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FACTS ABOUT THE POLAROID COLLECTIONS

What are the Polaroid Collections?

The Polaroid Collections consist of more than 16,000 fine art photographs accrued over the lifetime of the Polaroid Corporation, which was founded in 1947. The late Edwin H. Land, inventor, scientist, educator and founder of Polaroid, said when his revolutionary instant sepia film was announced to the world, “The purpose of inventing instant photography was essentially aesthetic – to make available a new medium of expression to numerous individuals who have an artistic interest in the world around them.”

This private and priceless corporate treasury of photographs is protected in environmentally controlled archives at a Polaroid facility located near the company’s headquarters in Massachusetts. The Polaroid Collections serve to chronicle the heritage and scientific innovations of Polaroid photography and allow the general public to view world-class art, while providing technical awareness and inspiration for artists and photographers. The Polaroid Collections are a corporate legacy of culture.

Exhibits curated from the constantly expanding Polaroid Collections traveled the globe as well as circulate within the United States. In museums, Polaroid fine art photography is included in the permanent collections of London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Amsterdam’s Stedelijk Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Why did Polaroid start collecting?

Dr. Land’s recognition that artistic vision might test the true limits of Polaroid film led him to integrate the aesthetic dimension of photography into his company’s scientific research. Intent on learning artists’ perspectives using his cameras and films, in 1948 Land hired the now legendary landscape photographer Ansel Adams to be a consultant, testing Polaroid’s emerging technology in the field. Artistic inquiry, Land believed, would reveal a new dimension of valuable information about products, above and beyond his technical staff’s laboratory explorations. The first photographs of what would become The Polaroid Collections were the work of Ansel Adams, sent to Land to illustrate the observations Adams made photographing on location in the American West.

In the 1950s and 1960s, more artists were invited to collaborate with Polaroid. Minor White, Paul Caponigro, William Clift and Nick Dean joined in working with Polaroid materials and their fine art photographs were informally acquired, creating a technical and aesthetic document of the company's products. Meroe Marsten Morse, a pioneer at Polaroid, managed Land's black-and-white laboratories in the early years. In the 1960s she is credited with establishing The Polaroid Collection and Polaroid's Artist Support Program which continues today.

To be considered for participation, artists submit portfolios to Polaroid's Director of Cultural Affairs and those chosen for the program are provided with modest grants of Polaroid materials in exchange for providing the company with a museum-quality fine art photograph. The artists also benefit from the status associated with being included in the Polaroid Collections and from publicity garnered from multiple Polaroid exhibits and books published.

Historically, by the 1970s, the Artist Support Program had expanded internationally, reflecting a wider physical, geographical and conceptual scope. During this era the expanding treasury of works was divided into two categories, a domestic collection in the U.S. and an international collection housed in Europe. Today, the two are combined and referred to as The Polaroid Collections.

What artists are included in The Polaroid Collections?

The 1,000-plus artists in the collection include both historically famous names and emerging artists striving for recognition today. Collaborating with Polaroid in the 1970s, the renowned Robert Rauschenberg, Lucas Samaras and David Hockney contributed famous works. Hockney in the early 1980s, revived cubism, creating grids of Polaroid's SX-70 film, revealing a subject constructed from an accumulation of details.

Still life images created in their studios by Barbara Kasten, Olivia Parker and Jan Groover, all stars in the art community, illustrate inspired originality achieved with the rich colors of Polaroid's large-format instant 20 x 24-inch camera and film. Pop icon Andy Warhol's work is also a highlight of The Polaroid Collections. Celebrated artist William Wegman's series of portraits of his dog Man Ray, made in the late 1970s, are a favorite of the viewing audience at exhibitions, loved for their humor.

Working with Polaroid's 4x5-inch black-and-white film, artists Bill Burke, Robert Frank and John Wood, achieved fame by manipulating or distressing their materials, seeking to describe the physical and emotional landscapes they inhabit. Whimsical images by Carrie Mae Weems investigate the power of racial texts and images.

Can Polaroid exhibitions be viewed on the web?

No, the original Polaroid.com site was taken down after the corporation was sold in 2009.

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THE POLAROID COLLECTIONS OF FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

History:

Polaroid's founder and inventor of instant photography, Edwin H. Land, amazed the world in 1948 with the introduction of instant photography. To appreciate Dr. Land's "magic" requires a step back in time when "snapshots" took weeks to be processed. Realizing the newfound potential for human creativity, Land predicted, "It should be a medium that permits self-expression for many people with an artistic interest in the world around them." Land immediately encouraged his prophecy and began a collaboration with the legendary American landscape artist Ansel Adams.

Adams created photographs with Polaroid materials in the American West for the rest of his life, capturing the rugged landscape with each new generation of instant film types, reporting technical observations and sending Land experimental as well as spectacular photographs. The critical artistic perspective Adams fed back to Land proved to be of utmost value to Polaroid scientists. Soon Land recruited more artists, including Paul Caponigro and William Clift in the late 1950s, and Polaroid's fine art photographs accumulated at Land's office in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

By the late 1960s, Polaroid formalized its burgeoning archive of works by artists in the United States, naming the valuable corporate asset the Polaroid Collection. The Collection was later further expanded to include international artists and in Europe David Bailey, Sarah Moon, Helmut Newton and Josef Sudek began experimenting with Polaroid's instant imagery. The American and international fine art is now combined in The Polaroid Collections. The body of works continues to expand as the outgrowth of Polaroid's ongoing Artist Support Program. Polaroid offers selected photographers the opportunity to freely experiment with Polaroid materials. In exchange, Polaroid receives a choice of the resulting images to add to the Collections.

The Collections Today:

Today, the Polaroid Collections contain more than 16,000 photographs, encompassing an astonishing eclectic range of world-class contemporary photography. Included are large format 20x24-inch instant color portraits created by celebrities William Wegman, Chuck Close and Andy Warhol, many shot at Polaroid's commercial 20x24 Studio in New York City. Famous artists like Helmut Newton, Olivia Parker, Franco Fontana, Ebberhard Grames, David Hockney, Robert Rauschenberg, Lucas Samaras and Joyce Tenneson also enhance the Collections. Virtually every photographic genre is found in the broad Collections, both traditional and experimental. The many Polaroid materials used range from transformed Polacolor prints, or gelatin silver prints from Polaroid negatives, to computer generated images captured on SX-70 film, or transfer prints on paper.

Overseeing the private corporate treasure, Barbara Hitchcock, Polaroid's director of Cultural Affairs and Curator, The Polaroid Collection, emphasizes that individual works from the Collections and entire exhibitions were available for display in museums, galleries and at special events. "While showcasing the inherent creative possibilities of Polaroid materials, the Collections gave us a forum to support, encourage, and publicize work of emerging, as well as established and major photographic artists," Hitchcock says.

Recent Shows:

Hitchcock arranged multiple exhibits curated from the Collections. For instance, "**American Perspectives: Photographs from the Polaroid Collection**" premiered in the US at two Boston, Massachusetts venues: the Photographic Resource Center and the Boston University Art Gallery. The show, consisting of more than 90 works by almost 50 American artists, was on display from November 22, 2002 through January 26, 2003.

"American Perspectives," returned to the US after a successful two-year run in Japan. It initially premiered in the fall of 2000 at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography. In 2001 "American Perspectives" then traveled to Kyoto's Museum EKI, appearing next at Takamatsu City Museum of Art, with its final show in Sapporo at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

"**Unique Ansel Adams**," an exceptional exhibition of photographs, memos and letters by Ansel Adams, the internationally celebrated master of the landscape genre, was featured at the Carrousel du Louvre at Paris Photo 2002 in November. The exhibition showcases more than 80 prints, including vintage enlargements of *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico*, 1941 and *Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite National Park*, 1960, as well as murals. Also featured are pristine, one-of-a-kind, Polaroid black-and-white prints, rare color photographs, and an example of Adams' commercial work. Many photographs in the show had never been shown before in Europe. "Unique Ansel Adams" was then shown in Milan, Italy from February through April 2003.

After the first instant camera and film were sold to the public at Jordan Marsh department store in Boston, Massachusetts more than 50 years ago, the world of photography was changed forever. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of the greatest advances in photographic technology – a one-step photographic process that produces finished photographs within one minute – the Friends of Photography curated **“Innovation/Imagination: 50 Years of Polaroid Photography”** from the Polaroid Collections.

This historically important exhibition of fine art photographs chronicled the explorations of numerous artists, tracked technical innovations and changing artistic techniques, and boldly testified to the unlimited creative possibilities of instant photography. “Innovation/Imagination: 50 Years of Polaroid Photography,” with contributions by artists worldwide over five decades, has been shown in galleries and museums across the US. The show was on display in March 2003 at the Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, Kansas. It was previously in Florida at the Pensacola Museum of Art, the University of New Mexico Art Gallery in Albuquerque, and in Tennessee at the Knoxville Museum of Art.

“Photography in Boston: 1955 – 1985,” a collection of 231 photographs by 60 artists, showcased the evolution and importance of Boston as a world-class center of photography, with Polaroid at the very core. The 30-year period initially chosen for this exhibit by the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts captured the acceptance of photography as an art form, the influence of modernism, and the coalescence of a unique constellation of educational institutions, museums, and technological developments in the Boston area that directly influenced artistic options for photography. The range of photographic genres represented was extensive, including social documentary, photojournalism, formalism, and the abstraction of nature, still life, and surrealism, among others.

“Photography in Boston: 1955 – 1985” featured fine art created with a variety of Polaroid materials by artists born or with connections to New England, including Paul Caponigro, Nicholas Dean, Olivia Parker, Rosamond Wolff Purcell, William Wegman, Minor White, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Bradford Washburn, Carl Chiarenza, Marie Cosindas, Harold Edgerton and many others.

In 2002, the Galleri Image in Aarhus, Denmark celebrated its 25th year of exhibiting photography and celebrated the occasion with the Polaroid exhibition, **“Counter Clockwise: Photographs from the Polaroid Collections!”** The show’s images illustrated creative ways Polaroid films are used in ways that were not quite imagined before artists began playing with them. Photographs in the exhibition resonate with experimental treatments that go against convention. Some have been popped in the toaster, spot-toned, painted, peeled, scratched and gouged – all to the creative delight of the photographers who produced them and the audience who enjoys them!

Some of the noted photographers featured in the exhibition are Eric Blau, Stephen Petegorsky, Marc Peverelli, John Reuter, Michel Medinger, and Dieter Herrman.

Permanent Collections:

In addition to traveling and one-stop exhibits, Polaroid photographs are included in the permanent fine art collections of London's Victoria and Albert Museum, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The Collections also serve as a rich photography resource bank, with images being continuously reproduced globally by book publishers, magazines, newspapers, video producers and moviemakers. Often Polaroid contributes photographs to exhibitions arranged by outside art venues, such as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. And for nearly 20 years starting in 1978, Polaroid participated in exhibiting work from its Collections at biennial Photokina trade shows in Cologne, Germany.

Polaroid's Artist Support Program:

Hitchcock also directed Polaroid's Artist Support Program, which had provided over a thousand artists worldwide with modest grants of photographic materials in exchange for transforming Polaroid science into museum quality art. Their images constitute the main body of the Polaroid Collections. The Artist Support Program provided artists with support and exposure, gave the worldwide viewing public access to a richly creative body of work, and illustrated the quality and creative potential of Polaroid films.

Photographers were given small film and equipment grants and were asked to provide Polaroid with images for the Collection. Exhibitions were created periodically from the Collection and toured throughout the international museum circuit, publicity was generated, portfolios were printed in the media, and books were published. Since 1973, more than 45 exhibitions have been exhibited, including, *Aigner's Paris, From My Window (André Kertész), Lucas Samaras: Polaroid Photographs, 1969-1983, and Legacy of Light*. Recently toured exhibitions and publications include, *Ansel Adams and Edwin Land: Art, Science and Invention: Photographs from the Polaroid Collections, It's a Dog's Life: Photographs by William Wegman from the Polaroid Collections, Fins, Wings and Other Such Things: Photographs from the Polaroid Collections, Sanctuary: Anna Tomczak Photography* (catalog Fresco Fine Art Publications, 2007), "The Polaroid Book" (Taschen 2005 and 2008), and "Private Views: Barbara Crane" (Aperture, 2009).

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