits is similar to someone collecting semi-precious stones – I look at them, put them into the light and discover their individual beauty. Others may prefer to cut these stones but I regarded this as losing the characteristics. I think that I have to respect every person, their characteristics, individual story and beauty. What I aim for is the moment you get an insight in a person.

Oddly I think that you can't achieve this by total control but rather the opposite – giving space for the unplanned.



Volker Muth



Dog Squad

way of working that I could hardly achieve with another camera. First of all there is the waist-level finder. It enables me to see the overall picture on the ground glass but also to talk to the person I am photographing. With an SLR I always found it annoying to have a camera body in front of my face. Working with a waist-level finder helps to build up trust and a certain level of intimacy between the photographer and the person who is being photographed.

During a portrait session I don't want to hide myself behind a camera. Taking portraits, is for me, a form of conversation between two people. These conversations don't have to be pleasant all the time and I have the opinion that you won't receive anything if you are not prepared to give something. Due to the waist level finder of the Rolleiflex it is possible to position the camera in a such a way so as not to catch someone's eye.

Portrait photography – an individual point of view

My intention with portrait photography is to unveil the characteristics of a person in such a way that he or she can recognise themselves. Old portrait photographers in Germany called this "*charakteristische Ähnlichkeit*" – characteristic resemblance. Thus I don't view myself as a director and I don't re-enact pho-



Fire Brigade

The reasons that I don't make "neutral" photos either, like a photo booth, is that my personal taste and experience functions like a mirror made of little coloured pieces of glass reflecting the picture. If however I try to do a neutral portrait, my personality is always included in the result.

In most cases, I don't know what awaits me – the person, the environment and the light setting are unknown to me in advance. Therefore I have learned that in most cases it is helpful to be able to adjust your visual idea. There is no standard approach to a meaningful portrait. If you stick to a certain pattern you will end up with these meaningless photos that you will see in most High Street studios. For me, photography has more to do with feeling than actually seeing something. I try to understand how I feel about someone or something. In that situation I totally rely on gut instinct. Sometimes you can simply feel if a picture will be good. Taking photos for me is to take up a position. Don McCullin once said in an interview "*Photography for me is not looking, it's feeling. If you can't feel what you're looking at, then you're never going to get others to feel anything when they look at your pictures.*" I totally agree with that point of view.

The technique

Daylight is something that is not easy to handle as a photographer but it can be rewarding to try. It's difficult also because film or sensors have different characteristics to the human eye in terms of white balance and perception of contrast. The use of daylight or flashlight is something, which depends, in my case, on the lighting situation I come across. This choice not only affects the characteristics of the picture in terms of colour but also the atmosphere of the portrait session. Imagine someone arranging several lamps in your living room – this can cause stress

and result in a loss of spontaneity. Working with an assistant, as a team, can significantly help. I use two 500-watt flashes from Hedler Systemlicht in Germany. Flash units give you more creative freedom than tungsten halogen light due to the much higher energy. But extensive lighting is not the silver bullet for good portraits – it is the sensible perception of the situation and the person.

With skilful positioning of a person and some basic tools you will be able to work with daylight very well. One of these basic tools can be a Styrofoam sheet on a lighting tripod used as a reflector. I have used this combination even for assignments. Also a reflector you can buy from several manufactures is helpful for brightening or reducing light.

Lighting setting is like mixing a cocktail – less is more! In some localities, like a factory site, the use of flash units is not



Head Chef

possible or would require a disproportional effort. In that case the assumed disadvantage can be turned into an advantage when accepting what you come across.

Here is a short overview of the equipment used with the Roliflex 6008:

- Manfrotto 055XB aluminium tripod, with short centre column and rubber spiked feet
- Novoflex Classic Ball 3-way head
- Manfrotto 030 adapter plate
- OP/Tech tripod strap
- Gossen Digipro F and a Pentax Spotmeter V

Using the centre column is something I only use for fine adjustment and otherwise avoid because a fully extended column is a source for vibration and camera shake. After my past experience with this arrangement I would also consider wooden tripods by Ries or Berlebach and heads from FOBA, Arca-Swiss or Linhof.

For most of my black and white pictures I use the classic Kodak Tri-X 400 film and for colour I took to Fuji Reala ISO 100 negative film, which sadly has recently been discontinued.

Together with a stable tripod-head combination and the mirror-lock up, a slow shutter speed is a good option. As I learned, the MRC 120 electronic remote release is a very useful accessory as it makes it convenient to use the mirror lockup. The matte box is also an item I can highly recommend.



Chemical Plant

◀ In most cases I use a handheld exposure meter as it gives me more freedom and therefore I can ignore the sophisticated exposure metering of the Rolleiflex 6008.

Without doubt, technique is important and you should know your gear inside and out. There is nothing more annoying to a person being portrayed than a photographer insecure with his own gear. Don't get dominated by the technical aspect because that is only your equipment, learn how to use it blindfolded - and then forget about it.

Here is where the Rolleiflex 6008 comes in. For me it is the perfect tool for doing portraits as it perfectly supports my flow of work letting me concentrate on engaging my subject.

The concept of the Rolleiflex 6008

Using the Rolleiflex 6008 made me appreciate the underlying concept of the camera. There is no odd solution; most of the camera is self-explanatory. You realise that the Rolleiflex SLX, from which the 6008 descends, was a well thought out camera concept. Everything gives the impression of being one piece. No additional motor drive or prism finder needs to be added to use features like shutter priority. The electronics built into the camera is not an end in itself but is support for the photographer - if desired. I found the motor drive with two frames per second very helpful and the noise never annoyed me. Automatic wind up to the first frame and wind off at the end of each roll are very convenient on a busy photo shoot.

Advantages

There are some features in this camera I would miss a lot, like the brilliant laminar dark slide, which is much better than the metal dark slide normally used, the film inserts that make load-

<i>Bespoke Tailor</i>	<i>Employee, Metal Works</i>
<i>Leather Goods Manufacture</i>	<i>Leather Goods Manufacture</i>
<i>Real Estate Developer</i>	<i>Artist I</i>

ing new film as fast as with a Nikon and the different exposure modes you can use without an additional prism viewfinder. In fact, the 6008 is the only 6x6 SLR camera that combines metering with waist-level viewing. The 6000 system is also the only 6x6 system to display aperture and shutter speed in the waist level viewfinder. The LEDs also signal the use of exposure compensation in 1/3 stops, meter lock and spot metering.

One advantage most photographers won't even realise, but which is quite important, is that the film plane is set in the body



Logistics

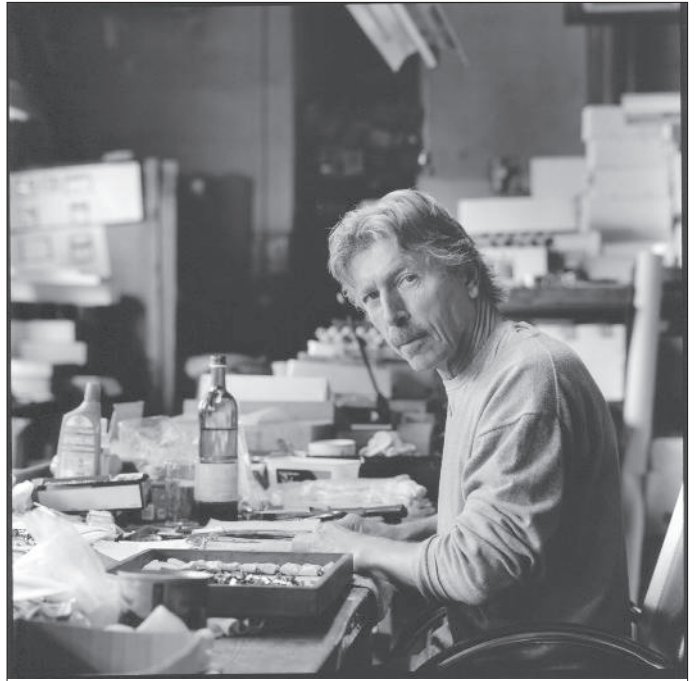


Kick Boxer

rather than in the magazine. The film is pressed up against some rails in the body so that the film plane is independent of the back installed. In e.g. Hasselblad cameras, the film plane is in each magazine back, which requires the back to be adjusted precisely to the body to sustain maximum sharpness.

Together with PQS lenses even the 6008 professional can use 1/1000th second (watch the three lines on the shutter speed dial) even with flash units. This fast flash synchronisation is even at today's standards, state of the art.

The development of the 6000 series was quite evolutionary. Comparing the 6008 professional to the younger 6008 integral2/AF I can't see any advantages over the 6008 professional which would be essential to me. If you want to use the 4,5 x 6 cm



◀ size, (16 pictures per 120 roll instead of 12) with the 6008, the 4560 rotating magazine will be an interesting option because it is possible to switch between horizontal and vertical format simply by turning the back. This magazine can't be used with the 6008 professional as it was designed later for use with the 6008 integral/E and later versions.

Metering

The 6008 system is the only medium format camera that combines TTL-light metering with waist-level viewing. Metering with the 6008 is straightforward. A large knob on the left side of the camera selects three modes: centre-weighted multi-zone metering, spot-metering (approx. 1% of frame area with a 80mm lens) and multi-spot metering by metering and storing up to five spot readings.

One area where Rollei is head and shoulders above the 35mm crowd, is the manner in which automatic exposure is selected. Rather than a complex display and a multi-function dial, Rollei



Miner

added an „A“ setting to aperture and shutter speed dials. Move the aperture dial to „A“ and you get shutter speed priority. Move the aperture back to f8 and the shutter speed to „A“ and you get aperture priority. Move both to „A“ and you get total automation. Select 1/125th and f8 and you get metered manual.

Auto bracketing (up and down 2 to 3 stops) is a feature of the camera I have not used once due to my current workflow as I often work with a tripod and a handheld exposure meter and so do it manually. Whereas locking the exposure value, by pressing a button next to the shutter speed dial, turned out to be helpful on some occasions. I expect that the internal metering system of my 6008 will be of growing interest to me when working handheld more often.

<i>Employer metal works</i>	<i>Priest</i>
<i>Cabinet maker and artist</i>	<i>Painter II</i>
<i>Parish priest</i>	<i>Blacksmith II</i>

Viewfinders

The standard viewfinder of the 6008 is the waist level finder. It is ideal for composing carefully and for portraits. Starting with 35 mm SLRs I easily understood the advantages of the waist level finder and I find composing a picture with the waist-level



Workshop

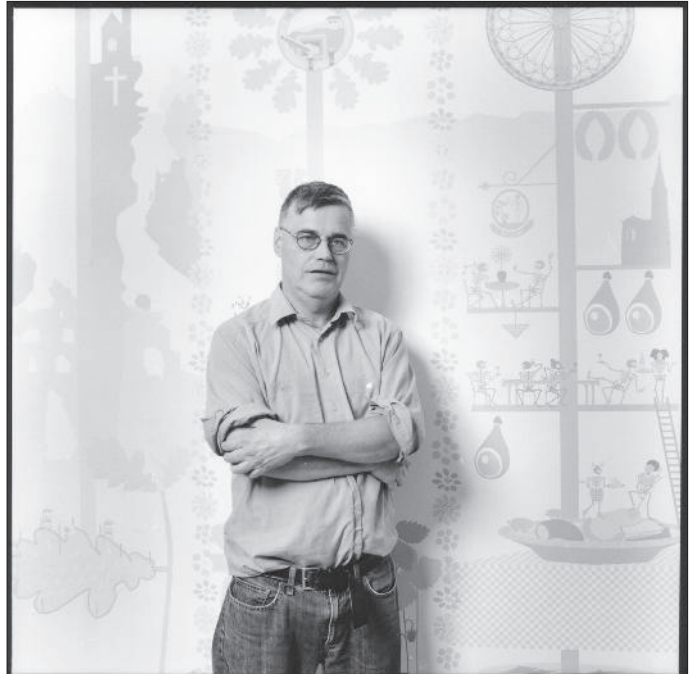
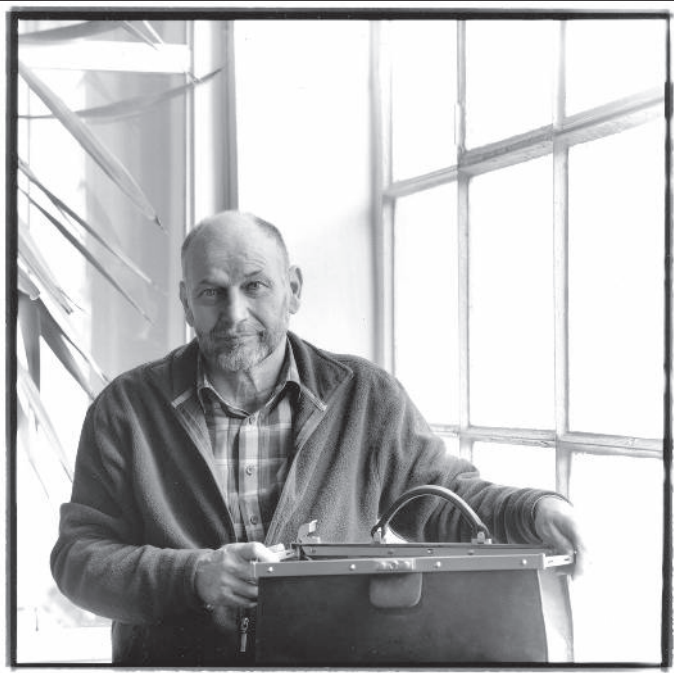
finder extremely effective. The three-dimensional impression of the focusing screen had an amazing impact on me. Additional 45 or 90-degree prism finders, a magnifying hood or two other very special finders can be used too. I recently bought a 90-degree prism finder with the intention to use the 6008 more often handheld like a classic SLR.

The standard focusing screen includes a central split image, micro prism collar and a grid of fine lines for framing. Compared to my old Nikons, I found focusing with the Rollei screens sometimes difficult. Because, with the much narrower depth of field when compared to 35mm, sharpness has to be set precisely.

No matter which finder and screen is used, the LED displays are visible and read correctly. The microcomputer electronically mirrors all displays to compensate for the installation of a prism finder.

Action grip

The 6008 has an "action grip" that facilitates one-handed op-



eration by right-handed photographers. This small handle plugs quickly in or out of the shutter speed dial when the shutter speed dial is set to a special position. The grip has a camcorder-like strap, cushioned with leather, which goes around your fingers. Rotation into any one of four positions is possible. A shutter release and meter lock button fall easily to hand, as does the switch for camera power and motor drive mode. The grip changes the way you use this camera and easily enables handheld shooting. Together with a prism finder and the exposure automation the 6008 can be used like a large SLR camera for photojournalism.

Film inserts

The ingenious film inserts can be preloaded and make changing film as fast as with a standard 35mm SLR camera. Doing portraits and using some preloaded film inserts enables me to easily continue photographing, whilst avoiding interrupting the positive tension in a portrait session. Also the film inserts effectively make a second magazine unnecessary, which saves weight and money. Owning a second magazine is only useful if you tend to change between different film types frequently. Therefore, owning some film holders and inserts is a very good investment in my eyes and highly recommended. The design of the film insert is another example of how well designed the 6000 system is in every detail, as they are designed symmetrically. This makes

so long with 35mm cameras. The Zeiss and Schneider-Kreuznach lenses are great. The range of lenses is extensive and includes lenses like the 55mm PCS wide angle shift lens or exceptionally fast lenses like the f/2 80mm and a f/2 110mm. The lenses I currently use are the Zeiss 80mm Planar PQ f/2.8 and the 150mm Sonnar HFT PQS f/4. The 80mm focal length is a lens, which is surprisingly versatile, and should not be underrated. From my point of view, a 50mm lens would be a useful addition. All lenses of the SLX/6000 system have 1/3 stop settings.

Rollei always offered a budget line of lenses called “Rolleigon” (made by Tokina) or later “EL” - economy line - (made by Zeiss), both for 67mm screw in filters instead of the Rollei VI bayonet mount; and the EL line of lenses basically had no external window for the aperture setting. The Rolleigon lens range was intended for use with the SLX and 6006 cameras. Together with the, then newly released, PQ lenses, the 6008 allowed open aperture metering for the first time. Therefore mounting a Rolleigon lens on a 6008 means that you can't use capabilities like the automatic exposure modes, the multi-spot metering, the display of the aperture in the viewfinder and Auto bracketing. You can use Rolleigon lenses on a 6008 in the manual mode, checking the exposure with the stop-down button each time. Due to this, using newer “EL” and “PQ/PQS” lenses on a 6008 would be the better choice in my opinion.



Blacksmith



Airport employee

loading quite convenient - you just remove the film insert from the magazine, remove the exposed roll, turn the insert 180°, put in a new roll of film and put it back into the camera. So you don't have to change the empty roll to the other side of the insert like with a Hasselblad.

When buying used film inserts it is important to differentiate between types for the SLX and the 6000 system. SLX type inserts are slightly different in size resulting in jamming in the 6000 magazine, making them difficult to remove. The old SLX film inserts are marked with a large white triangle on the inside of the insert. The 6000 type inserts have a much smaller white triangle on the outside.

Image quality & lenses

Not surprisingly the image quality of a medium format camera is great and makes someone (like me) wonder why he worked for

The convenience of a bayonet mount is very compelling to everyone who has ever cut his hand with a jammed screw-in filter. The downside is that these filters are ridiculously expensive. Heliopan filters from Germany are the most reasonably priced and are superb optically. Adapters from 67mm & 72mm to Rollei VI bayonet mount and to 67mm as well, exist. So I can use my Rollei VI filters on my Fujica GW 690 camera, with a 67mm filter thread, too. Otherwise the Formatt-Hitech and Lee resin 100mm filter system could be an option, too.

Disadvantages

Since photographing with the 6008 professional I have come across no serious disadvantages. The most “serious” was the problems with focusing when using the waist level viewer and the standard viewing screen. This is something I got accustomed to with more routine.

An often mentioned “disadvantage” of the whole 6000 system,

compared to other medium format cameras, is that without battery power the camera is “dead”. This is not an issue if you remember the last time you recharged the NiCad battery. After approximately two months the battery will be discharged. Putting the camera back into the bag still switched on is nothing the camera appreciates, as there is nothing like an automatic switch-off and the battery will be discharged the following day. As a careful photographer you might invest in a back up battery but I never got into a situation where I had lost photos due to an empty battery. Honestly you will have to admit that with the capabilities of the 6000 series, much would not be possible with a mechanical system.

As an addendum, DHW Fototechnik have now just informed me that NiCd batteries are not produced any more due to an EU wide ban and so they have recently switched to NiMH batteries (Sanyo/Panasonic "eneloop"). NiCd battery packs can be retrofitted with the new NiMH cells easily. I find the price of 79€ (postage excluded) for refitting a reasonable cost. This change comes with some advantages; the increased capacity of 1200 mAh approximately doubles that of the NiCds, and NiMH's do not have a memory effect like NiCad batteries. The Rollei Type C charger can still be used, although the discharge function is now obsolete.

Compared to the availability of used Mamiya or Hasselblad

the first time. Besides the classic CLA work, the camera required new batteries, adjusting of the exposure metering system, a new focusing screen and lubricating of the gearing mechanism of the motor drive. But this is nothing I was surprised about, as no one would seriously buy a 25 year old Porsche and go straight for a track day on Nürburgring. For service and repair Paepke Fototechnik in Dusseldorf and in particular DHW Fototechnik, the successor of Rollei/Franke & Heidecke in Braunschweig can be recommended.

Further Information

A valuable overview on the development of the SLX and the 6000 series, their lenses and accessories can be found in Claus Prochnow's Rollei Report 5 (only in German). It can be ordered through his widow's website <http://www.rollei-report.com>. There are also two books on the 6000 system you can buy used: Helfried Weyer's "Rollei-fototechnik. Kreative Bildgestaltung" (English/German) and Wilfried Mordmüller's "Rolleiflex 6008 professional und das System 6000" (German). Both books were published in the 90's.

I transport my Rollei equipment in a custom made aluminium suitcase because I like to see the whole of my equipment laid out in front of me. If you prefer a bag, the 07 series by Billingham may be an option as it has the width required for the camera.



Hotel employee



Painter III

magazines, lenses and accessories, the second-hand market for the 6000 system is small and it seems a lot has been sold to the US and Asia in the past.

When I bought a second used 6000 magazine, I soon realised that it had a problem with overlapping frames. This was quite annoying as it meant that I lost three pictures from a 12-picture roll. A fair, complete exchange of the magazine by mechanics at DHW Fototechnik in Braunschweig solved the problem. I have read that Rollei's brilliant dark slide system, requiring some kind of electronic encoder instead of a simple mechanical registration for film winding, as being the potential source of this issue. This can also be the reason why frames are not evenly spaced. But this is just a bit irritating when noticed and not a problem at all.

Buying it used

Having in mind that my Rolleiflex 6008 professional was probably built around 1988/89, I sent it for service before using it for

Conclusion

Owning 35mm, medium format and 4x5 inch monorail cameras, the Rolleiflex 6000 system is, for me, something of an ideal compromise between the portability of a 35mm system and the image quality of a large format camera. Due to the modular design of the camera it can be adjusted to most photographic needs. Every feature (except Auto-bracketing) of the 6008 Professional has turned out to be useful to me and turned out to be practical for my photographic workflow.

Besides the technical advantages, the Rolleiflex 6008 is something I simply enjoy taking in my hand as I appreciate the built quality and the design.

If I would consider a move into digital medium format I would also look closer at the Hy6 Mod2, as I have appreciated the waist level viewfinder, especially for portraits.

Having written a lot on technical issues I would like to

◀ emphasise that it is insignificant for a good portrait. As written previously, portrait photography is, for me, the respectful debate between two people and no monologue. A technical fault will be excused when the portrait is expressive and not the other way round. There are too many technically excellent, but meaningless photos around.

I mention that I used Fuji Reala 100 film which is now discontinued (page 11). I have now decided to give Kodak Porta 160 a try.

It should be noted that the rectangular photos on pages 10 and 12 have been taken with my 4x5 inch Plaubel Peco profia ZT, a view camera.

For my last portrait projects I used my Rolleiflex 6008 as well as the 4x5 inch Plaubel Peco profia ZT view camera. I have used the Plaubel when I could neither use a flash unit nor had the

place to set up a monorail camera. In some locations, like the data centre or at the airport, I simply had no space to set up the Plaubel. I had no access to a power supply required for the flash unit either. On more than one occasion I arrived at a location with both the view camera and the Rolleiflex system and decided on site which was best to use. Negative size is not such an issue as you might think. I have printed pictures up to nearly four feet square (120 x 120 cm) from a Rolleiflex negative. Through these portrait projects, I have come to appreciate the Rolleiflex as an ideal compromise between the transportability of a 35mm camera and the image quality of a large format camera.



Volker Muth works as a freelance photographer, specialising in corporate reportage, individual portraits, theatre and architecture photography.

Should anyone have a question and want to get in touch with Volker, he may be contacted by email...

Email: mail@volkermuth.net
Website: <http://www.volkermuth.net/en/index.html>
Blog: <http://volkermuth.wordpress.com>

Painter I	Metal works
Leather dealer	Burnisher metal works

