

NEWS

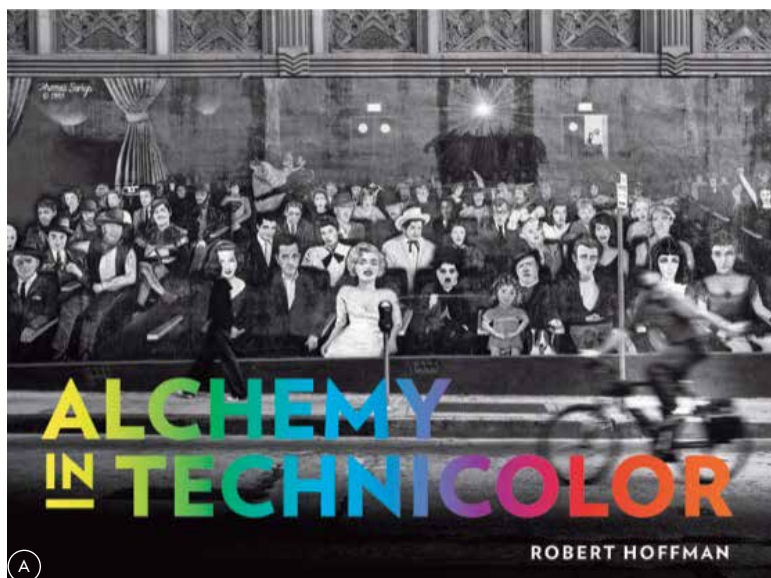
Alchemy in Technicolor

BY DAVID MORONG, EDITOR

“The success of Technicolor dye-transfer was the result of the closest possible coordination between Production Design and Art Direction with cinematography and the various laboratory processes employed. The same holds true with costume and makeup designs. Color was the nexus that brought those departments together.” Author Robert Hoffman made this observation when introducing the idea that his new book, *Alchemy in Technicolor*, would be of particular interest to the readers of PERSPECTIVE.

The book combines the history of color filmmaking, the science and chemistry of creating color images, and an album of over 150 beautifully reproduced images from the history of color celluloid and beyond. It offers a detailed history of the processes that made up the Technicolor revolution, and also reveals the work of the

scientists and artists that made the process into a dominant force in filmmaking. As detailed as the book is in the technological innovations that made color film possible, it is the approach of the artists who used the process that is the heart of the story.



A. ALCHEMY IN TECHNICOLOR COVER.

B. ERROL FLYNN AS ROBIN HOOD.



The history of color photography is the history of Technicolor. Early color prints in books and magazines were almost always enhanced by hand before reproduction. The Technicolor 3-strip dye-transfer printing process that forms the center of the narrative was the revolution that brought color photographic imagery to the masses. Technicolor opened up possibilities in design and visual composition that still resonate in this digital age.

Hoffman had a front row seat to much of this history. He served as Vice President of Marketing & Public Relations at Technicolor for 18 years. This provided him with not only almost two decades of experience within the company starting in 2001, but also gave him access to records and archival materials reaching back to the beginning of the process.

The book isn't arranged on a timeline from the start of color reproduction on film to the transition to digital color. The Technicolor process is explored in great detail, but is also used as a jumping off point on the development of color technology into the current era, and how color was developed as a thematic element through the use of the Technicolor process. Particular emphasis is placed on how it was employed by specific artists on specific films, and on how directors and cinematographers were able to manipulate the system to achieve their artistic goals. Hoffman also explores how different countries approached the use of color, with British, French and Indian films employing Technicolor to remarkably different results.

Hoffman also dispels the idea that the scientists and businessmen at Technicolor worked at odds with the interests of the filmmakers. The control that the company held over the use of color, and the idea that Technicolor wanted to show off the process with the use of vivid colors no matter the subject of the film is contradicted by the many examples



of the artists and technicians within Technicolor working with directors and cinematographers to get the results that were wanted by the filmmakers.



The contribution of designers to the development of color in motion pictures is touched on throughout the book. In discussing his findings Hoffman notes: "It is an unmistakable fact that Production Designers and Art Directors like Robert Edmund Jones, William Cameron Menzies, Lyle Wheeler, Vincent Korda, Alfred Junge, Heim Heckroth, Henry Bumstead, Ferdinando Scarfiotti, Richard Sylbert, and Dean Tavoularis had as much to do with the look of those Technicolor classics as any other individual on the production. Those working in the 1930s and 40s,

A. THE GRAND DAME OF TECHNICOLOR, ACTRESS OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND.

B. GENE KELLY AND LESLIE CARON IN *AN AMERICAN IN PARIS*



when color was still something of a novelty, helped define the color aesthetic attributed to Technicolor, while those working in the mid-50s through the late 70s were essential to elevating Technicolor to the apogee of cinematic color”

It is that era of the 1950s to the 1970s that is receives particular focus in the book. There is a good deal of material available on the birth of

Technicolor and its use in the 30s and 40s. Hoffman follows those developments into the following decades, looking closely at the films of Alfred Hitchcock, and showing use of the process in the work of filmmakers like Gene Kelly, George Stevens, John Huston, Bob Fosse and Francis Ford Coppola, and the impact of the process on later filmmakers like Todd Haynes and Damien Chazelle.



A. STILL FROM JOHN HUSTON'S *MOULIN ROUGE*.

B. STILL FROM *BLACK NARCISSUS*.

C. SCENE STILL FROM DAVID LEAN'S *LAWRENCE OF ARABIA*

D. KIM NOVAK IN HITCHCOCK'S MASTERPIECE *VERTIGO*..

E. *LA LA LAND*, 2016

