

HELMUT NEWTON FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

Polaroids

with works by Helmut Newton, Thorsten Brinkmann, Lucien Clergue, Barbara Crane, Alma Davenport, Toto Frima, Maurizio Galimberti, Luigi Ghirri, Erich Hartmann, Sally Mann, Sheila Metzner, Arnold Newman, Charles Johnstone, Marike Schuurman, Stephen Shore, Jeanloup Sieff, Pola Sieverding, Christer Strömholm, Oliviero Toscani, Ulay, William Wegman, and others.

Duration: 7 March – 17 August 2025



Helmut Newton, *Italian Vogue*, Monte Carlo 2003



Helmut Newton, *Amica*, Milan 1982

On March 6, 2025, the Helmut Newton Foundation in Berlin opened its new group exhibition, *Polaroids*, as part of EMOP Berlin 2025. This showcase features works by Helmut Newton alongside numerous other photographers.

The Polaroid process revolutionized photography in the 1960s. Those who have used Polaroid cameras often recall the distinctive smell of the developing emulsion and the magic of watching an image materialize instantly. Depending on the camera model, some prints developed automatically, while others required the application of a chemical coating to fix the image. In this sense, Polaroids can be seen as a precursor to today's digital photography – not in technical terms, but because of their immediate accessibility.

Polaroids are generally regarded as unique prints. This pioneering technology attracted enthusiastic users worldwide and in nearly all photographic genres – landscape, still life, portraits, fashion, and nude photography. Helmut Newton was particularly captivated by Polaroid photography, using a variety of Polaroid cameras and instant film backs, which replaced the roll film cassettes in his medium-format cameras. From the 1960s until his death in 2004, Newton relied on Polaroids primarily to prepare for fashion shoots. These instant photographs served as visual sketches, helping to test lighting conditions and refine his

compositions. Despite their role as preparatory studies, Newton dedicated a book to these images in 1992, followed by a second book published posthumously in 2011. Some of Newton's Polaroids, signed as standalone works, have since become highly prized on the art market.

The archive of the Helmut Newton Foundation in Berlin holds hundreds of Newton's original Polaroids. A carefully chosen selection from this collection has been curated and accompanied by enlargements of select works. The photographs are arranged roughly chronologically rather than by genre, but they reveal Newton's extensive use of Polaroid cameras across all areas of his work over several decades. The exhibition is like peering into the sketchbook of one of the most influential photographers of the 20th century. It invites visitors to envision Newton's creative process, from initial concepts to final images.



William Wegman, *Untitled*, 1988 | Maurizio Galimberti, *Johnny Depp*, 1993 | Jeanloup Sieff, *Self-portrait on car*, 1977

In this new group exhibition, Newton's Polaroids are showcased alongside works by 60 additional photographers, including selections from the extensive Polaroid collection of OstLicht in Vienna. Curator Matthias Harder had full freedom to draw from this historic archive, which was saved from auction in 2010 by Peter Coeln, founder of WestLicht Vienna, following Polaroid's bankruptcy. This international collection, stored at the Polaroid company for more than 20 years, comprises approximately 4,400 works by 800 photographers and has since been reestablished as a vital resource.

The Berlin exhibition highlights a wide variety of Polaroid processes and formats – SX-70, Polacolor 20 x 24, FP-100, and Polaroid T808 – as well as experimental treatments of individual prints and larger tableaux. German artist **Pola Sieverding** is represented by her small-format SX-70 Polaroid series *Valet*, which features close-up views of male wrestlers. In contrast, Italian artist **Maurizio Galimberti** is known for his monumental Polaroid mosaics, a physically demanding process in which he obsessively circles his subject – whether a person, a building, or a flower – capturing tiny details in individual images. He later assembles these fragments into unified compositions that appear three-dimensionally unfolded.

Two series by Dutch artist-photographer **Marika Schuurman** also explore experimental techniques, featuring inkjet print enlargements derived from SX-70 Polaroids. *Toxic* examines the lignite mining area in the Lausitz, south of Berlin, where coal extraction has left craters filled with highly acidic water. Schuurman photographed these artificial lakes using a Polaroid camera and developed the SX-70 prints in the lakes' low-PH water, dramatically altering their colors. In her second series, *Expired*, the colors of long-expired Polaroid film merge into one another, creating a distinctive interplay.



Pola Sieverding, Valet #11, 2014 | Marike Schuurman, from the series Toxic (Bergheider See PH3), 2022 | Sheila Metzner, Michael, Mermaid, 1980

New York City-based photographer **Charles Johnstone** produces small-format Polaroid publications at irregular intervals, each presenting a self-contained photographic narrative. Some projects, such as those centered on Monica Vitti, are captured as camera views from a screen and later bound into books. Other series, like *Escape*, involve collaboration with live models and were photographed en plein air at locations like a swimming pool in upstate New York. These projects result in unique artist's books, some of which include C-prints of the Polaroids as special editions. A selection of these books is on view in a central display case within the exhibition.

American photographer **Sheila Metzner**, known for her timeless and sensitive portraits, still lifes, and nudes – produced as Fresson prints – has previously exhibited her work at the Helmut Newton Foundation. Now, for the first time, her Polaroids are being presented. Drawn from the Newtons' personal collection, these instant images provide insight into Metzner's creative process, revealing her use of Polaroids as compositional studies – a technique similar to Helmut Newton's approach.

Whether featured as part of a series, a single image, a monumental Polaroid mosaic, or an artist's book, the new exhibition *Polaroids* is the most extensive presentation of this photographic process seen in Berlin in years.

In cooperation with EMOP Berlin 2025.



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