

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

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The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum: History

In 1964, Larry Aldrich (1906-2001), fashion designer and passionate collector of contemporary art, purchased the historic “Old Hundred” at the top of Main Street in Ridgefield, Connecticut, to hold his growing collection of art. Originally constructed in 1783 by Joshua King and James Dole, two lieutenants in the Revolutionary War, the building was nicknamed “Old Hundred” because it served as a grocery and hardware store from 1783-1883. It was also Ridgefield’s first post office.

In 1883, Grace King Ingersoll, a descendant of Lieutenant King, remodeled the building and it became her home. From 1929-1964, it served as Ridgefield’s First Church of Christ, Scientist. Mr. Aldrich purchased the eighteenth-century structure because of its high-ceiling rooms and the extensive backyard that would be suitable for the year-round sculpture garden he envisioned.

The Larry Aldrich Museum was incorporated as a nonprofit and opened in November 1964 as one of the country’s first museums devoted exclusively to the exhibition of contemporary art. The original Board of Trustees included Alfred Barr, Joseph Hirshhorn, Philip Johnson, and Vera List. In 1967, the Museum was renamed The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, a name it retained until 2004. In 1981, The Board voted to deaccession Mr. Aldrich’s permanent collection in order to better focus on its founding mission to exhibit only contemporary art.

Foremost in Mr. Aldrich’s vision was that the Museum should make contemporary art accessible to a variety of audiences. Over the course of its forty-year history, it has become renowned as a national leader for its presentation of outstanding new art, the cultivation of emerging artists, and its innovation in museum education.

In 2001, The Aldrich Board of Trustees, with Larry Aldrich, chairman emeritus, in attendance, voted to proceed with a major renovation and expansion. Groundbreaking took place in April 2003, and in September 2003 the galleries closed to the public until the reopening in June 2004. Today The Aldrich is comprised of the “Old Hundred” building which houses the Museum’s administrative offices, and a new white clapboard and granite Museum building. The Aldrich’s 25,000 square feet of new and redesigned space accommodates twelve galleries, including a screening room, a sound gallery, a 22-foot-high project space, a 100-seat performance area, a state-of-the-art education center, Museum store, and a redesigned two-acre outdoor exhibition space, The Cornish Family Sculpture Garden.

The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum continues to champion its original mission: The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum continues to fulfill its mission to be a national leader in the exhibition of significant and challenging contemporary art with an emphasis on emerging and mid-career artists, a world-class innovator of museum education programs, and a vital cultural resource for the community.

look. look again.