

**B R E E D**

## Breed Chats: Miles Aldridge in an Instant

By: Elyssa Goodman

November 30, 2016



Known for his cinematic, noir-esque images exploding with color, it's almost too perfect that Miles Aldridge, in a classic black cashmere sweater and grey slacks, looks like a movie star himself. We are walking around the Steven Kasher Gallery in New York's Chelsea neighborhood, images from his new book *Please Return Polaroid* on view before the opening reception that evening. Like Aldridge's images, there is something about him that seems equally timeless, simultaneously of other eras and of the present. That Polaroids are on display in this exhibition only adds to the mystique.

The Polaroids, on view until December 23, show Aldridge's photographic process in action: he first captures images on instant film (Polaroid before it was discontinued but Fuji's version since) to test the appearance of color, light, composition, or all three, then shoots the scene on color film. In one test on a black and white Polaroid—these develop in 30 seconds as opposed to a color Polaroid's two minutes so it is often easier to use, Aldridge says: "That difference in time doesn't sound much but when you are up a ladder in the Ritz on a camera looking at a naked girl trying to figure out if the picture works or not, it's really the faster the better," he laughs—a hallway is peppered with cats and a trainer signals the feline models toward the camera with a stringed cat toy wand. On a color diptych of two mouths eating spaghetti, one is cut out white against a black background and another is bright red, the edge of the Polaroid pleading in black Sharpie "I want a tiny bit of detail in teeth...not pure white." Another diptych, flipbook-like, shows a model holding still under an umbrella, eyes first open then closed, shuttering and blinking as if not being watched. An assistant stands, face blankly staring into the lens, while a stripper seductively kneels and strokes her hair behind him.

Seeing Aldridge's Polaroid process in itself is interesting because the photographer belongs to an ever-lessening pool of photographers (Max Vadukul included) who all came of age shooting film only, who learned from people who only shot

# STEVEN KASHER GALLERY

film, and who value the privacy of their images. They prefer and value that only the film knows exactly how the image looks after you've pressed the shutter—not the assistant or the client or the creative director or the hairstylist or whoever else is on set—and before the film has come back from the lab.

Pre-digital, of course, Polaroid was the way to show anyone an image instantly, though Aldridge still works this way. "All these Polaroids they were sketches, they were also sort of detritus from shoots," Aldridge says. "In this period of reappropriating images, I find that reappropriating my own images, my own junk, is really interesting. I've gone through the archive boxes where these were just sort of thrown after a shoot and not really looked at again." Many of the images are of interest not just because of Aldridge's compositions, but because of their "found" qualities: writing on the instant film's white edges, images ripped in a perfect curve, chemicals blending together to create curious shapes or textures on the print's surface. (At the opening later, a young man is standing next to me. "The blown-out lights and the damage to the print and everything, nothing was intentional?" he asks. "No," I say. Everything that happens on the print is just what happens with instant film.")

Aldridge visited his Polaroid archives because he was searching for something new to create, a fresh viewpoint after his 2013 book *I Only Want You to Love Me*. "That body of work seemed to be so perfect and complete that it was hard to know where to go next," he says. But seeing the Polaroids—scratched and damaged and raw as they were, and initially meant to be thrown away—gave him a new perspective. "I found it quite more fascinating to look at this work and enjoy the damage and the lack of perfectionism in these images that I now have released, rather than creating new work."

Because so much of photography is digital and because he prefers to shoot film, Aldridge is curious about interacting with photography's roots for his projects in the future but "not in a dinosaur-y, prehistoric way," he jokes. "I do think that there is a need for the public, for people who are interested in that simple equation of a man or a woman with a camera, for example, without all this other stuff, seeing the photographic flaws, the overexposure, the underexposure, the chemical stuff," he says. "It's too early to throw them away and say we don't need chemicals to make pictures. I like the surprise you get from the chemicals of photography."

Maybe the surprise Aldridge is talking about is what we seem to be craving from digital imagery. Because we see everything so quickly, there is no surprise left, no error that cannot be instantly corrected. In recent years the aforementioned shift to digital has been coupled with a nostalgia for film's imperfection, exemplified for better or worse by filters on Instagram that can age an image we've just taken on our iPhones to a 1970s-style sepia-tone. "One thing I've understood from the process of creating pictures myself is that the accidental that is part and parcel of the DNA of photography—the accidental meaning," he says. "You've got it all set up, but it's overexposed or the film has gone through the chemistry backwards—these sort of surprises make the pictures really interesting." It's just not something that can be duplicated digitally, no matter how hard a filter might try.

The purity of the Polaroid is thereby a huge draw for Aldridge. "If I can get that onto the photographs they will have again this thing that I love from Weegee, a photographic freshness I think is lacking from more than 99.9% of pictures I see in magazines these days," he says. "Most magazines, I open and close maybe one a week with lack of ambition in them and you go see an exhibition on [Erwin] Blumenfeld and his Vogue covers and you look at the crap we have to look at, it's really a shame what we've ended up with but it doesn't mean it has just be like that, you know? I think if you're aware how beautiful pictures can be, you owe it to yourself to do them."

The Miles Aldridge: Please Return Polaroid Exhibition runs November 18th-December 23rd. Book details for Please return Polaroid here.