

## From Aaron to Withington: Selections from Peter Palmquist's Collection of Women Photographers

An Exhibition at Yale University's  
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library

*April through June 26, 2010*

Beinecke Library's newest exhibition, "From Aaron to Withington: Selections from Peter Palmquist's Collection of Women Photographers," explores the photographs, rare books, and ephemera that photographer and scholar Peter Palmquist gathered to document and study the global history of women's involvement with photography. Palmquist, who began collecting in 1971, sought out images by women who worked as amateur and commercial photographers, studio assistants, retouchers, colorists, photojournalists, or filmmakers. He compiled biographical files for more than 30,000 women from around the world and acquired photographs representing the work of nearly 2,000 women.



From the beginning, Palmquist's collecting was driven by a desire to understand how the practice and profession of photography insinuated itself into every aspect of our modern life and culture. He wanted to know how women around the world embraced the art, technology, and profession of photography; how they expressed themselves through the images they made; and how they shared their work with others. He built his collection to explore these questions, and it was always his intention to share with others not only the insights he gained, but also the raw materials from which he worked. His women's material, the focus of this exhibit, was a fraction of his overall holdings concerning the history of photography, all of which are now part of the Beinecke Library. Palmquist, who was born in Oakland, California in 1936, passed away in January 2003, the same year his collections came to Yale. In the spirit of his commitment to scholarship, the Beinecke Library presents this exhibition as an invitation to students and scholars to develop and pursue their own projects within the collection.

Ranging from daguerreotypes (the first commercially successful form of photography) to contemporary color ink jet prints, the exhibition comprises more than 175 photographs, 17 photo albums, a half-dozen illustrated books, and various ephemera depicting women as photographers. Ninety 19th-century carte-de-visite portraits document how rapidly women throughout Europe and the Americas adopted commercial photography. Early

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*For more information, including image use and credit*

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portraits from Guernsey, Wales, Ireland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Algeria, and numerous small towns throughout Scandinavia accompany images from such expected centers of production as England, France, and Germany. Portraits from nineteen small Iowa towns reveal how quickly women photographers penetrated not only the urban centers of the United States but also its rural hinterland.

Fifteen personal and family photographic albums dating from 1898 to 1925 reflect the impact of the first “point and shoot” Kodak cameras. Introduced in the 1880s, the cam-

eras, and the business that Eastman Kodak built around them, supported the emergence of photography as a medium that amateurs could employ to create and preserve a visual record of their lives. As photography became a practical personal hobby as well as a commercial enterprise, the number of women taking photos grew. Advertisements, magazine covers, picture postcards, and snapshots from the Palmquist Collection document the ways in which commerce and art crafted an image of the woman photographer as cultural icon.

Reflecting the depth of the Palmquist Collection, the exhibit closes with 18 cases depicting the work of 9 women photographers whose careers span the 170 year history of the medium. Eliza Withington began making photographs in Ione, California as early as 1857. Over the next two decades she made portraits, produced a variety of landscape views, and wrote articles for the *Philadelphia Photographer*. Ethel Bowman, who ran a photo-finishing service in Fortuna, California in the early 20th century, promoted tourism and development through her photographic postcards. Rose Cotton, from Los Angeles, practiced the art of stereographic landscape photography into the 1920s, long after the commercial market for such images had subsided. Mary Aiken, who joined the photographic unit of the Women’s Army Corps at the start of World War II, combined her professional duties and personal interests to make a wide variety of large format landscape images. In the early 1950s, Pearl Hewlett became staff photographer for the Rochester, New York, *Democrat and Chronicle*. Her feature photographers reveal the social fabric of America during the Eisenhower era. Beginning with the Free Speech movement at Berkeley, Helen Nestor spent three decades recording the political and cultural scene in the Bay area. Her contemporary, Penny Brogden, explored the opportunities presented by negative solarization, hand coloring, and other artistic approaches to photography, while Tee A. Corinne, the noted feminist and lesbian activist, employed photography to make political as well as personal statements.

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