

WHITNEY

PRESS RELEASE

Whitney Museum
of American Art
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street
New York, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org
(212) 570-3633

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM PRESENTS *KEN OHARA: CONTACTS* THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION OPENING OCTOBER 10



New York, NY, September 30, 2025 — Opening October 10, [*Ken Ohara: CONTACTS*](#) foregrounds the artist's radical photographic experiment that redefined authorship, collaboration, and contemporary portraiture in 1970s America. The exhibition features twenty-two photographic contact sheets and four related archival documents from Ohara's groundbreaking participatory project *CONTACTS* (1974–76). By relinquishing authorship and inviting strangers across the United States to use his camera to document their own lives, Ohara forged a radically democratic portrait of American life during a period of cultural and political upheaval.

In *CONTACTS*, Ohara preloaded his camera with film, mailed it to a stranger, and invited the recipient to photograph themselves, their family, and friends before returning the camera to the artist along with the name and address of the next person to send it to. Over two years, Ohara's camera traveled to 100 participants in 36 different states. By surrendering control and shifting his role from sole image-maker to facilitator and co-creator, Ohara transformed photography into a collaborative act of social exchange.

The exhibition presents the resulting contact sheets recently acquired by the Whitney in chronological order, preserving the order in which they were created. Spanning the country, the images offer glimpses into the mundane intimacies of American life: candid family gatherings, quiet domestic interiors, scenes of labor and leisure, and fragments of urban and rural environments. Together, they form a vast, unfiltered portrait of the country defined not by singular narratives but by the throughlines and repetitions of daily existence.

"Ohara's project is extraordinary in both its conceptual daring and its humility," said Eli Harrison, Curatorial Fellow at the Whitney and organizer of the exhibition. "By giving his camera to strangers and inviting them to document their own lives, he created a collective, decentralized portrait of America narrated through snapshots and samples of everyday life."

While rooted in analog photography practices of the 1970s, *CONTACTS* introduces a form of image-sharing that shapes social media and participatory archives today. Its resonance lies not only in its historical moment, but also in its continuing relevance to conversations about co-authorship, collective engagement, and the social life of images.

Ken Ohara: CONTACTS is organized by Eli Harrison, Curatorial Fellow, Whitney Museum of American Art.

PRESS CONTACT

For press materials and image requests, please visit our press site at whitney.org/press or contact:

Ashley Reese, Director of Communications

Whitney Museum of American Art

(212) 671-1846

Ashley_Reese@whitney.org

Whitney Press Office

whitney.org/press

(212) 570-3633

pressoffice@whitney.org

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Generous support for *Ken Ohara: Contacts* is provided by David Bolger.

ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for ninety years. The core of the Whitney’s mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Whitney Museum Land Acknowledgment

The Whitney is located in Lenapehoking, the ancestral homeland of the Lenape. The name Manhattan comes from their word Mannahatta, meaning “island of many hills.” The Museum’s current site is close to land that was a Lenape fishing and planting site called Sapponckanikan (“tobacco field”). The Whitney acknowledges the displacement of this region’s original inhabitants and the Lenape diaspora that exists today.

As a museum of American art in a city with vital and diverse communities of Indigenous people, the Whitney recognizes the historical exclusion of Indigenous artists from its collection and program. The Museum is committed to addressing these erasures and honoring the perspectives of Indigenous artists and communities as we work for a more equitable future. To read more about the Museum’s Land Acknowledgment, [visit the Museum’s website](#).

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Public hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, 10:30 am–6 pm; Friday, 10:30 am–10 pm; and Saturday and Sunday, 10:30 am–6 pm. Closed Tuesday. Visitors eighteen years and under and Whitney members: FREE. The Museum offers FREE admission and special programming for visitors of all ages every Friday evening from 5–10 pm and on the second Sunday of every month.

Image credit:

Ken Ohara, *CONTACTS 47, Carr, San Francisco, California*, 1974–1976. Gelatin silver print, 19 13/16 × 23 3/4 in. (50.3 × 60.3 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase with funds from the Photography Committee 2025.37.47. © Ken Ohara

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