

Sun Negatives. Two centuries since the birth of photography

Llorens, Martí (2026) Barcelona. Exhibition text.

To mark the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the oldest surviving photograph, we have launched a research project on the history of photography using the archives of Casa Planas. We are therefore presenting a small selection from this heritage collection at the Museum of Mallorca as part of the Phof Festival.

The exhibition, curated by Martí Llorens/Factoria Heliogràfica and the Fundació Casa Planas, displays a selection of pieces from the collection of Josep Planas i Montanyà. Although he is better known for his work at the Casa Planas company, he also had a passion for collecting, born from his love for the technique and history of photography.

1. Introduction

In 2026-27, it will be two hundred years since the oldest photograph taken with a camera obscura reached our days. This is the famous photograph View from the Window at Le Gras, a heliograph on a pewter plate made 200 years ago by the Burgundian inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce. To mark this anniversary, we have launched a research project on the history of photography using the archives of Casa Planas. We are therefore presenting a small selection from this heritage collection at the Museum of Mallorca as part of the Phof Festival. The exhibition displays a selection of pieces from the collection of Josep Planas i Montanyà; and although he is better known for his work at the Casa Planas company, he also had a passion for collecting, born from his love for the technique and history of photography.

This extraordinarily rich collection is made up of cameras and technical equipment, photographs taken using various processes and formats, as well as a significant amount of bibliographical and publishing material. Although all these materials are currently being catalogued and indexed, it is clear that this is a collection that deserves specific documentary treatment, separate from the rest of the materials linked to the photographic company's commercial activity.

This exhibition is structured around three display cases dedicated to the beginnings of snapshot photography at the start of the 20th century. The selection brings together cameras, publications and various objects linked to a photographic practice defined by the use of lightweight, accessible and easy-to-use equipment. This was aimed at a progressively wider public—a market that Kodak discovered and opened up from its very origins. It is a type of photography conceived mainly as a tool to preserve the memory of everyday life: family gatherings, trips, holidays, meetings with friends or small events in the photographer's immediate surroundings.

Ultimately, it was a new way of relating to images that forever transformed how society constructs and preserves its memories, and it forms the backbone of this exhibition.

We believe that the true value of this small display lies precisely in highlighting the enormous potential of the materials within the Fundació Casa Planas heritage collection which, despite its interest, remains largely undiscovered and yet to be fully appreciated.

2. About the exhibition, Snapshot photography within everyone's reach (1888-1939)

As a result, the exhibition is structured around three display cases dedicated to the beginnings of snapshot photography at the start of the 20th century. The selection brings together cameras, publications and various objects linked to a photographic practice defined by the use of lightweight, accessible and easy-to-use equipment aimed at a progressively wider public—a market that Kodak discovered and opened up from its very origins.

It is a type of photography conceived mainly as a tool to preserve the memory of everyday life: family gatherings, trips, holidays, meetings with friends or small events in the photographer's immediate surroundings. Ultimately, a new way of relating to images that forever transformed how society constructs and preserves its memories, and which forms the backbone of this exhibition.

I believe the true value of this small display lies precisely in highlighting the enormous potential of the materials within the Fundació Casa Planas historical collection which, despite its interest, remains largely undiscovered and yet to be fully appreciated.

3. Contents of the display cases

First display case

Kodak: photography within everyone's reach

The first display case exhibits a full-scale replica of the first Kodak camera, which went on sale in 1888. This model marked the beginning of amateur photography, allowing anyone, without technical knowledge, to preserve their best memories. Its famous slogan summed up this idea perfectly: "You press the button, we do the rest." The camera is accompanied by other emblematic models from the brand, such as the Pocket Kodak, manufactured between the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the popular Kodak Brownie. The former stand out for their elegant folding design, which protects the lens using a bellows and a sliding mechanism, making them easy to carry. The Brownies, on the other hand, were box-shaped, simple and affordable cameras. Between 1900 and 1935, five different models were manufactured, with two film formats and numerous variations. Its huge commercial success far exceeded the company's expectations.

The display case is completed with reproductions of photographs and advertisements from the era featuring the Kodak Girl—a modern, independent woman who, camera in hand, symbolised the new society and the opening up of photography to an ever-widening public. These women, depicted as travellers or enjoying their holidays, represent the link that Fundació Casa Planas explores between photography, tourism and gender.



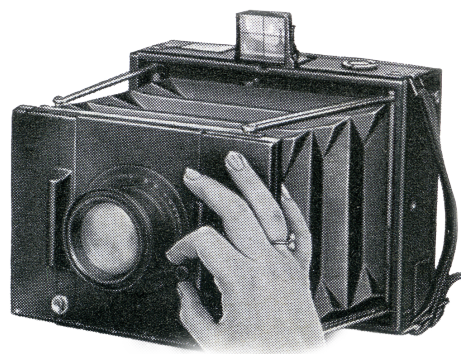
CAT
CAST
ENG

Second display case

The photographic laboratory at home

The second display case brings together various objects used in the home photographic laboratory, where advanced amateurs could develop their own films without needing to use a professional lab.

Among the pieces on display are glass bottles, some still sealed, containing chemicals for developing; metal tanks for developing and fixing rolls of film and plates; an attractive wooden developing tank accompanied by an illustrated manual explaining how it works; a set of metal tweezers for handling negatives; and various technical manuals dedicated to photographic processing. The set is completed by a box with a magnesium ribbon holder, an indispensable accessory before the advent of the electronic flash. The intense, brief combustion of the magnesium ribbons provided the light needed to photograph poorly lit interiors.



Third display case

Photography, leisure and creativity

The third display case features three copies of Kodak magazine published during the 1920s and dedicated to holiday photography. These publications offered advice and instructions on how to improve summer photographs, showed images taken by the most experienced subscribers, and encouraged participation in summer-themed photography competitions.

Alongside the magazines, three examples of humorous comic strips from the same period are presented. Linked, in this case, to the holiday theme, they could be used as photographic entertainment by both advanced amateurs and professionals looking to offer a fun product to their clients. Their mechanism was ingenious. First, the drawing, done in white on black card, was contact-printed onto photographic paper, creating an image with a white background and a black drawing. Then, without moving the already exposed paper, the drawing was replaced by a mask with holes where the characters' heads appeared. By projecting the negative portrait of a family member or friend onto each of these holes, a final image was obtained in which the characters kept the original drawing, but with real faces, creating compositions that were as curious as they were amusing.