

The Sygma Preservation and Access Initiative

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Preserving the world-renowned Sygma™ Collection for generations to come



Director David Lynch, Cannes, May 2001.

© Carole Bellaïche/Sygma/Corbis



Actress Monica Bellucci
at the 2000 Cannes Film Festival.

© Marcel Hartmann/Sygma/Corbis

The city of Phnom Penh after the Khmer Rouge bombardment, Cambodia, February 1974.

© Christine Spengler/Sygma/Corbis





The Sygma Preservation and Access Initiative involves...

50 million slides, negatives, prints and contact sheets

9 collections of unique photos

More than 10,000 contributors

800,000 images on Corbis.com

7000 meters of shelving

800 square meters of floor space

10 archivists

1 editor-in-chief for the collections

6 editors

Sygma is the visual record of a half century of European and world history. It is one of the largest photo archives in the world and includes famous collections such as Kipa, TempSport, Apis, Fornier and Interpress. It comprises five decades of some of the most important photography of the 1950s to the end of the 20th century.

Now, this famed collection is safely preserved inside a carefully designed facility with:

- Advanced climate control and ventilation
- Extensive fire safety and security protection
- An easily accessible location



African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela, 1993 Nobel Peace Prize laureate.



Young recruit for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), during the civil war, Liberia, June 1990.



Corbis' commitment to preservation and access

In 2004, Corbis announced the "Sygma Preservation and Access Initiative". Corbis' goal with the initiative was and remains to preserve and protect the Sygma collection and its cultural legacy for generations to come. Acting as conservator of the collection, Corbis also wants to ensure that it is easily accessible to historians, academics, photographers and others who wish to consult with the photography.

During the hunger strike by IRA members held in Maze prison, violent rioting rose in the streets of Belfast, Great Britain, April 1981.

© Michel Philippot/Sygma/Corbis



The Sygma Preservation and Access Initiative has been a significant investment over several years because it involved reclassifying, archiving, editing and bringing to life around 50 million “photographic objects” (slides, negatives, prints and contact sheets) in a new archiving facility to ensure the long term continuity of the collection.



An African child posing by his traditionally-built desert town in Mali, 1990.

© Sophie Elbaz/Sygma/Corbis



Jimi Hendrix at Olympia Music Hall in Paris, France,
January 1968.

How is Corbis preserving one of the largest collections of photos in the world while ensuring it is still accessible?

From 2004 to 2009, Corbis undertook a systematic review of the collection to better organize the photography, confirm photographer participation and uncover “hidden gems” to digitize and offer on the Corbis web site. For help in developing the facility, Corbis consulted an expert in the field of photo and film preservation, Henry Wilhelm, and partnered with Locarchives, a document management and security specialist. They supported Corbis in building a world-class, climate controlled preservation facility near Paris, France, that offers easy access to interested individuals. The project included:

Changing the archive classification system

Corbis first established a unique and constructive archiving system in which pictures are classified by photographer rather than by theme. Such a reorganization of the archives required extensive sorting, which was carried out for almost the entire collection of 50 million objects. Corbis did this to regularize royalties, better promote the collection and digitize more images to make them easily available on the Corbis web site. In doing so, Corbis is helping to highlight the inestimable heritage represented by some of the greatest collections of photojournalism in the world.

Inviting photographers to participate

Each carefully classified and archived picture is the photographer's property, and he or she alone can decide whether or not to entrust it to Corbis for licensing to third parties. Corbis over the past several years contacted all Sygma photographers or their heirs – more than 10,000 contributors – to offer them an “archive agreement”, entrusting Corbis to archive and license their works. The initiative received overwhelming support from photographers.

Publishing the heart of Sygma, TempSport and Kipa collections online to reach a larger market

Editing the pictures in the collections is carried out in close collaboration with the photographers. The goal is to digitize older news photographs of well known events to make them more accessible, and to give a new life to images that are yet to be fully discovered. Over the past several years, Corbis added more than 80,000 additional images from the Sygma collection to the Corbis web site. This offers photographers an opportunity to increase the royalties they receive from the imagery and the world to rediscover forgotten images.

Building a world-class preservation facility

Corbis worked with Locarchives to build the new, dedicated Sygma facility according to the specifications determined by Henry Wilhelm, who also helped in the development of Corbis' Film Preservation Facility in Pennsylvania in the USA, which preserves the Bettmann collection. Locarchives has proven archiving experience, housing the library for the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (National Foundation of Political Sciences) amongst others.



French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo on the set of "Pierrot le Fou" directed by Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1965

© Georges Pierre/Sygma/Corbis

Corbis carefully considered several factors in building a facility to preserve the famed Sygma collection. Several criteria had to be met, including:

- Easy access for photographers and specialists wishing to consult the archives
- Low risk to natural disasters
- Security for the collection
- Construction with materials suited to the preservation of photographic objects
- Low UV lighting
- Climate control including temperature and humidity, an inert gas extinguishing system and surrounding air treatment

These climate controlled conditions preserve unstable acetate film, fading dyes in color transparencies and negatives, and photographs, enclosures and indexing systems. This will help preserve the collection for centuries to come.

The facility has three vaults that fulfill different needs, with maximum temperatures ranging from 18° to -3° Celsius (65° to 26° Fahrenheit). All of the vaults are cool enough to aid in preservation. The warmer ones allow for people to work comfortably to organize, index or digitize images, while the coldest one meets specific preservation guidelines for fragile photographic objects.

The facility has a surface area of 800 square meters (8600 sq feet) and 7000 meters (4.3 miles) of shelving capacity. It has two image experts who maintain the collection and pull and digitize pictures from it for customers and other interested parties.

The facility is located approximately 45 minutes from Paris, France, in Garnay near Dreux.



American Special Forces arrest Iraqi soldiers trying to flee after the liberation of Kuwait City, Kuwait, February 1991.

© Durand-Hudson-Langevin-Orban/Sygma/Corbis

Providing access to clients, photographers and other professionals

With the new facility, the Sygma collection is both secure and accessible. There are up to two shuttles per day, depending on demand, that quickly deliver requested photography to Paris-based editors. The facility also has on-demand digitization capabilities to quickly fulfill specific images requests for Corbis' global customers, ensuring that all client requests are met promptly.

Located in close proximity to Paris, the facility is easily accessible for consultation by professionals including photographers, researchers, historians, iconographers and professionals working in the photo industry. Visitors may simply contact Corbis to schedule a visit.

Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, France,
October 1977.

© Sophie Bassouls/Sygma/Corbis





The Story of Sygma

In 1973, Hubert Henrotte and other photographers from the Gamma agency decided to establish the Sygma agency.

Sygma photographers were involved as photojournalism rose in status and quality: the Kippur War was the first major event that the agency followed. The main international conflicts that took place at the end of the century were covered by Sygma photographers: the Iranian Revolution, the Nicaraguan Civil War, the war in Lebanon, the Gdansk shipyard strikes, the war in Afghanistan, the war in former Yugoslavia, the Tiananmen Square events, the fall of the Berlin Wall and even the Gulf War.

In the 1980s, under the leadership of Monique Kouznetzoff, Sygma inaugurated a new way of “shooting famous people” by organizing “Rendez-vous”, and trying to “find photographers who would exclusively devote themselves to covering famous people” (Monique Kouznetzoff quoted by Hubert Henrotte in *Le Monde dans les Yeux*, Paris 2005).



A militia member affixes a “Forbidden Area” sign within the 30-kilometer off-limit radius of Chernobyl, Ukraine, October 1989.

There was a turning point in the 1990s, with the digital transmission of photographs during the first Gulf War. Sygma continued its technological evolution in 1993 when it decided to digitalize its images. Hubert Henrotte and Monique Kouznetzoff left Sygma in June 1998. In 1999, Corbis bought the Sygma agency.

The Sygma collection represents a photographic heritage of inestimable value, comprised of the collections of three main agencies:

- Sygma: photojournalism, news, magazines, celebrities and portraits
- Kipa: television and movie sets (agency set up in 1971 by Annemiek Veldman and bought by Sygma in 1991)
- TempSport: sporting events (agency set up in 1985 by Gilbert lundt and Jean-Yves Ruszniewski and bought by Corbis in 2000)

It also includes some older collections from the 1950s and 1960s: Apis, Universal Photo, Interpress, Spitzer, Reporter Associés, etc. Altogether, it has 50 million objects including some of the most iconic photos and unforgettable photos recounting the history of the last fifty years.



Pakistani protesters in support of the Taliban regime and Osama bin Laden burning an American flag, Pakistan, September 2001.

A new home for Sygma

Corbis proudly opened the Sygma Preservation and Access Facility, the culmination of the Sygma and Preservation Access Initiative, to the world in May 2009. Photographers, government officials, Corbis executives, journalists, media and advertising companies and industry associations helped celebrate the opening at an on-site event.

Sygma is now a living archive, where hidden gems are rediscovered and shared with the world, and where a cultural legacy is being conserved for this generation, the next generation, and generations to come.

The Sygma Preservation and Access facility in Garnay, France





An American soldier in battle during the Vietnam war, November 1966.





General de Gaulle returns to France from Baden-Baden, Germany, where he met with General Massu during the Paris riots, France, May 1968

© Henri Bureau/Sygma/Corbis

About Corbis

Corbis is a leading visual media provider for the creative community, licensing the widest array of award-winning contemporary, historical and entertainment photography as well as extensive collections of acclaimed illustration and footage.

Its imagery is seen everyday around the world in advertising, media, publishing and corporate communications. Corbis is headquartered in Seattle with offices throughout North America, Europe, Asia and Australia that serve more than 50 countries worldwide.



Jacques Brel (1929-1978), Belgian-born singer-songwriter and actor whose songs were known for their passion, emotional power and poetry.

For more information, visit www.corbis.com



French actress Karin Viard, France, May 1995.

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