

ELLEN CAREY



Ellen Carey (b.1952 USA) is an educator, independent scholar, guest curator, photographer and lens-based artist, whose unique experimental work (1976-2015) spans several decades. Her early work *Painted Self-Portraits* (1978) were first exhibited at Hallwalls, an artists-run alternative space, home to the Buffalo avant-garde — Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman — and led to a group exhibit *The Altered Image* at PS 1, another avant-garde institution. The visionary curator, Linda Cathcart, of The Albright-Knox Art Gallery (AKAG) selected Carey's work for this exhibition as well as *The Heroic Figure* which presented thirteen American artists for the São Paulo Biennale including Cindy Sherman, Nancy Dwyer, Julian Schnabel and David Salle, with portraits by Robert Mapplethorpe, for its South and North American tour (1984-1986).

In 1983, The Polaroid Artists Support Program invited Carey to work at the Polaroid 20 X 24 Studio. Her Neo-Geo, post-psychedelic *Self-Portraits* (1984-87) were created, quickly followed by her stacked photo-installations *Abstractions* (1988-95). Her pioneering breakthrough the *Pull* (1996) and *Rollback* (1997) name her practice *Photography Degree Zero* (1996-2011). Here, she investigates minimal and abstract images with Polaroid instant technology partnered with her innovative concepts, often using only light, photography's indexical, or none, emphasizing zero. Her photogram work is cameraless; it parallels her Polaroid less-is-more

aesthetic under her umbrella concept *Struck by Light*(1992-2015). Carey has worked in a variety of cameras and formats: Polaroid SX-70 and Polaroid PN film; black/white to color; 35mm, medium, and large format. Her experimental images, in a range of genres and themes, are one-of-a-kind.

Site-specific monumental installations in Polaroid include *Mourning Wall* of 100 grey negatives at Real Art Ways (2000) and *Part-Picture* exhibition (2015) at Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art (MoCCA); *Self-Portrait @ 48* at Connecticut Commission for the Arts (2001) and the gigantic *Pulls XL* that used the Polaroid 40 X 80 camera (shortly thereafter dismantled, never reassembled) for her MATRIX #153 exhibit (2004-05) at The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art; the prestigious MATRIX program celebrates its 40th year. *Dings & Shadows*, a new color photogram installation, recently exhibited at the Benton Museum of Art and another at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). Her new series *Caesura* uses the photogram to introduce visual breaks in color; caesura is Greek or Latin for pause: in word (poetry) or sound (music).

Photography Degree Zero (1996-2011) names her Polaroid lens-based art while *Struck by Light* (1992-2015) names her parallel practice in the cameraless photogram. Her experimental investigations into abstraction and minimalism, partnered with her innovative concepts and iconoclastic artmaking, often use bold colors and new forms. *Pictus & Writ* (2008-2015) finds the artist tradition of writing on other artists. *Sol LeWitt: A Wall Drawing Retrospective* at MASS MoCA, with Yale University Press, published the book *Sol LeWitt: 100 Views* with 100 new essays; *Color Me Real* is Ellen Carey's contribution. Her Man Ray essay on her discovery of his "hidden" signature in his black and white photograph (1935) titled *Space Writings (Self-Portrait)* sees an edited version *At Play with Man Ray* published in Aperture. On her own work *In Hamlet's Shadow*, published in *The Polaroid Years: Instant Photography and Experimentation* exhibit/book/tour (2012-13); Mary-Kay Lombino, Curator, Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College.

Ellen Carey's work has been the subject of 53 one-person exhibitions in museums, alternative spaces, university, college and commercial galleries (1978-2015): The Wadsworth Atheneum

Museum of Art, Real Art Ways, Lyman Allyn Art Museum, St. Joseph University, and ICP/NY. Her work seen in hundreds of group exhibitions (1974-2015): museums (Smithsonian), alternative spaces (Hallwalls), galleries (Perrotin) and non-profits (Aperture). Her work is in the permanent collections of over twenty photography and art museums: Albright-Knox Art Gallery (AKAG), George Eastman House (GEH), Museum at the Chicago Art Institute, Fogg Museum at Harvard University, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Britain Museum of American Art (NBMAA), Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM), Whitney Museum of American Art, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Yale University Art Gallery; corporate: Banana Republic; private: Linda and Walter Wick, and the LeWitt Foundation.

Books:

Color: American Photography Transformed (UTexas Press),
John Rohrbach, Amon Carter Museum of American Art

The Innocent Eye: A Passionate Look at Contemporary Art,
Patricia Rosoff (Tupelo Press)

The Polaroid Book,
Barbara Hitchcock and Steve Crist (Taschen)

A Century of Colour: From the Autochrome to Digital,
Pamela Roberts (Carlton Books, Ltd.)

The Polaroid Years: Instant Photography and Experimentation(Prestel/Delmonico Press),
Mary-Kay Lombino, Vassar College

The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography,
Lyle Rexer (Aperture Foundation)

An extensive bibliography includes reviews, essays, articles, brochures, catalogues, books; NEA, CAPS, Polaroid grants; interviews on TV (Nutmeg), radio (WNPR), video (Aperture), with two documentaries as *Pulls* (John Froats) and *Mourning Wall* (Real Art Ways); recent interview/feature in Joe Fig's book *Inside the Artist's Studio* (Princeton Architectural Press); *Dear Dave*, (#19) by Bill Armstrong; Camera Ready, documentary film on Polaroid 20 X 24 artists (Chuck Close, William Wegman, Elsa Dorfman) by John Reuter, Director of 20 X 24 Studio (1980s-present) also sees Carey's work on 20 X 24 Studio.

Sol LeWitt:

**"Ellen Carey is among
this country's most
committed experimental
photographers."** – Lyle Rexer

"The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography"
[Aperture](#)

<http://www.ellencareyphotography.com/>