



Picture Desk: Lucas Samaras

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In recent years, the photographer Lucas Samaras has used digital technology to create multi-layered and distorted images, but his early work took a manifestly more tactile approach. Born in Greece in 1936, Samaras immigrated to America as a young man. His purchase of a Polaroid 360 camera, in 1969, introduced him to a photographic medium that he would embrace for several decades. A few years later, the Polaroid Corporation gave Samaras an SX-70 camera, which he used to make his famous “Photo-Transformation” series. Samaras was able to create marks directly on the Polaroid film thanks to its sensitive emulsion. Pressing the emulsion, which moved on the eight-by-ten film sheets like paint on a canvas, transformed photographs of himself into warped, vivid, eccentric self-portraits.

In 1983, Samaras took a trip to the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston, to use its room-sized camera, which had been constructed by the Polaroid Corporation. There, he created “Ultra-Large (Hands),” a much less manipulated—but equally arresting—self-portrait. The photograph, above, measures seventy-three inches tall and forty-one inches across, an impressive printing feat even by today’s standards. The simplicity of the image stands in opposition to the chaos of much of Samaras’s other work, yet his enormous hands, with their vivid color and loose, dramatic configuration, resemble a nebula glowing in a night sky. A striking feature of my office wall, “Ultra-Large (Hands)” seems utterly contemporary. It is a gentle and revealing portrait, the artist fully present.

Lucas Samaras’s solo exhibition “Lucas Samaras: Offerings from a Restless Soul” is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, through June 1st, 2014.

His work can also be seen at the International Center of Photography, as part of the group show “[What is a Photograph](#),” on view through May 4th.