

For immediate release:

POLAROID: INSTANT JOY

Polaroid Photography

Curated by Andrew Garn

June 19-July 31, 2010, opening reception: June 25, 2010, 6-8pm

A.M. RICHARD FINE ART

328 Berry Street

Brooklyn, NY 11211

917-570-1476

contact: info@andrewgarn.net, gallery@amrichardfineart.com

“The pictures come out like presents...”- William Wegman

When Edwin Land introduced Polaroid Instant Film in 1947, he was unaware that he would anticipate two revolutions in photography. The first was instant photography, where both photographer (and human subject) could sample their image immediately. The second was digital photography, with a different -- and less expensive -- type of instant image. Ironically, this alternative hastened the demise of Polaroid.

What is the allure and fascination of the Polaroid? Beyond the sheer magic of seeing an image appear from nothingness, the prints could be remarkably rich, vibrant and resolute, rivaling and sometimes surpassing the finest silver or color prints. The Polaroid print was a living object: you shook it in the air or held it in the warmth of your armpit to accelerate development. With the sharing of the image and the subsequent marvel, taking a picture became an interactive experience.

The unpredictability of the process could be a thrill or an aggravation, the medium always a bit out of one's control. Polaroids were notoriously persnickety, but once the artist learned the rules and limitations, few things could compare to the joyous experience of pulling the print from the negative sheet or watching it slide out of the camera with that magic whirring sound.

From the beginning, Polaroid had mass appeal; by 1962, the company had produced its four millionth camera. In 1965, the \$19.95 Swinger, with a squeezable shutter button that flashed “Yes” or “No” sold another four million units.

Offering free samples and attentive technical assistance, Polaroid began marketing their cameras to artists in the late 1960s; this encouraged experimentation. With the introduction of the elegant and foldable SX-70 in 1972, artists were awed by the intense saturated colors and a new twist -- the possibility of image manipulation.

Walker Evans, known primarily for black and white documentary work, was given a large quantity of color SX-70 film by the company. He became entranced with the deep hyper-real color, photographing hundreds of still lives and abstract street scenes. Lucas

Samaras made groundbreaking self-portraits with colored gels and purposely scratched emulsions. Andy Warhol made thousands of Polaroids, famous for his self-portraits and celebrities, he appreciated the speed and ease of capturing images.

Throughout its history, photographers have used the Polaroid for myriad reasons. Often the goal is to make certain in the here and now that “they got the shot,” i.e., to achieve a simulation of real life. Chuck Close has used the vivid large format 20" x 24" Polaroids both for documentation and as studies for his larger paint canvases. Other artists have shot with Polaroids for the opposite purpose, to achieve something unknown or unfamiliar. How might a Polaroid reinterpret and change reality? Ellen Carey takes this exploration to its rawest level, unconcerned with camera image. Carey uses the color dye pods as starting points for abstract smears, always unexpected, but definitively recognizable as a Polaroid.

Because of their instantaneity, Polaroids were also widely used for commercial purposes, such as passport photos and insurance documentation. They were also popular with fashion industry and nightclub photographers. Many of these images were deceptively modest; witness Jimmy Baynes beautiful 4x5 portraits of ladies out for a night on the town in early 1960's Cleveland. William Coupon frequently used Polaroids as gifts for his primitive tribal subjects, to break down the barrier caused by their fear of the medium.

A Polaroid is vital, the swollen dye pods bursting with possibilities. A Polaroid, by way of its immediacy, is held up to a higher scrutiny; conversely, it can be immediately critiqued in order to improve the next one.

Lately, young photographers have been revisiting the wonders and quirkiness of Polaroid film. Using expired Spectra film, and a new film manufactured in a former bankrupt Polaroid plant in Belgium, this generation has created a novel vernacular language in instant photography. Blog sites of Polaroid art have sprung up on the Internet. With a new generation of advocates, the continuation of Polaroid art seems assured.

Although space restrictions have not allowed a complete survey of Polaroid art, this show attempts to capture the range of vision, spontaneity and experimentations possible with the Polaroid. The artists selected include Lynka Adams, Michael Anton, Jimmy Baynes, Todd Boebel, Ellen Carey, Brendan Carroll, Chuck Close, William Coupon, Melanie Einzig, Andrew Garn, Stan Gregory, Jack Johnston, Till Krautkraemer, Marc Kehoe, Mimi Lipson, Eric Kroll, Sally Mann, Richard McCabe, Barbara Mensch, Ber Murphy, Nagatani/ Tracey, Bill Ray, F. Scott Schafer, David Stock, Molly Surno, Jennifer Tausch, Robert Vizzini, Robert Warhover and William Wegman.

Special thanks to Chuck Close, William Wegman, Ellen Carey, Luc Sante, Jennifer Tausch, Rachel Weingeist, Jayne Baum, and Bill and Marlys Ray.

AG, June 2010

Andrew Garn is a photographer and curator who lives in New York City. His work will be featured in the first Ural Industrial Biennale at the National Center for Contemporary Art in Ekaterinburg, Russia this fall.