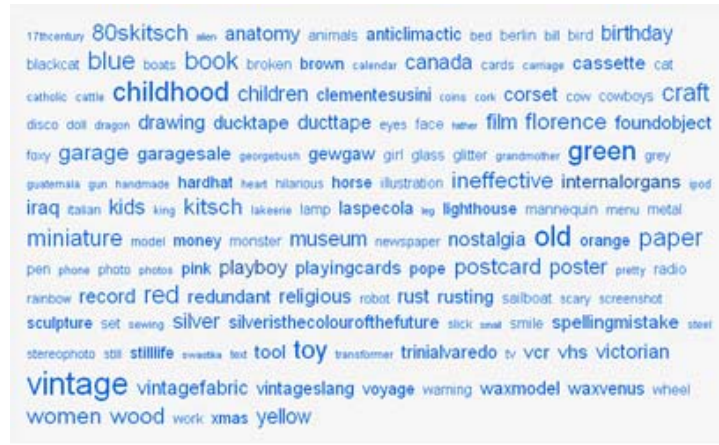


## @theobjectproject



*@theobjectproject* is an online exhibition exploring the themes of childhood, changing social norms, pre-internet life, generations, memory, and technological change. The objects photographed for *@theobjectproject* were culled from the personal archives and collections of three University of Western Ontario graduate students. Flickr, an image and video hosting website, is the virtual venue for this exhibition. When visiting *@theobjectproject*, the visitor is encouraged to engage with the images by tagging or leaving comments and links to other related material. In addition, the images in *@theobjectproject* have been released under Creative Commons attribution and non-commercial licenses in order to encourage visitors to embed images in their blogs, or to include them in their own virtual galleries, on Flickr, twitter, facebook and tumblr. Interactivity on every level is welcomed and encouraged.

**Visit the project at:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/objectproject/>

**Group members:**

Dave Kemp

Stefani Klaric

Neil Klassen

Julia Krueger

Kim Neudorf

**Curatorial Statement**

On March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011, two art historians, Stefani Klaric and Julia Krueger, and three artists sat in a darkened room and viewed snapshots of disparate objects culled from the artists' environment, such as the studio or home. The artists, Dave Kemp, Neil Klassen and Kim Neudorf, were tasked with selecting objects they had kept over a number of years. The objects could have sentimental value and might or might not relate in some way to their own practice. During this March meeting, the owner of each object contextualized it, and after viewing the entire collection of snapshots, the group discovered common thematic threads throughout: childhood, changing social norms, pre-internet life, generations, memory, and technological change.

The objects that best tied into the common thematic threads were selected and digitally photographed on a neutral grey background. This was done to give the entire project a sense of continuity, and the digital format provided a means for the images to

be disseminated through the internet. All of the images in *@theobjectproject* relate to concepts of past and memory. By collecting these objects over their lifetime, and then presenting them as projected snapshots in the initial meeting, the artists continued their access to the past and memory. Klassen states that he thinks “These objects from the past function in a way to slow the effect of time. It stretches those memories and associations with the past. I also like to see them as time machines, transporting myself to the past.”<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, the experience was not only felt by the individual artist owning the object but by the other group members, who found themselves reminded of their own childhood memories. Thus, the group recognised that the experience gained by the viewer of this virtual exhibition would be a temporal shift between the past, present, and future through the three artists’ object collections and archives.<sup>2</sup>

In order to better facilitate this complex temporal shift, the group decided to present the objects as images in a diptych format. The diptych was chosen to better reveal the object, show different angles and intricacies, and direct the viewer to areas that merit a close-up, attentive look. This is related to Svetlana Alpers, James Hyde, and Barney Kulok’s project *Painting Then for Now. Fragments of Tiepolo at the Ca’ Dolfin* from 2007, where they took detailed close-up photographs of three paintings by Giambattista Tiepolo. This detailed orientation was done in order to manipulate the viewer’s gaze and experience with these paintings, as they were often overlooked by the museum visitor. The artists’ goal was to have the visitor stop and take a long, detailed, pleasurable look.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the goal of *@theobjectproject* is to provoke the flighty internet user into spending the time to look at these everyday objects for a longer period of time, facilitating a temporal shift between past, present and future.

When a visitor to online or offline galleries engages in attentive, pleasurable looking, he or she then experiences a personal temporal shift which fosters an access to memory in relation to the objects and the exhibition. The internet is an ideal venue for an exhibition engaging with memory because it is a non-linear space with infinite depth and relationships. In the essay “The Art of Archiving”, Geoffrey Batchen states that Jacques Derrida’s understanding of memory is an “impossible perceptual apparatus in which the blank receptive surface is always already a web of inscriptions, such that this surface also comprises an infinite depth.”<sup>4</sup> This description of memory illustrates the very structure of the Internet, and therefore it makes sense to choose an environment which reflects the dominant themes of childhood, changing social norms, pre-internet life, generations, memory, and technological change found within *@theobjectproject*.

The experience gained from viewing the collection of diptychs online cannot be fully experienced in any other exhibition format. The World Wide Web is a vast place and in order to situate the *@theobjectproject* exhibition, the project group selected a metaphorical venue already being used by internet users to engage with images. The group tried to pick an online equivalent of the National Gallery of Canada, a place that already has an audience eager to engage with images. The group decided on the website Flickr as the venue. Flickr is an image and video hosting website with its own online community, hosting more than five billion images. An advantage of Flickr is that it allows an online community to embed images in their blogs, while users can also comment on the images and include them in their own virtual galleries, on and off Flickr. To help facilitate such distribution, the exhibition’s images have been released under Creative Commons attribution, and non-commercial licenses.<sup>5</sup>

The 21st-century viewer is already accustomed to engaging and interacting with images in a social networking format. This makes *@theobjectproject* relevant because it is using forms of communication that are prevalent in the online world. Viewing an online exhibition is different than a 'real world' exhibition experience. In the offline world, the visitor is not only interacting with the architecture, space and the artworks but people as well. Online, people are able to interact with the images and leave comments as if they were communicating their thoughts to another person in the gallery, or even with the images themselves. This is one of the reasons for the 'venue selection' of Flickr, for the group anticipates that visitors will comment on the images, tag them, and include them in their own galleries. On Flickr, tagging is when the user associates and applies key words and labels to a photograph, thus expanding the potential meanings and associations of the objects. These actions democratise the role of the curator, archivist and/or librarian. These are no longer positions of authority but of creativity and subjectivity. Ideally, all of this interactivity will reflect the visitor's personal relationship to the image of an object after experiencing the temporal shift between past, present and future.

By bringing these objects to the attention of the group that evening on March 2<sup>nd</sup> in that darkened room, the artists were able to give new lives to their collections and archives. By putting these objects on Flickr and asking visitors to interact with them, further meaning will be woven into them through the intricate web of memory and the internet, which both temporally shift the viewer's experience of the past, present and future. This is but the beginning of the project as it now lives on the internet. Every time

a user comments, tags or includes one of the images in their gallery, new exhibition content is generated, and so by design, *@theobjectproject* will continue indefinitely.

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Klassen, e-mail message to Stefani Klaric and Julia Krueger, March 25, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The temporal shift between past, present and future happens when someone looks at an image or object and is reminded of their past. This entry into the past, via a present experience, might influence future actions. For example, an image from the *@theobjectproject* might cause one to think of a song sung to them as a child, and this might then inspire the viewer in the future to seek out the song on the internet or at a more conventional music store. A discussion of the temporal shift between past, present and future in relation to digital archives and the work of Vera Frenkel can be found in Geoffrey Batchen, "The Art of Archiving," in *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art*, eds. Ingrid Schaffner and Matthias Winzen (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1998), 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> Svetlana Alpers, James Hyde and Barney Kulok, *Painting Then for Now. Fragments of Tiepolo at the Ca' Dolfin* (Johannesburg, South Africa: David Krut Publishing, 2007), 81.

<sup>4</sup> Batchen, "The Art of Archiving," 46. Derrida's understanding of memory is influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud.

<sup>5</sup> For more information on Creative Commons, please visit <http://creativecommons.org/about>.