

# INSTANT AND FOREVER

With the demise of the much loved Polaroid instant film, new hope rose in the guise of Impossible, a company courageously dedicated to reviving this lamented loss. **Dave Chow** takes up the story...



**Exordium (from The Flying Circus series) by Wendy Bevan, 2010, platinum palladium print from Polaroid instant film**

The story goes that while Edwin Land was taking holiday snaps in the early 1940s, his three-year-old daughter asked why she could not see the images he had taken 'right now'. He tried to explain to her that they still needed to be developed, but that didn't comfort her.

Land, a physicist, inventor and founder of the Polaroid Corporation, set about solving this problem by creating a system of one-step photography. After much research and development – Land was notorious for his marathon brainstorming sessions – in 1947 he demonstrated instant film to the Optical Society of America and in doing so revolutionised the world of photography. The sense of seeing a picture develop in one's hands was at the time a truly amazing experience.

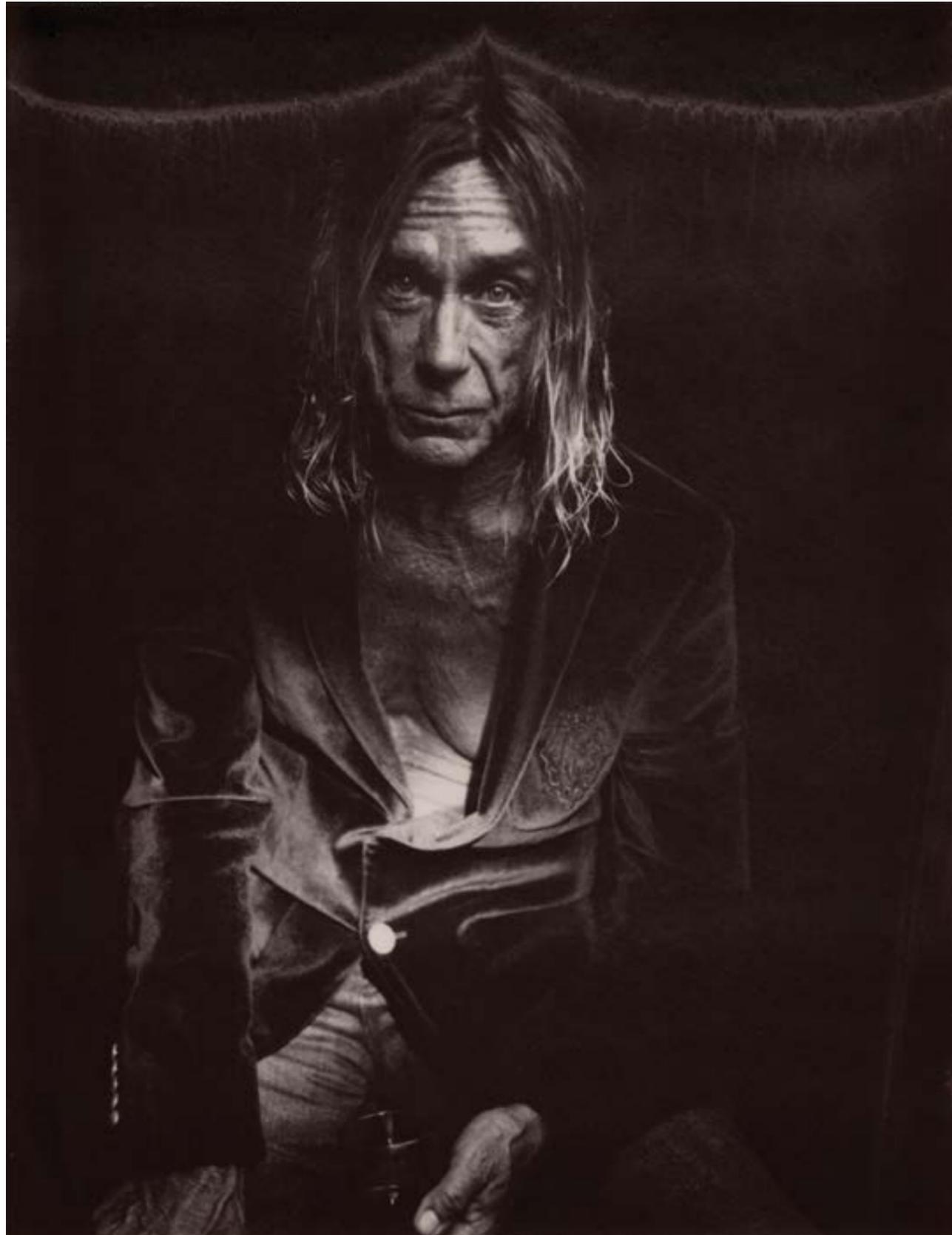
Initially trialled and tested by legendary landscape photographer

Ansel Adams, Polaroid films were widely used by amateurs and professionals and made in a variety of format sizes from 35mm up to 20x24 inches. The majority created a positive print, while type 55 and 665 yielded both a positive and negative that could be used in a conventional enlarger. Adams wrote at the time that many of his most successful photographs from the 1950s onward were made using positive/negative films.

Over the years it has been used artistically by celebrated photographers including Walker Evans, André Kertész, Helmet Newton, Robert Mapplethorpe and Patti Smith to name a few. Photographers like Lucas Samaras created effects with instant film that were simply not possible with traditional photography, including manipulating the emulsion during the developing process or separating the image emulsion from the film base. >



**Les Fleurs du Mal by Stefan Milev, Silver Shade 10x8 Impossible instant film**



Iggy Pop by Stefan Milev, 2011, Polaroid instant film



Christina by Sarah Moon, 2008, Polaroid Type 55,  
courtesy Michael Hoppen Gallery



**Maayan Keret by Stefan Milev, 2011, platinum palladium print from Polaroid instant film**

With the advent of digital photography the demand for instant film inevitably fell year on year, so much so that Polaroid ceased production of all such films in early 2008, much to the disappointment of those who used the film artistically.

However, later that year at the closing event of one of Polaroid's factories in the Netherlands, two former employees Florain Kaps and André Bosman met and started discussing the creation of a new instant film in a bid to stop more than 300,000 Polaroid cameras being made redundant.

They set about purchasing the old production machinery from Polaroid and together with eight other ex-employees formed a company called Impossible. By 2010 they had started marketing and selling their first black & white and colour instant films (Silver shade PX 100 and PX 600 and Colour shade film PX70). Initial batches of the film had mixed reviews, some complaints relating to the unpredictable nature of the film. However, three years later, the quality of the final prints has improved significantly. They now

have 45 employees and a full range of instant films including the recently released 10x8in Silver Shade black & white film for large format cameras.

In a relatively short space of time Impossible instant film has developed a loyal following among creative photographers as there is currently nothing to quite rival the tactile and alchemical qualities of their film.

As a photographer and specialist printer for other artists I can see only two limitations of the instant film currently available – the small size of the final print, and the fact that, over time, the original printed image will fade, especially those made in colour. These two reasons are why a number of established names within the photographic world have turned to alternative photographic printing techniques to reproduce their instant imagery. Prints created using historical printing processes retain the uniqueness and tactile quality of instant film with every print being hand coated; imagery can be greatly enlarged using digital negatives and certain processes have excellent archival qualities. >



**Untitled by Wendy Bevan, 2010, platinum palladium print from Polaroid instant film**



**Nika by Stefan Milev, 2012, platinum palladium print from Polaroid Type 100 film**

Two well known photographers who have followed this path include Sarah Moon and Paolo Roversi. For Moon, her iconic colour Polaroids have been printed using the four colour carbon process, a complex and specialised printing technique that, in the right hands, yields colour prints of exceptional beauty and archival permanence.

In the case of Roversi, he recently translated some of his most iconic monochromatic instant imagery into platinum prints. Initially invented in the 1830s and later patented in 1887 by William Willis, prints created using this process not only display a great range of subtle tonal variations, almost double that of silver gelatin, from rich velvety blacks to luminous mid and high tone values. They will last many generations, greatly surpassing all other modern printing methods including inkjet and lambda/Lightjet prints.

Over the years I have created prints, using the platinum print process, for a number of photographers who have wanted their instant film imagery reproduced for exhibition. They include Simon Larbalestier, Wendy Bevan and Stefan Milev. Both Bevan and Milev are contemporary fashion photographers who have become synonymous with the instant film aesthetic and in the past have shot for magazines such as *Vogue*, *Marie Claire* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Bevan has great affection for Polaroid: 'I love the magic of it, and the instant beauty that I am able to capture within each sheet of film is unique every time. It allows me to work freely and express the most intricate of details subtly. It's like a memory, so eloquently packaged and immediately remembered. Instant film can be fairly unpredictable; however, I use this unpredictability to my advantage. I have learnt how to master these qualities and work against them and develop my technique around its spontaneity.'

Milev describes himself as more of a portrait photographer with an interest in fashion. Having initially been inspired by the early 19th century Pictorialists, such as Alvin Langdon Coburn and

George Seeley, he has a great affinity for the traditional values and the craft associated with the medium.

Using large format cameras, his approach to taking photographs is more considered, methodical and deliberate and instant film suits his workflow. Instead of taking hundreds of images digitally on a day shoot he may just take half a dozen using instant film.

Milev was asked by Impossible to trial their new 8x10in large format instant film early last year before its release and he has so far been impressed with the film's characteristics. He does believe the chemistry of future batches can be improved upon but has no doubt that Impossible will succeed in doing so.

In the grand history of photography instant film holds a special place with many photographers. Edwin Land was a true visionary and created some remarkable films that have recorded some of the most memorable imagery from the 20th and 21st century. With the demise of Polaroid, instant film has been given a second chance with the formation of Impossible, and the future looks bright for this aspirational company. Despite the ever increasing surge digitally forward it is clear that there is still a demand for a more slow paced, thoughtful, traditional way of taking and creating unique and tactile photographic prints, and long may this continue.

**To see more of Wendy Bevan's work visit [wendybevan.com](http://wendybevan.com) and to see more of Stefan Milev's work visit [stefanmilev.com](http://stefanmilev.com)**

## **David Chow Workshops**

**David Chow runs a dedicated platinum printing studio and has printed for some of the most well known photographers in the country. He also provides workshops in alternative photographic processes including platinum, cyanotype, vandyke and gum printing. For further information visit [dceditions.com](http://dceditions.com) and [platinumprinting.co.uk](http://platinumprinting.co.uk)**

**B+W**