

Sean Donnola: *One Square Mile*

23 November 2021 – 8 January 2022

Charles Moffett

511 Canal Street, NYC

PRESS CONTACT

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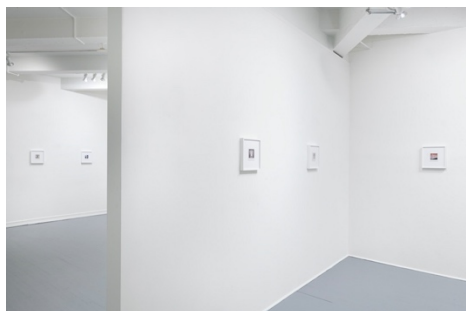
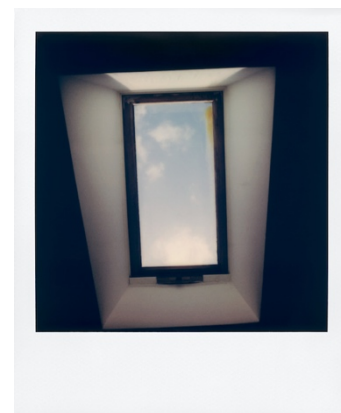
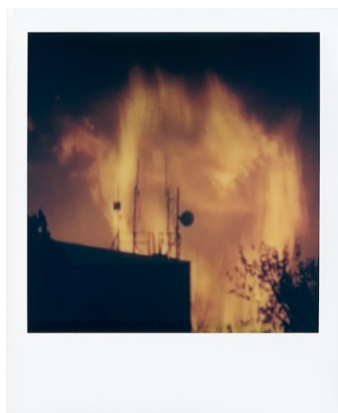
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Images: [molly.nyc/onesquaremile](https://molly.nyc/onesquaremile)

## In a new exhibition, Met-collected photographer Sean Donnola, who principally works in traditional film-based media, turns to the ephemeral immediacy of the Polaroid

*The exhibition's title, One Square Mile, refers to the artist documenting "boundless subject matter" constrained only by the commonality of being located within the one-square-mile area surrounding his home*

In a remarkable manner given the nature of the Polaroid medium, the 18 works collectively present a jarring variety of moods, aesthetics, art-historical references, and eras to which associated nostalgia is anchored



All Polaroid, 2020, 3.1 x 3.1 inches (4.2 x 3.1 inches with chemical packet border).

From left: *Untitled (News 1)* • *Untitled (Lamp)* • *Untitled (Film)* • *Untitled (Skylight)* • Installation shots credit: Adam Reich

**New York, NY — Winter 2021** — Charles Moffett is pleased to present *One Square Mile*, a solo exhibition of 18 Polaroids by New York based artist Sean Donnola, on view from November 23, 2021 through January 8, 2022 at the gallery's 511 Canal Street space.

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With a conceptual premise defined only by location – the one square mile area in which the images were captured – Donnola takes advantage of the liberties offered by his loose framework, capturing objects and broader views alike; his practice, in general, relates to the “American visual landscape.” The works chosen for the show are often enticingly disorienting, requiring the viewer to take a moment to get their bearings – to make sense of the eerily familiar yet at-first undefinable subject matter of each composition. The moment of recognition conjures a pleasure similar to solving a riddle. Compositions include television news footage of a forest fire; a curiously geometric frame around a skylight for a result that conjures a James Turrell work; a metallic film packet that at first evokes something of a morphed ice cube, and a trophy-like chrome lamp base that pushes the captured depth of field into a 1970s-nostalgia coloration, for a result that is reminiscent of Warhol’s Polaroid practice.

Donnola’s new body of work began in the spring of 2020 and culminated in the spring of 2021. Leaning into the uncertainty and restrictions of the times, Polaroids became the focal point of Donnola’s practice: “For one year, I would limit myself to making work within a one square mile zone, with my house at the center”. The resulting images were made at home and on daily walks. Unlike the meticulous editing process that goes into perfecting each of his 35mm archival pigment prints, he had one chance to produce each unique work.

The pictures oscillate between eerie and beautiful, mysterious and everyday. In one, idyllic clouds sit atop a cotton candy sky in a sunset scene which is anchored at the top by a tree-line and includes the side of a back-lit house that conjures the geometry of an Ellsworth Kelly sculpture. In another, Donnola’s framing of a skylight makes the normalcy of a window feel like the artist’s own personal James Turrell *Skyspace*. Images of news footage on the television screen show the horror of a world literally and metaphorically on fire from a distance.

Donnola’s images, some of which border on abstraction, all offer their own moment of reflection and contemplation. While his practice is built upon a steadfast employment of 35mm film, throughout his life Donnola has turned to making Polaroid pictures. His SLR 680 camera is a descendant of the SX-70 that allows manual control of exposure and depth of field, enabling the ability to fine-tune each image. He embraces instant prints as objects that have the potential to be intimate and magical. Measuring a mere 3.1 x 3.1 inches, memorialized in a 3.5 x 4.2-inch white-matted film frame, the instant prints are made all the more powerful through their nature as unedited images which were held in the artist’s hands at the moment and location of their creation; both object and relic.

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## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Sean Donnola (b. 1983; BFA NYU Tisch, 2006) makes photographs, films, and videos, often relating to the American visual landscape. His process is largely intuitive and reliant on the subconscious. He draws heavily upon his memory and experience to relate to what appears in his viewfinder. With every image, Donnola makes work that is felt before it is understood. As French film director Robert Bresson put it, “Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.” His work is in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.