

# 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” on 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 housed Ridgefield’s First Church of Christ, Scientist. When Mr. Aldrich acquired the property, he envisioned the airy, high-ceiling rooms as ideal to display art, and the extensive back yard as perfect for a year-round sculpture garden.

Mr. Aldrich’s belief that contemporary art should be accessible to a variety of audiences became a reality with the incorporation of the Larry Aldrich Museum as a nonprofit; it 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 elected to deaccession the Museum’s permanent collection in order to better focus on its founding mission to exhibit only contemporary art.

In 2001, The Aldrich’s 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. The Aldrich reopened in June 2004, with the administrative offices housed in Old Hundred and the galleries and art-handling facilities located in the new 25,000 square-foot facility, which received a design award from the American Institute of Architects. The Aldrich 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.

As it approaches its fiftieth anniversary, The Aldrich is renowned as a national leader for its presentation of outstanding new art, cultivation of emerging artists, and innovation in museum education, offering programs that bring 7,000 students into the galleries annually. In 2011, the Museum achieved accreditation from the American Association of Museums, the highest national recognition for a museum, signifying excellence to the museum community, the government, funders, and to the museum-going public. Of the nation’s estimated 17,500 museums, 779 are currently accredited. The Aldrich is one of only 20 museums in Connecticut and only 318 art museums in the country to achieve this honor.

*The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum works to promote twenty-first century visual literacy in accord with its mission to advance creative thinking by connecting today’s artists with individuals and communities in unexpected and stimulating ways.*