



## THE POLAROID COLLECTIONS

By Jean Caslin

**F**or the past 36 years, from the inception of instant photography, Polaroid Corporation has actively promoted the arts through its Artist Support Programs. What originally began as a research activity has since grown into a significant, mutually beneficial relationship between the corporation and the artist. Since the early years of Polaroid film testing in the late 1940s, artists have been invited to experiment with Polaroid film materials, and selected work has been accessioned into the permanent archives of the Polaroid Collection, now housed at the Clarence Kennedy Gallery in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Much of the early black-and-white work was influenced by the landscape tradition of Ansel Adams, Paul Caponigro and Minor White, while the newer color work is more experimental.

The Polaroid International Collection, begun informally in the late sixties, is housed at the Polaroid Gallery in Offenbach, Germany. The work is newer and tends toward experimentation and innovation. Unlike the domestic collection, which contains photographs almost exclusively by U.S. photographers, this Collection represents work primarily by international photographers. These two complementary collections, comprising close to 10,000 images and representing the work of about 600 photographers, constitute an historically significant archive of Polaroid photographic materials.

In 1948, the year the first "instant" camera was marketed, Ansel Adams was hired by Polaroid's founder, Edwin H. Land, as a consultant to test new films and



Peter Feldstein © 1981

analyze results. His contributions led the way for the support programs to follow. According to Sam Yanes, Polaroid's Director of Corporate Communications, "Dr. Land felt that the artist could tell us things about our products from a point of view that would be quite different from that of the company's technical staff. He sensed that artists would push our film to the limits and report back even the most minute problems."

In the 1950s, Paul Caponigro, William Clift and Nick Dean joined Ansel Adams in testing film. Meroe Marston Morse, Research Man-

ager of Black and White Photography at Polaroid, became the liaison between the scientists and the artists. A number of photographers were added to this informal program in the sixties, including Jeffrey Silverthorne, John Benson and Stephen Gersh. About this time, Ansel Adams and Dr. Land worked together to amass 200 photographs by well-known photographers working with conventional materials, including Edward Weston, Aaron Siskind, Minor White and Eliot Porter. The photographs in the "Library Collection" date from 1924 to 1955 and were acquired to serve as an historical comparison to Polaroid photography.

The Polaroid Collection was officially founded in the late sixties, with the aim to encourage and assist photographers in the medium of Polaroid instant photography and to enable Polaroid Corporation to acquire an exciting and diversified collection of original instant images. For practical as well as philosophical reasons,



William Wegman © 1982 "Dusted"



sponsorship was limited primarily to younger, lesser known artists. Photographers were given small film and equipment grants and were asked to provide Polaroid with one image per grant for the Collection. Additional photographs were purchased from photographers in the program.

Before Meroe Morse's death in 1969, several of her colleagues discussed with her the continuation of the Collection program and plans for a Polaroid Gallery. In the summer of 1972, with the support of Dr. Land, space was requisitioned at 770 Main Street in Cambridge, and a volunteer committee was formed to construct the Gallery and install exhibitions. The

tion in the Gallery, in April 1973. To date, 65 exhibitions have been shown in the Gallery. In addition to exhibiting work from the two Polaroid Collections, the Gallery has sponsored invitational exhibitions and historical shows by Henri Cartier-Bresson, W. Eugene Smith, Roy DeCarava and Julia Margaret Cameron.

The 1970s were a very active period for the Artist Support Program, and many young artists, including Lorie Novak, Rosamond Purcell, Alma Davenport and Eugene Richards, have benefited from this support. Lorie Novak, whose work is represented in both collections, says, "The film exchange program gave me the

Rosamond Purcell has spent 75 percent of her career working with Polaroid photographic materials, and since 1970 has worked with almost the entire range of Polaroid black-and-white and color films. Since she is one of the photographers who is represented by a significant body of work in the two collections, her evolution as an artist, and her resolution of aesthetic concerns, can be followed. She explains: "I started as a photographer with Polaroid films, and my progress has been defined by the materials. This medium encourages play and active participation, and demands that you figure it out as you go along. Because you're generally working from print to print, you can't pretend that the photograph is an extension of your wishes. You know right away whether it's successful or not."

The Gallery and domestic Polaroid Collection, now administered by Linda Benedict-Jones, is advised by a Gallery Steering Committee of seven members.

This Committee now reviews portfolios of Polaroid photographs several times a year. The next review will take place in December. The Committee will select work, and purchase grants of \$150 will be given to photographers for each image.

For more information on the Polaroid Collection Program in the United States, contact Linda Benedict-Jones, Clarence Kennedy Gallery, 770 Main Street, Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 577-5177.



*William Clift © 1970*

Gallery was named after Clarence Kennedy (1892–1972), a longtime associate and friend of Dr. Land's. Kennedy had been a Polaroid consultant for over twenty years while he was a Professor of Art at Smith College and an architectural photographer.

"SX-70 Photographs by Polaroid Employees" was the first exhibi-

incentive to experiment with Polaroid materials—to really try out approaches I couldn't have afforded to do. Also, when my work in the collections has been borrowed by independent curators, or when it traveled in Polaroid group exhibitions, it has promoted my work in a way that I couldn't have done on my own. It's given my work greater visibility."





Pelle Casse © 1982

The Polaroid International Collection developed quite differently from the Cambridge-based Polaroid Collection. In the late sixties Eelco Wolf, then based at Polaroid's European headquarters in Amsterdam, asked a number of international artists to explore the potential of Polaroid instant photography. Explains Wolf (now Director of Worldwide Marketing Publicity in Cambridge): "The editor of the prestigious international publication *Camera*, and a longtime friend of Polaroid, suggested that we collaborate on a special issue of *Camera*, chronicling the history of instant photography. When we began to collect and edit images for the issue, it didn't take long to realize how little high-quality, creative Polaroid photography work existed by photographers outside the U.S. We candidly and openly

discussed the problem with several leading photographers, including David Bailey, Sarah Moon, Helmut Newton, Jean-Loup Sieff, Josef Sudek and Kishin Shinoyama, and without exception, they offered to help and contribute. We didn't have a formal program or a budget to support

this type of important activity, but somehow everyone seemed intrigued by the opportunity and challenge to experiment with, for them, new photographic materials. The body of fine work resulting from the *Camera* magazine project became the basis for the International Collection." The work was originally housed in Amsterdam and moved to its present location at the Polaroid Gallery in Offenbach, Germany, in 1983.

The International Collection is best known for its publications and traveling exhibitions. In the mid-seventies, three limited-edition portfolios were published, and through the years, collaborations with other publishers resulted in *SX-70 Art*, *From My Window* (André Kertész), *Aigner's Paris* and *Selections 1*. Polaroid was also the sole publisher of a number of books and catalogs, including *Faces and Facades*, *Exploration of a Medium: The Polaroid Collection*, and *Lucas Samaras: Polaroid Photographs, 1969-1983*.



Philippe Halsmann © 1949





Lorie Novak © 1983

Barbara Hitchcock has managed the International Collection since 1981, and has curated an impressive number of exhibitions from the Collection's archives, including "Selections 1" and "Selections 2," "The Big Picture" and "In Grand Perspective." One-person shows in the Collection's Traveling Exhibition Program include "Lucien Aigner: Paris of the 1930's," "Bill Burke: Encounters," "Moment to Moment" (Carl Chiarenza), "Barbara Crane: Captured," "From My Window" (André Kertész), "Objects and Implications" (Olivia Parker) and "Lucas Samaras: Polaroid Photographs, 1969-1983."

Artists in the International Collection program work in a variety of formats. One of the most exciting aspects of the program has been the Polaroid 20x24 camera and film system. Since 1978, many artists have used the large format

camera, including Elsa Dorfman, William Wegman, Chris Enos, Olivia Parker, Barbara Kasten, Sandi Fellman, Vicki Ragan and Luciano Franchi de Alfaro III. Elsa Dorfman comments, "Without the Artist Support Program, I would never have worked with the 20x24 camera. I fell in love with it, and have gotten very good results. Now I've started a commercial business, and I occasionally rent the studio and cover my costs doing commissioned portraits. I then have a portion of the day left to continue my personal work. That's what's good about it. . . . I've found a way to continue working on the camera, and Polaroid can go on and support new artists on the program." Melissa Shook, who worked with the 20x24 camera through a special project at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts, says: "Because of the large scale, this format forced me to experiment in ways I wouldn't have with conventional materials.

I began making diptychs and triptychs, and my style of informal black-and-white portraits translated well into a medium which was formerly alien to me."

The Artist Support Program of the International Collection is administered by Barbara Hitchcock, who reviews portfolios of work throughout the year. Polaroid photographs are acquired from individual artists either through film grants or purchase grants of \$150 for each image.

For more information on the Artist Support and Traveling Exhibition Programs of the International Collection, contact Barbara Hitchcock, Polaroid Corporation, 575 Technology Square, Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 577-2038.

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Ken Kuenster © 1984