



Robby Müller

Described as “one of the greatest film artists of the last half-century”, we talk to Andrea Müller-Schirmer, founder of the Robby Müller Archive, about a book and exhibition of Robby’s Polaroids.

How did the book ‘Interior/Exterior’ come to be?

The book was first published in 2016 on the occasion of the major retrospective ‘Master of Light - Robby Müller’. This amazing exhibition was conceived by Eye Filmmuseum Amsterdam and presented different layers of Robby’s images: large screens with projections of film images, monitors with archive footage and the Polaroids were displayed in vitrines.

For the publication, we omitted the flowers and trees and focused on his Polaroids of hotel rooms and street scenes, motifs Robby photographed while travelling for work. We chose to reproduce the photos in their original format and without too much empty space around them, making viewing them an intimate experience. Linda van Deursen, the designer also came up with the solution of the varnish: the Polaroids are not reproduced as usual with the white frame; you only see the typical frame and format at second glance.



You mention in the book's introduction that you believe that the Polaroid was mainly about intimacy for Robby. Can you expand on that?

Robby always had a number of photo and film cameras at hand. He

usually chose motifs from his close surroundings: ordinary things and ordinary places. He found beauty in the modest. Emotion and truth were more important to him than spectacular images. Some Polaroids are actually small still lifes.



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Those photographs were meant for himself, they are small (light) studies that require a careful observation. When he felt undisturbed, he could contemplate while taking pictures, distract himself from the outside world, finding tranquillity, silence and



resilience. And, of course, the format is small and intimate.

Was it interesting to note what Robby photographed in his free time away from movie sets? He seemed keenly aware

of the quality of light and intimate details.

I would say he was extremely sensitive to light. He was absolutely aware of light in all its facets and manifestations, of reflections and mirroring. He told me a lot



about the appearance of light, the absence of light, shadows and all the gradations in between.

Did Robby express specifically what he liked about the medium of Polaroid?

I don't remember anything specific. But I assume he was fond of the magic of Polaroid like all of us. Robby was a very playful person and loved to experiment. He was probably also attracted to the colours of the Polaroid films of the



time and the soft texture of the impalpable emulsion.

Maybe something to do with instant gratification for people who usually had to wait days or weeks to see the fruits of their labour?

Maybe it had something to do with the singularity and the thing as an object. Maybe there was also a banal and practical reason. Polaroids were used on film sets at the time for continuity. There was always a lot of material available through film productions. You could use them as a visual notebook.



The instant result was definitely something magical and joyful and played a role for Robby when he had time on weekends to relax from the hectic and pressures of the film set. Then he found the peace to observe and the rapid development allowed him to study the result immediately. Among his Polaroids are sequences

of single motifs in different lighting situations, sometimes clearly taken shortly after each other, sometimes seemingly on different days but from the same vantage point.



Can you talk about the exhibition in the Marian Goodman Gallery?

Before the major exhibition in Eye in 2016, which I mentioned above, we first showed the Polaroids in 2014 at the Annet Gelink Gallery in Amsterdam in a dialogue with photos of the Ed van der Elsken

Archive. The largest Polaroid show yet was in Arles in 2019 at the annual photo festival. That show, *Like Sunlight Coming Through Cloud* was organised by the Polaroid company and we showed more than 120 originals in combination with the enlarged gallery prints. Later, this exhibition was shown in various



locations and depends on the space and context. The space of Marian Goodman Gallery in Paris was very inviting and we put together a wonderful little show. I am always pleased and moved that visitors are so emotionally touched by Robby's images. For this feeling, the space in Paris was a perfect shell.

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All images presented were taken in the 1980s when Robby was travelling and working as a cinematographer.

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Robby Müller (1940 – 2018) was a cinematographer and a photographer. 'Robby Müller Polaroids' exhibited from Mar-Apr '24 in Marian Goodman Gallery.

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