

“The Merest Novice”: The Snapshot, Gender, and the Museum, 1888-2008

By

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Introduction

The snapshot is everywhere. It sits in shoeboxes, hangs on walls, flashes on computer desktops. In recent years, the snapshot's universality, along with its ability to exhibit eccentricity, familiarity, or history, has made it a favorite of the art museum. But why has this happened? How are snapshots being interpreted and exhibited by art historians, and how have these characterizations evolved since the snapshot became a mass phenomenon in the late nineteenth century? Using these questions as a starting point, I set out to trace the history of the snapshot as both an intensely personal and increasingly public cultural object.

Perceptions of and attitudes toward gender have played a major role in the characterization and exhibition of snapshot photography within the physical and social space of the museum, and I use this lens to help shape my arguments throughout the following chapters. Historically, the relationship between snapshots and other vernacular work and femininity has led both to the omission of such work in major museums and, where it has been included, to ambivalent, often gendered characterizations of the everyday snaphooter. However, recently this association has become more nuanced and historicized in exhibitions that recognize the snaphooters' awareness of visual culture and ability to consciously manipulate images for their own purposes.

In unpacking historical and contemporary perspectives on the snapshot, I have situated my work at the interstices of art history, museum studies, and gender studies. All of these fields offer avenues for interdisciplinarity, and taken together they shed light on the snapshot from a variety of perspectives. Perhaps even more critically, the snapshot is a cultural and artistic object that reveals broader trends within the history of these fields,

as well as ways in which they overlap and intersect. My choice to give primary attention to snapshots' place in the art museum limits my scope, allowing me to examine closely a pivotal institution and its stakeholders through their dynamic relationship to a form that while massively popular has often been viewed as inconsequential. Still, while I focus on the art museum and more broadly on the discipline of art history, much of what I discuss, particularly in terms of museum trends toward engagement and community involvement, has important implications for all museums.

The first chapter of this work focuses most heavily on the ways in which the snapshot became associated not only with women, but also with particular notions of femininity during the first three decades (from the late 1880s through about 1920) of its availability to the public. Kodak became the most prominent player in this process, edging out the competition and offering products and advertisements that appealed to a developing "leisure class" and public ideals of middle-class womanhood.¹ I argue that as the snapshot became a mass phenomenon, a photographic hierarchy began to develop, geared in part toward setting the snapshot—and its connotations of ignorance and unselfconsciousness—below artistic, journalistic, and even amateur photography.

As an institution, the museum has especially influenced attitudes toward photography, but like the images themselves it is a product of its own time. The second chapter discusses how museums gradually developed in ways that made them resistant to snapshots as legitimate artistic or social objects that might be displayed to the public. Such resistance makes instances where the snapshot has been exhibited worthy of further analysis, and the chapter highlights three such exhibitions that emphasize how even

¹ Thorsten Veblen, *The theory of the leisure class; an economic study in the evolution of institutions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899).

curators who acknowledge the legitimacy of the snapshot are often affected by gendered perspectives that developed at the turn of the twentieth century.

In the third chapter, I examine two other recent snapshot exhibitions and discuss the implications of this work within a broader framework of museum culture. I rely in this chapter on Eilean Hooper-Greenhill's notion of the "post-museum" as a way to contextualize the recent popularity of snapshot exhibitions as part of a broader transformation of museums that represents a reevaluation of what and how collections should be presented to the public.² The exhibitions I explore here demonstrate a newfound acceptance of vernacular work and the social context in which it was made and can continue to be appreciated.

² Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance*, Museum Meanings Series (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

Feminizing the Snapshot

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which snapshot photography became inextricably tied to gender from its introduction in the late nineteenth century through its development into the early twentieth century. Rather than emerging as a natural or inevitable relationship, the connection between femininity and the snapshot—and the subsequent disconnection between femininity and other forms of photography—has its roots not only in the camera’s use by women, but also in institutional and individual efforts to promote and define that use according to gender norms. Though the focus of this thesis is on the museum’s role in developing and reinforcing a gendered perspective on snapshot photography, it is impossible to discuss early characterizations of snapshots without exploring Kodak’s role in advertising and ultimately exhibiting cameras and photographs.

As I mentioned in my introduction, it is important that we consider snapshot photography both as a medium historically practiced by women and as one socially constructed as feminine. Throughout the last 120 years, women have actively used snapshot photography as a means of expressing individual and collective experience. Holland speaks eloquently of how “the affirmation of the everyday can itself reassert the coherence of women's memories.”³ By taking and using photographs—as additions to snapshot albums, as donations to museums and historians, as pieces of their personal memoirs—women have found the ability to work outside and even break down social structures that dismiss such work.

³ Patricia Holland, introduction to *Family Snaps*, edited by Jo Spence and Patricia Holland (London: Virago, 1991), 9.

This thesis, however, is less concerned with how women have historically produced snapshots than with how individuals and institutions (specifically museums) have constructed the discourse around snapshot photography through a gendered lens. By this I mean that, from the earliest days of snapshot photography, the practice and photographs themselves have been characterized using language traditionally tied to stereotypes of femininity. Just as society has deemed women *essentially* passive, naïve, and domestic, so it has deemed snapshots as well. Though the connection between femininity and snapshots may not always be explicitly stated, these imagined attributes help maintain the relationship in the public mind.

Below I will consider how this association developed and how snapshots and snapshot photographers were positioned (though not always of their own accord) specifically in opposition to other forms of photography and photographer roles. It is clear that those who created labels such as art photographer, photojournalist, and serious amateur, terms I will discuss at length later in this chapter, did so in part to set each apart from other categories. All of these photographers at some point described their work in opposition to snapshot photography, setting themselves apart from a feminized medium and reinforcing that feminization. Such a dichotomy, which I elaborate throughout this chapter, is key to my later discussion of how snapshots have ultimately been characterized within the framework of the museum.

Women of the Leisure Class:

Kodak's handheld No. 1 camera emerged in 1888 in the midst of the so-called "Gilded Age," a time when the notion of an American "leisure class" began to gain

traction among intellectuals and the general public. The camera became an integral part of a middle-class society finely attuned to the opportunities of a developing mass consumer market.

The snapshot camera, if not the instigator of these social changes, certainly became a key part of American middle-class life and leisure culture. “Photography,” said Pierre Bourdieu decades later, “is what one does on holiday, and also what makes a holiday. By capturing the image of the most insignificant places and moments, one transforms them into monuments to leisure, as the photograph is there to certify, for ever, that one has had leisure and the leisure to photograph it.”⁴ Using the camera, the middle and upper classes could produce evidence of their economic comfort, both through their purchasing power in buying the technology in the first place and through their ability to take time away from daily labor.

The rise of the New Woman throughout this era signified transformative change in the lives of middle- and upper-class American women. Embodied two-dimensionally in advertising by the Gibson Girl and later the Kodak Brownie Girl, this woman was independent, educated, healthy, and beautiful.⁵ Society remained ambivalent about a kind of New Womanhood that celebrated sexual permissiveness and threatened both the nuclear family and men’s role as breadwinner.⁶ Even as major components of the New Woman agenda became mainstream within the framework of the Progressive movement,

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 36.

⁵ Holly Pine Connor, “Not at Home: The Nineteenth-Century New Woman,” in *Off the Pedestal: New Women in the Art of Homer, Chase, and Sargent*, edited by Holly Pine Connor (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 4.

⁶ Evelyn Nesbit, the model for Charles Dana Gibson’s *The Eternal Question* (1905), personified public ambivalence toward the New Woman. As a beautiful, youthful Broadway performer, Nesbit took on new ideals of feminine fashion and freedom. However, when her enraged husband attempted to murder her lover, Nesbit finally overcame public censure only by playing the role of a loyal wife to an insane man. See Frank Cullen, *Vaudeville, Old & New: An Encyclopedia of Variety Performers in America, Volume 1* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 821-2.

for most women there remained socially and politically reinforced limitations on their new freedoms.⁷

For the first time, large numbers of women were able to question the notion of “separate spheres” that had kept men and women within rigidly defined social roles for generations. Respectable, middle-class women could be seen at theaters, in restaurants, and in the workplace. By 1900, about seventy-five percent of office typists and stenographers were women.⁸ Still, only about three percent of white, married women worked outside the home, and elite or leisure status was based at least in part on a man’s ability to provide a work-free existence for his wife. Veblen asserts that the delicate demeanor and features en vogue at this time were meant to demonstrate that a woman was “incapable of useful effort and must therefore be supported by her owner. She is useless and expensive, and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength.”⁹

Despite new strides toward independence, married women were also increasingly isolated in single-family homes, which by about 1890 became another important sign of leisure status. Historian Kenneth Jackson dates the emergence of a distinct suburban image in the United States to this decade,¹⁰ as urban Americans drew on older, largely British ideals of genteel country living to establish elite and middle-class residences

⁷ Charlotte J. Rich, *Transcending the New Woman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 3-4. As Rich discusses, it is also important to note that minorities and working class women often remained entirely absent from this public discourse, which “championed women’s rights yet [was] often blind to the privilege that allowed her to pursue that goal without first surmounting racial and economic oppression.”

⁸ Gail Collins, *America’s Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 244.

⁹ Veblen, 148-9.

¹⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 46.

outside the boundaries of the city.¹¹ From the moment of its availability on the market, the handheld camera became an accessible tool that new homeowners could use to record their domestic prosperity.

Women were also often expected to manage their family's finances, and a growing mass-consumer culture developed that aimed to make the responsibilities of purchasing for home, husband, and children more appealing as leisure activities in and of themselves. Department stores and the advertising industry grew rapidly, working in tandem to sell a world based on economic status and success. Middle class women were targeted as consumers because of their increased free time and their increased economic power within the home. As managers of the family's finances, these women were most likely to buy goods, the snapshot camera among them.¹² In this new object, specifically geared toward pleasure, they might find another tool that allowed them to reaffirm their social worth.

Though it is true that women responded enthusiastically to the handheld camera, we should remember the response was not inevitable or immediate, and that it was not until the second decade of their existence, when Kodak introduced the even more portable Brownie camera, that the brand and medium became the mass phenomenon we imagine today.¹³ It is difficult to overestimate the role of Kodak advertising in achieving this, and it is telling that Kodak beat out numerous competitors to become the quintessential snapshot camera company.

¹¹ Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 39.

¹² Patricia Vettel-Becker, *Shooting from the Hip: Photography, Masculinity, and Postwar America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 3.

¹³ Nancy West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 23.

Advertising to Women:

White, leisure class women were foremost in Kodak's mind while developing an effective advertising strategy, and advertisers were keenly aware of how they could exploit the factors I have discussed to sell cameras specifically to this demographic. Patricia Holland describes how Kodak envisioned female consumers as an "army of employees" for "this leisure activity of the home."¹⁴ As West says, "Intuiting that women would constitute the largest group of customers for Kodak products because of their supposed sentimentality, Eastman encouraged [Kodak advertising manager Lewis Bunnell] Jones to advertise extensively in [women's] magazines, urging the female consumer to see photography not only as a necessary component of domestic life but as an integral part of the world of fashion and feminine beauty."¹⁵

In short, Kodak advertisers preached that women who took snapshots were not only responsible wives and mothers, but also desirable young women prior to marriage. This attitude fit within trends in advertising for women: "Freedom was connected to leisure and romance; stability, to the family and the home...Whereas women had earlier produced the objects of their daily lives, now they were to buy them—from the objects that made them lovable (marriageable), to those that created a healthy family or a secure home life."¹⁶

Here we see the intersection of the camera and advertising's vision of the ideal female life. Young women could use their Kodaks to capture carefree moments with friends and lovers. Older, married women could use their cameras to capture domestic

¹⁴ Patricia Holland, "Personal Photographs and Popular Photography," in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2000), 138-9.

¹⁵ West, 32.

¹⁶ Carol Ascher, "Selling to Ms. Consumer," in *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives*, edited by Donald Lazere, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 50.

moments with their family or to bond with their children as they helped another generation learn to “push the button.” In this early Kodak world, there were no alternatives to this path for women; young, unmarried snapshoters did not become older, unmarried snapshoters. There were no black women, no poor women, no ugly women, only an archetypal figure of white femininity who followed a prescribed life path.



Figure 1: “The Kodak Story,” June, 1907, Kodak Advertising Collection, <http://www.eastmanhouse.org/inc/collections/Kodak-collection.php>; “The Baby’s Picture,” *Harper’s Magazine*, February, 1908. Kodak Advertising Collection, <http://www.eastmanhouse.org/inc/collections/Kodak-collection.php>.

For instance, figure 1 shows an advertisement of a woman snapping a photograph of a man fixing a car on the road below. The image evokes a narrative of romance and freedom, as the viewer is left to wonder about the nature of the relationship between this young woman and the automechanic, seemingly alone on a country road. As an illustration rather than a photograph, it suggests other girlish pastimes such as drawing or scrapbooking and effectively disassociates the camera from its technological or

complicated origins. Yet, the advertisement's text reinforces the woman's agency in this situation, as she can capture images "*from your point of view*—just as you see them." Here women are told they may easily and conveniently express themselves as individuals, albeit through their relationships to men.

In the advertisement at right, from about the same time, a mother takes a photograph of her baby. Here men are absent from the photograph, but "father's" presence is implicit. By featuring a photograph rather than an illustration, mothers are reminded of the perfect likenesses they will be able to take of their own children, shedding the girlish fantasies of the left image and replacing it with the responsible, maternal (but still joyful) ideal of the right. The text of this advertisement stresses mothers' obligation to take "home pictures" to "supplement more formal studio portraits." It even offers consumers a small book about the best way to take baby photographs; in short, where the first advertisement emphasized individuality, this emphasizes conformity.

What draws these advertisements together for generations of women is an adherence to a belief that women are technically and aesthetically ignorant. The Kodak slogan, "You push the button, we do the rest," has long epitomized the characterization of snapshotting as efficient, easy, and closely linked to the camera apparatus itself. "This new technology," says Holland, "was *gendered*. Its simplicity of operation indicated that the woman of the house could use it, while the chemicals and other technical paraphernalia could be left to the men."¹⁷ It is especially telling that the "we" in the Kodak slogan often referred to the group of working-class women who, though absent from Kodak advertisements, worked behind the scenes in photograph development and

¹⁷ Holland, "Personal Photographs," 143.

administration.¹⁸ Kodak advertisements reinforced the simplicity of taking photographs with the snapshot camera as the company simultaneously helped shape public conceptions of femininity.

Another advertisement features a beaming, fashionably dressed young woman, camera in hand (figure 2). The last two lines of text read: “And it is all so simple by the Kodak system that the merest novice can make good pictures from the start. Kodak has removed most of the opportunities for making mistakes.” By associating an image of a young woman with the position of “the merest novice,” Kodak uses her as “a symbol of the extraordinary ease of taking pictures (even [she] could achieve photographic success.”¹⁹ Rather than attributing the quality of this woman’s photographs to her own expertise or awareness of her surroundings, Kodak attributes the quality to the camera itself. Kodak’s advertisements conveyed a “persistent alliance between technological simplicity and femininity” and subsequently marketed their product to “someone interested in a hobby that required little or no expertise or intellectual effort.”²⁰

¹⁸ Judith Fryer Davidov, *Women’s Camera Work: Self/Body/Other in American Visual Culture* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 1998), 82.

¹⁹ Don Slater, “Consuming Snaps,” in *Family Snaps*, 54-5.

²⁰ West, 41.



Figure 2: Woman in a white dress/hat clutching her Kodak, June, 1908, Kodak Advertising Collection, <http://www.eastmanhouse.org/inc/collections/Kodak-collection.php>.

This advertisement is reminiscent of the late eighteenth-century French painter Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun and her *Self Portrait in a Straw Hat* (ca. 1782) below (figure 3). Both images portray artists holding the apparatuses of their work, but rather than serving as functional artistic tools, they become accessories, signifiers of a particular social niche and evidence of the women's buying power and leisure time. Both women stand serenely and passively open to our gaze, inviting us into the image with their own eyes. Positioned in decontextualized spaces, ambiguous, ethereal cloudscape, they become emblematic of the woman as artist, or perhaps simply of the woman as fashionable dabbler.

Unlike the woman we see in the advertisement, Vigée Le Brun painted her own self-portrait; nevertheless, we can imagine how she similarly constructed this image with a conscious desire to appeal to an artistic establishment with a vested interest in marginalizing her work. Vigée Le Brun, a close friend and portraitist of Marie Antoinette's, was the first woman admitted as a full member to the Royal Academy in Paris, though she had many enemies and remained confined primarily to the traditionally

feminized work of portraiture.²¹ A painting such as this, as well as the advertisement above, reveal a deeply embedded ambivalence felt toward the female artist in Western culture. Both simultaneously demonstrate a celebration of women’s artistic accomplishments as well as an awareness of prevailing gender norms that strove to limit women to a nonprofessional, “feminine” sphere.



Figure 3: Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Self-Portrait in a Straw Hat*, After 1782, Oil on canvas, 98 x 70 cm. National Gallery, London, UK.

Of course, to demonstrate effectively that notions of simplicity and ignorance were ascribed to women photographers, one must look at how early Kodak advertisements targeted male consumers. Judging by the etymology of the word “snapshot,” it seems that the practice was masculinized rather than feminized. The term was originally related to hunting in the nineteenth century, when it referred to a casual and quick shot.²²

²¹ Gita May, *Louise Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 42-43.

²² Snap-shot, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, http://dictionary.oed.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/cgi/entry/50228959?query_type=word&queryword=snapshot&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=uFQM-YnDTpq-10558&hilite=50228959 (February 25, 2009).

Advertisements positioned the camera as a replacement for the gun, asserting that men might reinforce their masculinity by “taking” their prey with a different, modern sort of snapshot (figure 4). This kind of image gained traction with those who modeled themselves after the hunter-explorer figure popularized during this era in the form of Theodore Roosevelt.²³ The advertisement reads “If you want it—take it—with a Kodak” and, at the bottom, “If it isn’t an Eastman, it isn’t a Kodak,” a slogan used not to assert the simplicity of the camera, but its authenticity.

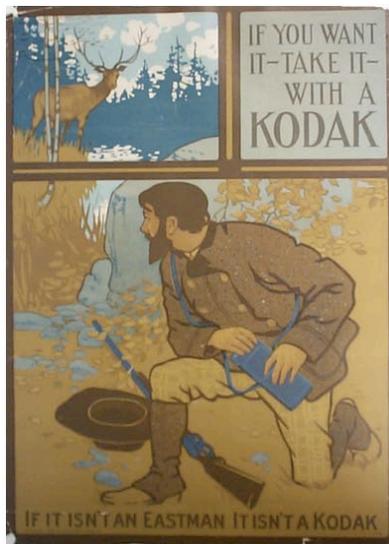


Figure 4: Hunter and a buck, “If you want it, take it with a Kodak,” 1900, Kodak Advertising Collection, <http://www.eastmanhouse.org/inc/collections/Kodak-collection.php>.

With the camera, men could apply the same skills they used while hunting; on the contrary, women were portrayed as “mere novices,” apparently prone to the mistakes Kodak claimed to prevent. Decades later, professional art photographer Walker Evans described his own work in such masculine terms, perhaps distancing himself from more domesticized practice when he “said of his photographs surreptitiously made on the New York subways in the late 1930s and early 1940s, ‘I am stalking, as in the hunt. What a

²³ Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” in *The Haraway Reader* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 171.

bagful to be taken home.’’²⁴ But I would argue that even at the turn of the century advertisements like this one were differentiating between snapshot photography, generally related to women, children, and the home, and amateur photography taken with a Kodak, generally related to male hobbyists. Where the former was relegated to the realm of sentimentality and naïveté, the latter was marked by awareness and technical knowledge. Kodak assured men they were buying a high-quality product that would allow them to take photographs stealthily, thereby emphasizing speed and efficiency rather than ease.

In reality, we can easily recognize the greatly varied ways in which men, women, and their families collaborated to produce a variety of images. It is true that the camera was an important tool for recording a leisure class existence, but we also have evidence that women captured more unusual images than girlish fantasies and familial bliss, and that men often took photographs of their families. But from the introduction of the handheld Kodak camera, we can also see how advertisements constructed messages that reinforced widely held notions of gender.

Kodak Exhibitions:

Despite a celebration of the medium as egalitarian, there has long been a tension that encouraged those who considered themselves “serious” photographers to distance their own work from the mass medium of snapshot photography. A great irony of snapshot culture is that while it is essentially popular, used in wide and varying ways by a diverse body of people, it is those who consider themselves as part of more elite groups

²⁴ Sarah Greenough, introduction to *The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2007. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2.

of photographers who most often have the opportunity to define snapshooting. Snapshot photography has long hovered on the periphery of worlds of photojournalism, amateur camera clubs, and professional art photography as both a niggling irritation that challenges the abilities of the skilled and a convenient scapegoat that allows skilled photographers to reinforce their own superiority by setting themselves apart from the snapshooting masses.

It is important that I lay out what I mean when I discuss the positions and roles played by various types of photographers. I have already begun to discuss how Kodak participated in a process of defining male and female photographers differently, and I will continue throughout this thesis to explore how art photographers, photojournalists, amateur photographers, and shooters have constructed boundaries around their practices. These are working definitions of malleable and complex roles, and part of my purpose here is to question and challenge their development.

The first two groups, art photographers and photojournalists, are certainly related in terms of their professionalism and their desire to produce images that demonstrate a keen awareness of technical and aesthetic technique, evoke emotion, and captivate an audience. A major difference between the two groups is that where art photographers envision themselves within a creative framework, where both subject and form may be ambiguous, photojournalists strive for a coherent narrative in their photographs. This need is closely related to the commercial aspects of photojournalism, where there is a demand for photographs that are both aesthetically sophisticated and quickly appeal to the everyday magazine or newspaper consumer.

The latter two categories, amateur photographers and snapshotters, are often mentioned interchangeably, but it is important for my purposes to distinguish between the two. When I discuss amateur photographers, I refer to those who consider photography a hobby, who may participate in camera clubs, follow technological developments, etc., but who do not consider themselves professional photographers. Certainly, snapshotters may be considered amateurs, but it is central to my thesis that the boundaries of the first three groups often rigidify in opposition to snapshotters. The definition of the snapshot photographer is, as I will discuss, something constantly in flux as people, though generally not those who consider themselves snapshotters, debate the role of the snapshot photograph in society.

Aside from snapshotters, I have defined the other three groups largely according to how they have historically self-identified. We can see how permeable boundaries between these groups may become, as professionals snap family photographs, journalists' work hangs in the art museum, and amateurs turn their work into a commercial enterprise. Such fluidity also allows us to see how arbitrary many of these lines are, as groups can more easily be separated by socially constructed factors than by an essentialist notion of their actual work.

It is clear that gender has played and continues to play an important, if often implicit, role in shaping each of these categories and in designating certain subjects or styles as inside or outside their respective boundaries. As I discussed above, from the beginning Kodak marketed its handheld cameras primarily to women while ascribing certain traits to their female consumers that generally set them outside the boundaries of amateur and professional groups. In 1897, less than a decade after releasing the No. 1,

Kodak began a series of exhibitions that played a critical role not only in beginning to form a photographic hierarchy, but also in gendering that hierarchy in order to privilege forms practiced predominantly by men.

Developed by photographer and Eastman employee George Davison, the first Kodak exhibition in 1897 posited that handheld Kodak cameras could create such high-quality photographs that even “eminent photographers,” including professionals and some serious amateurs, would be satisfied with the results.²⁵ “The exhibit,” said George Eastman, “is going to dispose of the idea that Kodaks cannot be used for the highest class of work.”²⁶

The strategy was largely successful, as people flocked to see about 230 Kodak photographs taken by photographers who had already become world famous—Alfred Stieglitz, J. Craig Annan, and several members of the British royal family. Also included were about six thousand photographs chosen from twenty-five thousand international submissions to an amateur photography contest held by Kodak, as well as two rooms of technical and equipment displays. In London, the original site, the exhibition created a “furor,” as about 24,700 people attended in only nineteen days.²⁷ This far surpassed attendance at the Royal Photographic Society exhibition that year and testified to the success of “kodakery” as a popular photographic medium.²⁸

In January 1898, a large portion of the London exhibition moved to the Academy of Design in New York. Reviews in newspapers and amateur photography magazines were universally positive, promoting this event as “the largest and most interesting

²⁵ *Kodak Portfolio: Souvenir of the Eastman Photographic Exhibition 1897, a Collection of Kodak Film Pictures by Eminent Photographers* (London: Eastman, 1897).

²⁶ Elizabeth Brayer, *George Eastman: A Biography* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1996), 172.

²⁷ “The Eastman Photographic Exhibition,” *Wilson’s Photographic Magazine*, 35 (1898): 89.

²⁸ Brayer, 172.

photographic exhibition ever held in America, as well as the biggest and most successful piece of photographic advertising so far attempted in this country.”²⁹

This exhibition reveals some ambivalence about the role of women in photography circles and specifically in “kodakery.” There was a clear emphasis on providing a large-scale forum for amateur photographers, but it is unclear how many examples of women’s work, domestic photography, or snapshots generally were included. The contest was widely advertised throughout 1897, but Kodak seems to have limited its advertisements to male-dominated publications, such as amateur photography magazines and trade publications, rather than the women’s magazines that featured so many of the company’s camera advertisements.³⁰ Holland notes that “amateur photography remained a more masculine pastime, scornful of the snapshot’s cheery refusal to concern itself with the complexities of the medium.”³¹ The inclusion of technical displays also seems to signify that this was not an exhibition for those who simply “pushed the button”; on the contrary, this was a place for serious amateurs and experts.

Unsurprisingly, the judges—Henry Peach Robinson, Andrew Pringle, and G.A. Storey—were all men, as well as pioneers in turn-of-the-century art photography and the pictorialist movement.³² *Camera Work*, edited by Alfred Stieglitz, a man internationally famous for his art photography and heavily involved in staging this exhibition, praised it as a triumph for pictorialism. This style, characterized by attention to aesthetics and

²⁹ “Eastman,” 89.

³⁰ See “Eastman,” 89; League of American Wheelmen, *Good Roads: Devoted to the Construction and Maintenance of Roads*, 26 (1897): 20, for examples of advertisements directed specifically toward male audiences.

³¹ Holland, “Personal Photographs,” 139.

³² “The Eastman Photographic Competition,” *Wilson’s Photographic Magazine*, 34 (1897): 565.

painterly techniques such as etching and soft focus, originated in Great Britain and was meant to more directly relate photography to the fine arts rather than the sciences.³³ The majority of the amateur prizes were for photographs from Europe and Great Britain rather than the United States, where pictorialism had not yet peaked, so we might assume most of the amateur photographs chosen appealed to the pictorial aesthetic.³⁴

Part of the reason it is necessary to guess at the contents or photographers of the six thousand amateur prints is that not one of them was included in the “souvenir book” that accompanied the exhibition. Here instead were fourteen photogravure reproductions of photographs included in the “loan” portion of the exhibition. Even the photographs submitted by the amateur women of the Royal family were excluded. The photographs were all taken with Kodak cameras and spanned a range of subjects, from portraiture to landscape to architecture.

The single photograph produced by a woman, “Portrait” by Miss Frances B. Johnston (figure 5), emphasizes respectability and fits within social norms around women’s photography that encouraged portraiture and other work that could be done indoors, preferably in the home alongside domestic work.³⁵ Apparently there was some conflict when Johnston wished to enter the amateur competition, but was told that because she was a professional photographer she could not do so. It was common even for relatively well-known female photographers at this time to call themselves amateurs, thereby eliding public censorship of the “masculinization of women” through professionalism and other aspects of New Womanhood. Eastman reported that Johnston

³³ John Taylor, “Pictorialism,” in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, edited by John Hannavy (Danvers, MA: CRC Press, 2008), 1126-30.

³⁴ “Eastman,” 89.

³⁵ C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 32.

was “penitent” when she was told her work would be displayed with the loan pieces instead and even included in the souvenir book, “so she got a good deal more than a prize in the exhibition.”³⁶ Though Eastman is correct that this option afforded Johnston significantly more exposure, the choice (probably made by Davison) of this photograph as the single representation of women’s photography certainly reinforced expectations of what such photographs should look like. While Johnston was not a snapshotter, it is important that those responsible for the exhibition set her up as the standard for aspiring women photographers.



Figure 5: Frances B. Johnston, “Portrait,” *Kodak Portfolio*, 12.

As Zakia says, it is clear that within just a few years after this premiere exhibition, professional art photographers began to distance themselves from practices, including amateur photography, they felt had become tainted by commercialism and populism.

³⁶ Brayer, 172.

While Stieglitz was “an early advocate of the hand camera as a creative tool,” just two years after the 1897 Kodak exhibition he worried that “the placing in the hands of the general public a means of making pictures with but little labor and requiring less knowledge has of necessity been followed by the production of millions of photographs. It is due to this fatal facility that photography as a picture-making medium has fallen into disrepute.”³⁷ By the early twentieth century, pictorialism was defined in part by its opposition to “the snapshot photographers who were criticized for being too unpretentious.” Pictorialists also took aim at commercial portraitists whose work they believe failed to live up to an artistic aesthetic. Many professional women of the era worked as portraitists since this subject was both practical and respectable for middle-class women, but their reliance on commerce over aesthetics earned them the same scorn afforded to shooters.³⁸

What is rarely mentioned, however, is that commercial photography companies like Kodak may have been almost as anxious to distance themselves from art photography that emphasized a keen sense of aesthetics. Between 1905 and 1910, Kodak again organized a series of exhibitions with photographs drawn from amateur submissions. These exhibitions traveled throughout the East and the Midwest, and Kodak made no excuses for their role as advertising tools as well as enjoyable and educational experiences.

Undergoing major ideological changes that I discuss in the following chapter, major art museums would break away from involvement with Kodak and other popular

³⁷ Qtd. in Richard Zakia, “Snapshot Photography,” in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, 1278.

³⁸ Brayer, 172. Brayer also points out that as modernism began to radically change photographic techniques around 1914, women who continued to use pictorial styles were criticized as sentimental and out of date.

companies in developing exhibitions for nearly half a century. The company's original role in advertising and exhibitions reveals the ease with which professional and amateur photographers might relegate snapshotters to a realm defined by femininity or even make them invisible entirely. The collaboration of Kodak, art photographers, and amateur photographers during this earlier era effectively forged a public understanding of the relationship between femininity and "lower" forms of photography. As we will see, such a characterization continued to affect museum exhibitions of snapshots in the twentieth century, and it is only over the course of the last decade that museums are beginning to critically challenge this discourse.

Exhibiting the Snapshot

The divisions within the world of photography continued to widen over the course of the twentieth century, particularly as art photographers and even photojournalists gained cultural cache through the display of their work in museums. In this chapter, I will examine how snapshot photography has historically been considered within the project of the modernist museum. I contend that issues of gender are inextricably related to the development of this institution and, in turn, to the development of attitudes toward snapshot photographs and those who produce them.

After analyzing the origins of the Western museum, particularly with regard to museological perspectives on gender, I will use this contextual framework to explore how the deeply set, gendered attitudes museums developed over time ultimately led to the exclusion of snapshots from prominent exhibitions. As we consider the relationship between snapshot photography and femininity, whether based in historical fact or social construction, it is of course necessary to remember how this relationship led to snapshots' almost total invisibility to the museum-going public. Such a lack of exhibition certainly reveals a museological bias against snapshots and other popular or outsider work as legitimate cultural products, and it forces us to carefully consider exceptions to rules that held fast throughout the vast majority of the twentieth century.

Here, I will examine three major exhibitions that have appeared in widely known and culturally influential museums over the course of the past sixty-five years. The first is perhaps also the first of its kind, a 1944 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art developed by Willard Morgan. The second is a 1977 exhibition by Ken Graves and Mitchell Payne at the Center for Creative Photography. The third, curated in 2002 at the

Metropolitan Museum of Art by Mia Fineman, is one example among a slew of snapshot exhibitions to appear over the course of the last decade.³⁹ However, I believe it offers a strong case study of how newer exhibitions may break with earlier approaches while retaining key notions of the essential nature of the snapshot. All of these exhibitions reveal an ambivalence about the role of snapshots in relation to other photographs, as they simultaneously acknowledge and marginalize the everyday work of the shooter.

Constructing Gender in the Museum

I see snapshot photography and its dynamic place within the walls of the museum as a strong example that might help shed light on how the museum has changed and continues to evolve as an institution. Snapshots are not easily categorized, and their relationship to feminized domestic space and to the “middle brow” have made their exhibition problematic for many curators. This is best demonstrated by the near total lack of snapshot exhibitions in prominent museums before the mid-1990s, almost one hundred years after the introduction of the Kodak camera. Just as the objects elites chose to include in museum collections defined their institutions, so too did the objects they chose to exclude. For the most part, the feminization of snapshots I described in the previous chapter has led to their exclusion from the museum. The exhibits I will discuss later in this chapter represent exceptions to this exclusion (though not necessarily to snapshots’ feminization) and demonstrate snapshots’ turbulent relationship with an institution based on its ties to elites and its firm separation from either domestic or working class settings.

³⁹ See also, for example, Greenough 2007; Marvin Heiferman, Geoffrey Batchen, Nancy Martha West, and Newark Museum, *Now Is Then: Snapshots from the Maresca Collection* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).

Western museological development in the modern age is one scholars have visited often, particularly as the field of museum studies has grown over the past two decades, so here I will only briefly discuss that development in order to provide a framework for my focus in this chapter and throughout the remainder of this thesis.⁴⁰ As critical awareness of museums and their role as historical gatekeepers of culture develop, it becomes increasingly important for us to consider how curators have presented museum content—the substance of that “culture”—in ways that complement contemporary social, economic, and aesthetic norms.

The Western museum has its roots in renaissance and early modern Europe in two major but distinctly different forms. The first, royal palace collections, originated as a relatively private arena in which the sovereign could represent his power and ability to have personal control over a national domain. The second, collections of curiosities, offered elites, including royalty but extending to aristocrats and the wealthy, the opportunity to form material representations of their own power. By collecting mementos of their own or others’ exotic experiences, of the grotesque, the fantastical, or the scientific, these men could demonstrate their own status as cultural agents.⁴¹ In both cases, individual male collectors set themselves up as powerful, almost god-like in their ability to harness knowledge in the form of paintings or artifacts.

The development of Enlightenment ideals, however, offered such individuals opportunities to foster collective notions about how these objects ought to be arranged, displayed, and catalogued. Though collectors gradually moved toward more explicit

⁴⁰ See Tony Bennett, *Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴¹ Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 19-27.

disciplinary frameworks for their collections, they took on similar categorical norms, in which pieces could be arranged chronologically, and then into subsets based on provenance, producer, etc. New attitudes toward the organization of museum artifacts and art were not arbitrary; on the contrary, they indicated a belief on the part of museum elites that such secular, “objective” frameworks could represent social progress.⁴²

As public museums such as the Louvre and the British Museum took shape, they relied on these methods of display to provide visitors with an educational experience, one that could “civilize” the masses by exposing them to supposedly timeless and universal objects presented as a progression of genius throughout history.⁴³ Museums in the United States followed suit and, like their European counterparts, sought to educate the public by “offering knowledge for passive consumption.”⁴⁴ Through the nineteenth century, education formed the major goal of the museum. For instance, art museums routinely presented plaster reproductions of famous sculptures, less concerned with the economic value of such pieces than with their didactic possibilities. Whether or not visitors were awed by the rarity of the object itself, they could be equally impressed by the rarity of creative genius inherent in the object. Even through reproductions, they could learn that “having good taste and culture meant seeing Greek sculpture with nothing but the predefined aesthetic of beauty.”⁴⁵

Such a methodology seems deceptively progressive, especially considering that women (including working class and middle class women) as well as men were typically

⁴² Bennett, 192.

⁴³ Alan Wallach, *Exhibiting Contradiction: Essays on the Art Museum in the United States* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 126.

⁴⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 190.

⁴⁵ Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: nation, gender, empire, and the cultures of travel* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 1996), 109.

allowed entrance to these institutions.⁴⁶ Still, Hooper-Greenhill points out how, despite inviting the public to learn from the cultural resources of the museum, ultimately museum leaders aimed to reify a sharp division between mind and body, and subsequently between masculinity (as embodied by elite men) and femininity (as embodied by women, children, and other marginalized groups):

The body was seen as a potential problem, to be set aside during learning, with the use of the senses perceived as a less reliable way of learning...Where the senses were acknowledged, they were problematic; it was sight and hearing that could perceive beauty, and touch, smell, and taste were insignificant. Social divisions and hierarchies were based on the mind-body dualism, with those whose lives were thought to be defined by bodily processes and activities, which included women, laborers and the disabled, being seen as of lesser value than those whose lives were defined by intellectual achievements.⁴⁷

As Hooper-Greenhill suggests, such a dichotomy represents not only an arbitrary prioritization of the mind over the body, but also a political move that maintained the interests of a select group of individuals and the institutions on which their status depended. By emphasizing “quiet contemplation” of the visual or aural, and shunning the other senses, museums were also instrumental in reinforcing divisions of power that suppressed alternative narratives. Perspectives of the cultural “other,” whether of actual women or others who were ascribed with “feminine” traits, were generally dismissed.

Though Hooper-Greenhill contributes here by framing her statement within the context of the museum’s history, the “mind-body dualism” she discusses has become one of the central concepts put forth for deconstruction in writings on feminism and gender. Judith Butler, for instance, traces the history of this conflict, particularly within feminism, and reaffirms the subtlety of gender bias by cautioning that “any uncritical reproduction

⁴⁶ Bennett, 31-33.

⁴⁷ Hooper-Greenhill 2007, 191.

of the mind/body distinction ought to be rethought for the implicit gender hierarchy that the distinction has conventionally produced, maintained, and rationalized.”⁴⁸ With regard to the museum, Butler’s assertion helps us understand how particular ideologies became institutionalized and continue to be “reproduced, maintained, and rationalized” even without conscious or conspiratorial motivations on the part of more recent administrators and curators.

Historian Tony Bennett speaks more specifically about the role of women envisioned in the developing museum as he discusses how museums encouraged them to attend in large part because of their supposedly “civilizing” capacities. If working and middle class women could persuade their husbands to join them in the museum, a new class of *men* might experience a sort of cultural—and, by implication, moral—improvement. Once lured there, men might be able to engage in contemplation and transcend their “low” roots. Their wives, though instruments of their husbands’ intellectual uplift, were only expected to passively consume exhibited objects as they would consume items in a department store. While they would certainly benefit from ideals of middle-class femininity put forth through the objects around them in both of these institutions, it was only in the museum that wives could aid their husbands in internalizing a “pure” or “intellectual” perspective quite separate from that of their daily existences.⁴⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century, museums turned away from primarily educational aims and began to resemble the form with which we remain most familiar

⁴⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 16-17. Also see Kathy Neustadt, “The Folkloristics of Licking,” *Journal of American Folklore* 107 (1994) for a discussion of the development of the mind-body dualism and ways it might be challenged.

⁴⁹ Bennett, 30-33.

today. The plaster casts and curiosities quickly disappeared as most museums shifted to become repositories not only of knowledge, but also of the world's economically valuable treasures. Alan Wallach asserts that this gradual transformation was not simply an ideological battle over "aesthetic or educational merit...but, rather, a question of the evolving needs of elites who controlled museums."⁵⁰ As the authenticity of museum collections became an issue as never before, elites could cultivate the already rarified atmosphere of the museum and promote their museums' collections as available—intellectually if not physically—only to those who could "naturally" appreciate them. Reaching out to the public was no longer an explicit goal of the museum.

But as museums became increasingly less concerned with popular taste or even "reformatory" uplift, simultaneously other institutions rose to the challenge of entertaining the masses, particularly targeting women as the embodiment of consumerism.⁵¹ In 1888, Kodak released the handheld No. 1 camera, introducing the opportunity for the public to produce photographs with greater efficiency and affordability. I would argue that the timing of these two events is more than coincidental. While a decrease in museum outreach was surely not a direct result of the Kodak phenomenon, it was a reaction against popular interests generally. As the public embraced a developing mass culture that allowed for the dissemination of news, music, and visual culture to wide audiences at minimal cost, the museum embraced authenticity, rarity, and economic value as priorities that could maintain its cultural power and elite status. Moreover, such priorities became integral to masculinist attitudes that pitted elite culture against mass culture. Vettel-Becker, for instance, cites Andreas Huyssen's

⁵⁰ Wallach, 49.

⁵¹ Bennett, 32.

discussion of the feminization of mass culture as it became associated with commercialism and a lack of creative integrity.⁵²

This basic understanding of how the museum has evolved in Western culture over the last four centuries, particularly with regard to gender, is essential to understanding how snapshot photography's relationship with this institution has developed. Long before the introduction of the snapshot, the museum had developed principles that favored the "museum-going, normatively gendered male."⁵³ Museums built their collections and attracted their audiences according to evolving ideals of power, education, economics, and aesthetics, all of which were intricately related to and to some extent determined by gender norms. The exhibitions I discuss below, while presented to the public in 1944, 1977, and 2002, all reflect the troubled, often ambivalent stance museums have taken with regard to the snapshot and the snapshotter.

MoMA & the American Snapshot (1944):

As I discussed in the previous chapter, a rigidly enforced distinction between high and low culture at the turn of the twentieth century left those who considered themselves art photographers with the burden of proving that their work belonged on the walls of the art museum. For Alfred Stieglitz and fellow pictorialists, this meant enthusiastically embracing the ideal of the art museum as a forum for creative genius and just as enthusiastically spurning the snapshotter for supposed lack of genius. "Do not," said Stieglitz, "fancy yourself an artist simply because you received a Kodak on Xmas

⁵² Vettel-Becker, 17.

⁵³ Grewal, 109.

morning.”⁵⁴ Sentiments like these became implicit in an idealization of the artist-photographer, a person who was thought to be able to separate himself from consumerism and the sentimentality of the family.⁵⁵

As the most influential and revered art photographer of his time, Stieglitz was able to wield careful control over the field in lasting ways, and perhaps nowhere have he and his work been more idolized than at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). It is here we begin to clearly see the intersection of museology and art photography, particularly how these fields’ masculinist emphases have affected the exhibition and characterization of snapshots. While Stieglitz and other photographers in the early 1900s generally accepted the possibility for women to become artists and express themselves creatively through photography, they could only conceive of this possibility if women were to integrate their work into a preconceived modernist, masculinist framework.⁵⁶

The Museum of Modern Art established its Department of Photography in 1936, just seven years after the museum’s founding. Beaumont Newhall took on the role of Director of Photography and quickly exhibited a small but crucially important series, *60 Photographs*. This exhibition asserted photography’s legitimacy as a fine art, and engaged in a discourse previously reserved for the history of Western painting and sculpture. The success of this exhibition spurred the creation of a department of photography and established MoMA’s role as the world’s arbiter of photographic taste. Newhall and collaborator Ansel Adams constructed this seminal exhibition—and

⁵⁴ Fineman, unpaginated.

⁵⁵ In his later 1960 study, Bourdieu specifically discusses the amateur photographer’s aversion to “the family cult” of photography as the method through which he distinguishes himself from the everyday snapshotter. See Bourdieu, 40.

⁵⁶ David A. Gerstner, *Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema* (Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2006), 133.

therefore the department itself—as one that could engage in “policing the artistic boundaries of photography.”⁵⁷ Newhall saw “each print [as] an individual personal expression.”⁵⁸ By embracing photography as a fine art worthy of exhibition and critical study, MoMA staff also asserted their authority to decide the criteria that would separate the photographic elite from all the rest. MoMA took control of the photographic canon, choosing photographers of the mid- and late-nineteenth century to stand alongside the newly conscious artists of the twentieth century.

The characterization of photographs as creative, aesthetically unique, painting-like objects has its roots in pictorialism and a conscious decision on the part of a small group of photographers to characterize their work in opposition to mass-produced snapshots.⁵⁹ However, as a museum MoMA’s existence ultimately depended on donations and high attendance, difficult to obtain through exhibitions that characterized photography in rarefied or solely formal terms that made it less accessible to audiences. This dilemma would ultimately end in Newhall’s resignation in 1947 and his replacement by Edward Steichen, a man who straddled the worlds of art photography and photojournalism and in 1958 exhibited the internationally famous *Family of Man* at MoMA.⁶⁰

Prior to this, in 1942-45, World War II called Newhall away from MoMA. Newhall’s wife, Nancy Newhall, took over the department in 1942. Her appointment was controversial because of her lack of formal curatorial experience. However, it seemed

⁵⁷ Vettel-Becker, 28.

⁵⁸ Christopher Phillips, “The Judgment Seat of Photography,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, edited by Richard Bolton (Boston: MIT Press, 1992), 21.

⁵⁹ Though by the 1930s, pictorialism itself was frequently disregarded as “feminine” and “antimodernist.” See Vettel-Becker, 27.

⁶⁰ Phillips, 23-24.

Nancy Newhall was bent on continuing her husband's work by upholding an ideal of the "master" photographer; one of her major projects, realized only on a small scale, was to exhibit a selection of Stieglitz photographs that would pay homage to the "father of photography."⁶¹ Steichen exhibited photographs celebrating the American war effort in 1942 and 1945, and Willard Morgan acted as director in 1943-44.⁶²

In many ways, Morgan's tenure at MoMA foreshadowed the radical changes in the department that would later occur under Steichen's directorship.⁶³ Though friends with the Newhalls, Morgan's approach to photography was decidedly more populist than theirs. Morgan himself was famous for popularizing the Leica 35-millimeter camera and founding Circle of Confusion, a camera club devoted to amateur 35-millimeter photography.⁶⁴ Though, as I discuss below, the original appeal and marketing target of the Leica were serious amateurs and photojournalists, Morgan clearly played an important role in popularizing what would become the mainstay of snapshot film up to today's age of digital photography.

While at MoMA, Morgan established the short-lived Center of Photography, best known for producing the exhibition *American Snapshot: An Exhibition of the Folk Art of the Camera* in 1944. As Terry Toedtemeier asserts in the catalog to the 2006 exhibition

⁶¹ Erin O'Toole, "Nancy Newhall and the Museum of Modern Art, 1942-1946," *Resource Library* (November 20, 2008), <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/8aa/8aa219.htm>.

⁶² Phillips notes 43

⁶³ There is still some question about how radical Steichen was in terms of welcoming popular culture into the museum. Though many of the photographs in *Family of Man* were taken from photojournalists, particularly from *Life* magazine, Vettel-Becker points out that the post-World War II prominence of photojournalism also signified further exclusion of women, who rarely took on roles as professional photographers.

⁶⁴ Richard Zakia, "Snapshot Photography," in *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography: Digital Imaging, Theory and Applications History and Science*, edited by Michael Peres (New York: Focal, 2007).347. A "circle of confusion" refers to a point of contact between light and the camera film. The image will be most sharply focused at the point where these circles are smallest, and out of focus if they become too large. Such a technical term emphasizes the group's relationship to serious amateur and professional photography.

Snapshot Chronicles, Morgan's exhibition "serves as a sort of benchmark or historic beginning point in the appreciation of the snapshot as an expressive medium by a major cultural institution."²³ Yet despite Toedtemeier's emphasis on its significance, even now there remains disagreement about the exhibition's level of success. O'Toole characterizes it as disastrous for MoMA, Morgan, and the Center of Photography. The exhibition, she says, was "lowbrow in the extreme" and "a great embarrassment to the museum."⁶⁵ Warren calls it "unsuccessful."⁶⁶ John Szarkowski remarks on its "banality" and lasting "damage [to] the reputation of the department" and Morgan's career.⁶⁷ Zakia is more evenhanded, as he points out that "not only was it unprecedented for its time, but the exhibition was also one of the best attended and, as might be expected, received a fair amount of criticism."⁶⁸ Considering the popularity of snapshot photography as a mass medium, it is likely that Zakia's assessment is more accurate; whereas Morgan's exhibition garnered little praise from the photographic establishment, it did please museum visitors.

Considering its sponsorship by no less an advertising powerhouse than Eastman-Kodak itself, the exhibition's popularity is unsurprising.⁶⁹ Such an explicit connection to the commercial world, now extremely common (if still controversial) in major museums, tainted the exhibition in the eyes of a museum and artistic establishment that emphasized the separation of commerce and creative expression.⁷⁰ For the exhibition, Morgan chose

⁶⁵ O'Toole, "Nancy Newhall."

⁶⁶ Lynne Warren, *Encyclopedia of Twentieth Century Photography* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1105.

⁶⁷ Qtd. in Zuromskis, 138. From John Szarkowski, *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid Century: At Home and Abroad* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 20.

⁶⁸ Zakia, 348.

⁶⁹ Zuromskis, 138.

⁷⁰ See Victoria D. Alexander, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship, and Management* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between contemporary museums and corporations.

about two hundred images, primarily from Kodak's collections of photographs that had been submitted for various competitions but had not won any major awards.

Jonathan Green asserts that *American Snapshot* “did not include a single vernacular snapshot but was made up of the idealized, family-centered photographs upon which Kodak and the other photographic manufacturers built their ads.”⁷¹ Like Szarkowski, Green seems to be pointing to the homogeneity present in the exhibition, which *insists* on a narrow interpretation of snapshot photography and prevents it from being confused with professional photography. Still, Green does not fully explain how he differentiates between “vernacular snapshots” and the “family-centered” photograph, and by failing to do this minimizes the important role home photographers, particularly women, played in both emulating and developing a Kodak-like ideal. By selecting images from Kodak, Morgan was of course limited to what photographers felt what was appropriate to submit, and eventually exhibited images he probably felt would be universally appealing—“a bridal couple dashing through a rain of rice” or “a young goat peering around a barn door.”⁷² As with Flickr today, images would be submitted with the knowledge that they should follow certain social norms and hold popular appeal. Harkening back to Kodak's 1897 exhibition, amateur photographers also likely used Kodak cameras to take more technologically sophisticated images that would not have been “vernacular” in the sense that they were not taken within an everyday social or domestic context. On the whole, while Green is probably correct that the overall

⁷¹ Jonathan Green, *American Photography: A Critical History, 1945 to the Present* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1984), 49.

⁷² Museum of Modern Art, “Snapshots Exhibited at Museum of Modern Art As Important American Folk Art,” press release, February 1944, 2.

impression of the exhibition held closely to Kodak's advertising imagery, there was also probably more diversity and photographic awareness than might have been apparent.

While Morgan clearly wished to break new ground in terms of photographic exhibitions, his exhibition simultaneously reinforces the ideal of the snapshot photograph as domestic and feminized. The title of the exhibition and Morgan's introduction to the exhibition catalog demonstrate his ambivalence: "The snapshot has become, in truth, a folk art, spontaneous, almost effortless, yet deeply expressive. It is an honest art, partly because it doesn't occur to the average snap shooter to look beyond reality, partly because the domain of the camera is in the world of things as they are, and partly because it is simply more trouble to make an untrue picture than a true picture. Above all, the folk art of the camera is unselfconscious. It may well be a highly significant form of self-expression, but the snapshooter doesn't think of it that way. He takes pictures merely because he likes to."⁷³

By labeling snapshot photography a "folk art," a medium shaped by those who are "honest" and "average," Morgan safely distances it from the work of art photography, and even from "serious" amateur photography. Morgan's assessment of snapshot photography fits with contemporary descriptions of folk culture, which often characterized the folk, outsider artist as "primitive" or "Other," unaware of and unconcerned with aesthetics and, more importantly, unfamiliar with the creative work of the established, insider artist. While the "folk" descriptor remains commonly used and is not typically meant as derogatory, Morgan's association between it and the "unselfconscious" picture taker perhaps unintentionally dismisses the agency of the snapshooter beyond a superficial understanding of how to snap any subject he or she

⁷³ Ibid.

finds appealing. Just a few years after Morgan's exhibition, Ansel Adams himself took great offense at the common characterization of *all* photography as "folk art," and subsequently introduced a photographic hierarchy that emphasized the dominance of creative photography and, unsurprisingly, placed the "record" of the snapshot below all the rest.⁷⁴ As Geoffrey Batchen suggests, "Vernacular photography is the absent presence that determines its medium's historical and physical identity; it is that thing that decides what proper photography is not."⁷⁵

Morgan's exhibition of snapshots clearly demonstrates that he sees the everyday snapshotter as "bound by commercial conventions," and his celebratory attitude toward the "honesty" of this medium seems to reflect a certain joy in its *lack* of creativity or artifice. Still, Morgan's appreciative discussion of snapshot photography necessarily complicates our interpretation of his perspective. Certainly, he does not, like Adams, spurn "folk art" or consider it beneath the "dignity" of the museum. On the contrary, this exhibition was his most well-known work during his time at MoMA, and it reflects his appreciation of the everyday snapshotter. Still, such appreciation was founded largely on the dichotomy the exhibition reinforced between professional photography and snapshot photography. Morgan may allow that snapshot photographs are "expressive," but he seems to see this quality as a byproduct of a process based on capturing "reality." He ultimately denies the everyday snapshotter the agency to engage in a meaningful or conscious process of social construction.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Boston: MIT Press, 2002), 59. While Batchen speaks more generally of vernacular work, the snapshot, often a domestic or vernacular form, was particularly useful for Adams and others to compare negatively against other forms of photography.

American Snapshots (1978)

In 1978, the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) at the University of Arizona reprised MoMA's original show with the almost identically titled *American Snapshots*, an exhibition of one hundred snapshots converted to silver gelatin prints (with a few exceptions in color film) and enlarged for the catalog and exhibition. For this project, Ken Graves knocked on doors across America to solicit snapshots, before culling the results to one hundred photographs. Though it is unknown precisely how the photographs were exhibited at the time, the majority of the photographs were recorded in the museum's archive and printed in the complementary book without comment, only the location and date of each snapshot. A few were titled according to the occasion or included a comment from the photographer or owner.⁷⁶

It seems telling that curators at both MoMA's Department of Photography and CCP chose to exhibit selections of snapshots during the earliest years of these institutions' existences. To be sure, from their founding both intended to promote the idea of a photographic canon on par with that of other fine arts, particularly painting. As I have described, MoMA's first exhibition of photography inscribed photographs from the mid-nineteenth century onward into a framework of artistic ingenuity rather than scientific skill or craftsmanship. CCP's founding came with the acquisition of the photographic archives of five canonical artists: Ansel Adams, Wynn Bullock, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind and Frederick Sommer.⁷⁷ Each of these men played a significant role in developing masculinist perspectives on photography in the mid-twentieth century,

⁷⁶ Ken Graves and Mitchell Payne, *American Snapshots* (Oakland, Calif.: Scrimshaw Press, 1977); "Group Exhibitions," Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, <http://www.creativephotography.org/documents/groupexh.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Looking back, we may note Ansel Adams's key role in developing *Sixty Photographs*, MoMA's premiere exhibition.

an era highly concerned with reinforcing gender norms that emphasized the male perspective.⁷⁸

Why, then, if both MoMA and CCP were deeply concerned with collecting and preserving canonical photography as their legacies, would these institutions choose to exhibit work so far outside that canon? While we have evidence that MoMA officials turned to Willard Morgan and later Edward Steichen as curators who could draw large audiences with exhibitions like *American Snapshots* and *Family of Man*, CCP's motivation is less clear. It certainly may also have been important to CCP officials to offer a popular perspective on photography; the next year saw another exhibition with popular appeal—*Evidence*, which presented criminology photographs within an aesthetic interpretive framework. The collection and exhibition of such images allowed CCP, an institution founded on the discourse and history of photography as well as the principles of artistic excellence, to broaden the diversity of its collection despite the more conservative nature of its core founding archives.

As Toedtemeier says of work like Graves and Payne's in *American Snapshots*, "Collectors report the appeal of snapshots as a seemingly never-ending source of contemplation, finding in their spontaneity and lack of edifice an honesty of expression and an aesthetic richness that kindles the imagination."⁷⁹ Exhibitions like the one at CCP and to some extent that at MoMA placed less emphasis on the creative expression of snapshotters than on curators' abilities to manipulate images and to present them as a

⁷⁸ For more in-depth discussions of the intersection between photography and masculinity during this era, see Vettel-Becker; Deborah Bright, "Of Mother Nature and Marlboro Men: An Inquiry into the Cultural Meanings of Landscape Photography," in *Contest of Meaning*; and John Pultz, "Harry Callahan, Modernist Photography, and Postwar Suburban Domesticity," in *A Fine Regard: Essays in Honor of Kirk Varnedoe*, edited by Patricia Berman and Gertje Utley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

⁷⁹ Toedtemeier, 188.

product of their own inspiration. Although Graves and Payne collected these images directly from individuals, their notes largely eschew contextual narrative in favor of universal titles—*Thanksgiving Day, Easter*—that impose a sense of universality on the familial experience. As the authors explain, “We were on a search for those pictures which were complete visual statements, needing neither explanation nor rationalization. We picked images which were extraordinary for us, relying on our own photographic intuition and sensitivity.”⁸⁰ Yet as with MoMA’s exhibition, it would seem that what makes the vast majority of these photographs “extraordinary” is both their inherent ordinariness, their ability to act as representative samples of the “lowliest and least honored...the simple households,” and their appeal to the trained curatorial eye.⁸¹

Considering that over three decades had passed since MoMA’s *American Snapshot*, Jean Shepherd’s introduction to the accompanying book, which has survived in public memory far longer than the original exhibition, is strikingly similar to Morgan’s: “What artistic results he [the snapshotter] obtains are almost inevitably accidental and totally without self-consciousness. Perhaps because of his very artlessness, and his very numbers, this nameless picture-taker may in the end be the truest and most valuable recorder of our times. He never edits; he never editorializes; he just snaps away and sends the film off to be developed, all the while innocently freezing forever the plain people of his time in all their lumpishness, their humanity, and their universality.”⁸²

Note here that while the author refers to the snapshot photographer with the generic pronoun “he,” Shepherd retains the notion of passivity originally linked to the

⁸⁰ Graves and Payne, 3.

⁸¹ Jean Shepherd, introduction to *American Snapshots*, edited by Ken Graves and Mitchell Payne (Oakland, Calif.: Scrimshaw Press, 1977).

⁸² *Ibid.*

female photographer. Like Morgan, Shepherd sees snapshot photography as a simply reflective medium, one that captures an essential truth about the subject because of the essential ignorance of the photographer. He too sees this as a “folk art,” bred of social habit and intuition rather than conscious social construction or creativity.⁸³ What is most striking about this is that Shepherd wrote these words in clear contradiction to the material Graves and Payne had gathered. A photographer’s statement included with one of the photographs, taken in Berkeley around 1916, reads “I had the negative retouched because we thought this girl's parents wouldn't like it—knowing she had been with all those men” (Figure 6).⁸⁴ Perhaps the curators chose this comical photograph and noted these words because they believed the statement captured the quirky provincialism of the average snapshot photographer, but they explicitly show how carefully snapshot photographers *have* “edited” and “editorialized” their work.



Figure 6: *Berkeley, Calif., About 1916*, Silver gelatin print, from Ken Graves and Mitchell Payne, *American Snapshots* (Oakland, Calif.: Scrimshaw Press, 1977), 31.

Again, we are presented with an exhibit that, like MoMA’s *American Snapshot*, simultaneously characterizes the snapshot as a legitimate museum object and as a

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Graves and Payne, 3.

feminized photographic medium. In the eyes of Graves, Payne, and Shepherd, the snapshot itself is “extraordinary,” but only when filtered through the curatorial and institutional gaze. Otherwise, they see the snapshot and the snapshotter as essentially passive, reflecting the world as it appears before them and unaware of its possible relevance or social or aesthetic significance. In the next section, we begin to see how these attitudes, which held sway for about a century of the snapshot’s existence, have begun to evolve even as old notions of what a snapshot can be persist.

Other Pictures *and the New Snapshot Exhibition*

CCP’s exhibition of snapshots and the resulting book helped lay the groundwork for a widespread interest by museums in the collection of vernacular photography. In the 1990s and early twenty-first century, multiple factors have contributed to the museum’s newfound positive attitude toward snapshot exhibitions. Collections of snapshots gleaned from flea markets, individuals, and even auction houses have multiplied exponentially, offering museums both a range of collections and a mediated focus that allows them to avoid actively sifting through millions of photographs themselves.⁸⁵ Since the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and curator Douglas Nickel presented *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life* in 1998, there have been at least nine other exhibitions of snapshot photography at well-known museums, three of them at what are among the most prestigious arts institutions in the United States. MoMA has not followed the herd of other museums to reprise its original exhibition from half a century ago.

⁸⁵ Sarah Greenough, Robert E. Jackson, and The National Gallery of Art, “Snapshot Collecting,” NGA Art Talk Website, October 2007, <http://www.nga.gov/podcasts/index.shtm>.

Catherine Zuromskis has discussed many of these exhibitions in some depth, and here I will only focus on one exhibit I consider critical as an example of how gendered attitudes toward snapshot photography have persisted even into the twenty-first century.⁸⁶ I will particularly consider the ways in which this exhibition characterizes the snapshot photographer, what it values about the snapshot photograph, and how these elements engage with the history of museological perspectives on the snapshot. Again, it is important to note that while I am focusing solely on this one medium, the snapshot remains one component of many in mass culture that have a similarly troubled relationship with the museum.

In the 2002 Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition *Other Pictures: Anonymous Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection*, curator Mia Fineman chose to explicitly emphasize the formal aspects of collector Thomas Walther's found photographs (Figure 6). The exhibition spanned from the 1910s to the 1960s, and all of the photographs were black and white prints, offering a sort of formal consistency despite the wide variety of content. In the exhibition catalog, there are almost no details provided for any of the photographs aside from the country of origin and the approximate date. The exhibition is made up largely of anomalous photographs; as Zuromskis suggests, "No one would confuse these images with the photographs from a family album. Their modernist aesthetic autonomy from their origins and from all that is socially and culturally familiar about the conventional snapshot genre is too overt; 'the art is there, plain as day.'" ⁸⁷ In other words, the relationship between these images and their domestic origins (as

⁸⁶ Catherine Zuromskis, "Intimate Exposures: The Private and Public Lives of Snapshot Photography" (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 2006), 183-233.

⁸⁷ Zuromskis, 196.

represented by the family album) has been severed in favor of a distinct aesthetic more appealing to modernist (and perhaps masculinist) tastes (Figure 7).

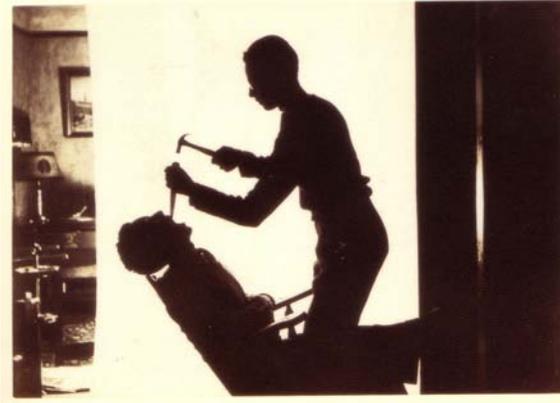


Figure 7: USA, Circa 1930, Silver gelatin print, Thomas Walther Collection, from Mia Fineman, *Other Pictures: Anonymous Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection* (Santa Fe: NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000).

Related to this shift in the exhibition of snapshots and more broadly in the museological power structure itself is the rise of cultural studies and postmodern perspectives. These have encouraged challenges to the aesthetic and historical canons that largely excluded work from nonprofessionals and therefore from women and other marginalized groups. The seemingly basic representation of previously ignored groups, most notably women, has allowed for an infinitely more nuanced discussion of all aspects of visual culture and how that work might be situated within the context of the museum.

Such theoretical paradigm shifts are affecting snapshot exhibitions like *Other Pictures* at a moment when technological advances in photography are necessarily transforming the ways in which we interpret the snapshot. Digital cameras have made analog snapshotting practically obsolete as a daily practice, and so printed snapshots take on a loftier role as they are incorporated into the realm of the historical past. Most exhibitions have stopped short of including digital contributions for the snapshot, perhaps seeing this phenomenon as an entirely different cultural product. Digital snapshotters

have the power to snap hundreds of images, immediately delete those they dislike, download, edit, and selectively share them. In short, digital snapshot photography allows photographers new agency regarding the types of images they create and present publicly.

I do not mean to necessarily celebrate technological advancement in photography here; rather, I want to emphasize how such exhibitions implicitly differentiate between the snapshotter of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the Met's exhibition and others have been described as "nostalgic" for a rapidly disappearing art form, it seems such nostalgia goes deeper to a longing look back at a different kind of artist-producer as well. Walther and Fineman exclude today's photographers, who they might consider technologically savvy and capable of carefully constructing a self-image. Instead, they choose in favor of photographers whose supposedly deft mimicry or lack of technological skill encourage audiences to see that "the 'genius' is the collector or curator, not the actual producer of the image."⁸⁸

Fineman points out that "part of the reason these photographs lend themselves so easily to the game of canonical mix and match is the photographic naifs who made them were not always as naïve as we might like to believe—most amateur photographers are neither noble nor savage, and they tend to absorb the styles and traditions of mainstream art photography like sponges."⁸⁹ Fineman seems to group amateur photographers and snapshotters, groups that have often overlapped but have also experienced tension as self-identified amateurs have struggled to distance themselves from the supposedly casual

⁸⁸ Zuromskis, 197.

⁸⁹ Fineman, unpaginated.

nature of the snapshot. While Fineman breaks with earlier work I have discussed that refused to allow for the agency of the lay photographer in consciously engaging with visual culture, she continues to see snapshots as simply reflective of high culture. Implicit in her interpretation of these few chosen photographs is the idea that while these “accidental masterpieces” hearken to the masters of fine art, their producers do not have the artistic or social consciousness to critically interpret such work or to draw from a host of other sources of inspiration.

Zuromskis’s major criticism of *Other Pictures* is that while it seemingly opens up the elitist standards of the museum to popular work, it is actually only incorporating snapshot photographs into the modernist project of the museum. Stripped from their historical and social contexts, chosen by prominent art collectors, artists, or curators, and exhibited according to museological conventions, these photographs are made to fit within formal aesthetic frameworks.⁹⁰ Fineman’s approach, like earlier exhibitions I have discussed, demonstrates an ambivalence about the snapshot and the snapshotter and reinforces static visual standards without considering how snapshot photography might challenge such standards. Still, this exhibition represents a willingness to reconsider the value of the snapshot and offers interesting and complicated images that reveal another perspective on snapshot photography and its relationship to fine art. Fineman’s characterizations of snapshots contrast in some respects with earlier interpretations, and the Met’s exhibition slightly opens the cultural gate to allow “the most prolific and eclectic artist of this century: *Photographer Unknown*” to take on that role of “artist”

⁹⁰ Zuromskis, 210.

rather than, as before, defining the “real” artist through the snapshooter’s *lack* of artistry.⁹¹

Zuromskis does not offer a coherent solution to what she sees as this fundamental problem that persists even in recent exhibitions of snapshots, but she introduces an important challenge to present-day curators that this thesis works to build on by using the lens of gender. How can museums that choose to exhibit snapshots remain mindful of their original sociocultural contexts in ways that shed light on the often overlooked narratives of those who originally created them? How can these exhibitions break with interpretive frameworks that feminize the snapshot as either “an utterly unmediated, instinctual approach to image-making” or a simple reflection of other, “higher” visual culture?⁹²

⁹¹ Fineman, unpaginated.

⁹² Zuromskis, 193.

Recontextualizing the Snapshot

It is impossible for us to know whether the current emphasis on the vernacular photograph is an ephemeral trend, emerging only as curators, collectors, and the public become aware of digital photography superceding the ubiquitous material form of the snapshot. Nevertheless, the snapshot has become an increasingly common sight in museums of all varieties and sizes, and it has done so at a moment when the institution itself, as well as the discourse around it, has begun to enter a new phase of redefinition. The aim of this chapter is to explore how recent snapshot exhibitions fit within the increasingly inclusive sphere of the museum. Continuing this thesis's concern with snapshots' inextricable ties to gender, I assert that exhibitions of the medium both reflect changing underlying attitudes about museum content and purpose just as they also help constitute such change.

In the previous chapters, I have discussed snapshot exhibitions within the sociohistorical context and museological practices of their times, specifically how gendered attitudes toward the snapshot have consistently colored such exhibitions. While Chapter 2 particularly focuses on curatorial ambivalence toward the snapshot and its historically uncomfortable place within the museum, this chapter will begin to explore exhibitions that "make room" for the snapshot as a legitimate medium of artistic production and the snaphooter as, if not necessarily an "artist," then certainly a legitimate, conscious producer with individual agency. As in the previous chapter, I will begin with a discussion of museological background, now focusing on how museums are increasingly fostering environments that legitimize snapshots and other work historically

dismissed as “feminine” or “other,” not only as objects worthy of inclusion *in spite of* their cultural context but rather *because of* that context.

I will continue by presenting two important exhibitions that represent a shift in the discourse and visual display of snapshots. These exhibitions are not radically different from other exhibitions I have discussed. After all, the exhibition of snapshots for public view by respected institutions has historically been remarkable, and museums that choose to present this and other vernacular work all represent a common belief in its importance, however their perspectives may differ. The exhibitions I discuss in this chapter, however, are particularly strong examples of a push toward more fully representing the contexts in which snapshot photographs have been made and of their pervasive cultural significance.

Developing the Post-Museum

While developing an exhibition of snapshot photographs drawn from the albums and shoeboxes of working women, Patricia Holland expressed surprise at the number of women who considered their snapshots as trivial or uninteresting. Where Holland saw images that shed light on the realities of individual women’s lives in mid-century Britain, contributors saw themselves and their colleagues as unremarkable players in an ordinary narrative. However, Holland continued soliciting photographs from schools, nursing homes, and families, and started collecting visual and oral stories. Witnessing her interest and ultimately an entire exhibition made up of these stories, these women began to see how the scenes they had chosen to photograph revealed shared experience and the

importance of their testimony. These photographs, meant originally only to add visual interest to the exhibition, quickly became its core mode of storytelling.⁹³

Though a simple example of the increased recognition of snapshots and their makers, Holland's experience is representative of a broader trend in museums that leads curators to develop exhibitions by engaging with members of the community, whether that community is geographically local or only "imagined." Such exhibitions subsequently foster a museum environment that, while didactic and inclusive in ways that echo the museums of the nineteenth century, begin to subvert the authoritative role of the museum as audience members simultaneously become stakeholders. Moving beyond simple inclusion of women or the presentation of snapshots, Holland integrates personal experience into a public acknowledgment of both the value of these images and the individual lives behind them.

While Holland deals quite literally with women's lives, a broader reading of her exhibition, as well as those discussed more fully below, leads us to consider the development of what Eilean Hooper-Greenhill terms the "post-museum."⁹⁴

One of the key dimensions of the emerging post-museum is a more sophisticated understanding of the complex relationships between culture, communication, learning and identity that will support a new approach to museum audiences; a second basic element is the promotion of a more egalitarian and just society; and linked to these is an acceptance that culture works to represent, reproduce and constitute self-identities and that this entails a sense of social and ethical responsibility.⁹⁵

It is impossible, of course, to encompass the myriad strategies today's museums are using to develop exhibitions and promote them to new demographics. What Hooper-

⁹³ Holland, 9.

⁹⁴ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Museum Meanings Series (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

⁹⁵ Hooper-Greenhill 2007, 1.

Greenhill's definition and her promotion of the post-museum offers is a broad articulation of the ways that museums can engage with practical applications of postmodernist and postcolonialist theories that have developed over the past several decades. As I have discussed, many historians see the museum as an inherently modernist project. They may even believe that the postmodern museum is an anachronism, as an embrace of postmodernism would signal the downfall of an institution founded on "bourgeois hegemony" and "the marginalization of resistance."⁹⁶ As compelling as such theoretical arguments may be, they often fail to recognize the potential of the museum as an exhibition space, forum, and community center that may actually be shaped by multiple stakeholders. Far beyond demanding simple representation of female, nonwhite or nonelite constituencies, new museum scholarship calls for a reevaluation of *how* such groups "constitute self-identities" through their museum experience.

What is critical here is not necessarily the term "post-museum" itself but rather an understanding that museums are self-critiquing and rapidly changing. Hooper-Greenhill offers the most flexible and realistic assessment of how museums may undergo this transformation without sacrificing their educational mission or cultural significance. Such broadly significant questions are far beyond the scope of this paper. However, when we consider how museums are defined according to their collections, and how they choose to present social and cultural narratives to their audiences, we can begin to see how important the integration of snapshot photography may be to the development of a new kind of museum. Hooper-Greenhill also asserts that the focus of the post-museum will be on shifting approaches to how we use collections rather than collecting itself. She may be correct, but by collecting and exhibiting snapshots and other vernacular work, museums

⁹⁶ See particularly Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 303, 318.

are fundamentally questioning distinctions between art forms, including the photographic hierarchy (including professionals, photojournalists, amateurs, and snapshooters), and helping visitors understand art through a multifaceted lens of aesthetics and cultural history. By collecting snapshots, museums simultaneously acknowledge their worth and challenge audiences about what is artistically valuable.

Most relevant to my contention that notions of gender are inextricably linked to characterizations of snapshots in the museum and beyond is Hooper-Greenhill's assertion that "the development of the post-museum will represent a feminization of the museum. Rather than upholding the values of objectivity, rationality, order and distance, the post-museum will negotiate responsiveness, encourage mutually nurturing partnerships, and celebrate diversity."⁹⁷

Hooper-Greenhill is keenly aware of the opportunities offered by the post-museum for the introduction of oppositional knowledge and the reevaluation of artists and collections originally conceived within a modernist framework. She is correct that the museum has begun to shift, becoming an institution that values emotion, interaction, and formerly marginalized narratives. She also notes that it may be non-European locations, many that have long been marginalized in the West as supposedly "feminine," that most successfully transform the museum, though I am most concerned here with the outsider experiences captured by those who primarily came from Western cultures.⁹⁸ By embracing these values, museums may not only exhibit snapshots, but also exhibit them in ways that legitimize the people who made them, allow for multisensory engagement

⁹⁷ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, "Interpretive Communities, Strategies, and Repertoires," in *Museums and Their Communities*, edited by Sheila Watson (New York: Routledge, 2007), 82.

⁹⁸ Though Hooper-Greenhill only says that the post-museum may be developed outside Europe, it is also interesting to consider ways that social "outsiders"—women, immigrants, the disabled, etc.—might take nontraditional or non-Western stances within European or American geographic spaces.

(such as touching objects or hearing narratives as well as seeing images or reading texts), and showcase the diversity of experience represented in these snaps.

Still, Hooper-Greenhill does not adequately differentiate between an essentialist notion of femininity and a construction of femininity developed culturally over time. By implying that we might define femininity in direct *opposition* to values such as rationality, order, and distance, she falls into the trap Butler cautions against by reinforcing a masculine/feminine binary that essentializes these traits as the purview of men. Though she may not intend to limit women to descriptors such as “responsive” and “nurturing,” Hooper-Greenhill effectively assigns femininity precisely the role society has traditionally assigned it—that of the sensitive corrective to a sort of masculinist critical objectivity. While her major point is critical in its analysis of how the museum is beginning to change, it would be more effective to challenge this gendered binary by exploring how these traits came to be associated with femininity.

In my first chapter, I discussed such an essentialization of snapshot photography as a “domestic” art, one associated with family, home, and femininity. Throughout this thesis I have tried not to deny the relationship between home and photography, but to complicate it in order to show how the snapshot’s gendered status has affected its exhibition in the American museum. Recent exhibitions highlighting the snapshot photograph as an artistic and cultural form take a variety of perspectives on its place within the history of art and on what sort of creative authorship drives snapshooting. Is a snapshot the product of a visual consumer, naively and undiscerningly snapping pictures, or is it the product of an artist, consciously shooting photographs that maintain or challenge cultural norms? How can museums exhibit snapshot photographs in new ways

that neither relegate them to the arena of the feminized innocent nor appropriate them within a modernist, masculinist aesthetic?

Interdisciplinarity offers a key component of the solution to these challenges; as museums reconsider their mission and relationship to their audience, they must also consider how their collections and interpretations of those collections have formed. Holland's exhibition, shown within the context of the history museum, recognizes the power of the visual as more than illustrative or symbolic. As in Holland's exhibition, museum displays are moving beyond presenting photographs and visual materials that merely supplement textual narratives. In the art museum, curators have increasingly chosen to couch their exhibitions within sociocultural frameworks that emphasize pieces' production and role in the lives of their makers, consumers, and audiences.⁹⁹ This approach may incorporate cultural studies, gender studies, science and technology, and a host of other fields to shed light on the development of visual culture, including the vernacular, outsider art, and more established forms. The choice to include work such as snapshot photography, as well as the willingness I discuss below to explore that work from a variety of perspectives, may represent an increased awareness of the constructed nature of the museum, the roots of its discipline-based structure, and ways it may be evolving to appeal to a wider variety of audiences than ever before.

Below, I will further explore questions I have introduced about the nature of today's museum from the perspective of two exhibitions presented to the public within the last four years. As in the previous chapter, these exhibitions are only two of many that have recently been developed. They come somewhat later than exhibitions such as *Other*

⁹⁹ See, for example, Judith A. Barter, *Apostles of Beauty: Arts and Crafts from Britain to Chicago* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2010).

Pictures and benefit from the growing interest in these exhibitions over the past decade, but it remains difficult to tell if their shared emphasis on social history and the experience of the individual snapshotter will remain the norm. Regardless, they remain case studies of ways that museological interpretations of snapshots may have broader implications for museums and their audiences.

Connected Images: Exhibiting Scrapbooks

Holland notes that “as with other marginalized groups, forms which are themselves marginal, impure, apparently trivial have offered ways of seeing the past which insist on linking the personal with the political, the mundane with the great event, the trivial within the important. Blurring the boundaries between personal reminiscence, history and fantasy, using popular entertainment, reading official histories between the lines and against the grain, these exploratory styles fit easily with the *bricolage* and loose ends of the family album.”¹⁰⁰ In 2006, the Douglas M. Cooley Memorial Gallery at Reed College embraced the “apparently trivial” form of the snapshot album with its exhibition *Snapshot Chronicles: Inventing the American Photo Album*, made up of works from the collection of Barbara Levine.¹⁰¹

This exhibition marks a striking shift away from, and perhaps even a reaction against, earlier exhibitions of snapshots and other vernacular photography. Curator Stephanie Snyder chose to present full photo albums and album pages and even used

¹⁰⁰ Holland, 9.

¹⁰¹ It is telling that of all the exhibitions I have discussed so far, *Snapshot Chronicles* is the one exhibition that left the context of the art museum by traveling to the San Francisco Public Library. Installed here during the centennial of the massively destructive 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the exhibition took on special historical significance because it included scrapbooks with snapshots capturing the aftermath of the earthquake at its centennial anniversary.

sound and “virtual albums” to “create an immersive experience for the viewer.”¹⁰² These albums still come from a single collector who deemed them exceptional in some way, but the exhibition recognizes the contexts in which they were produced and the interplay between individual photographs, texts, and the editorial/curatorial choices of the snapshotters and album makers themselves. Snyder also recognizes, more than in any previous exhibition, the role of the photographer and album maker in individually constructing his or her own world view (Figure 8).

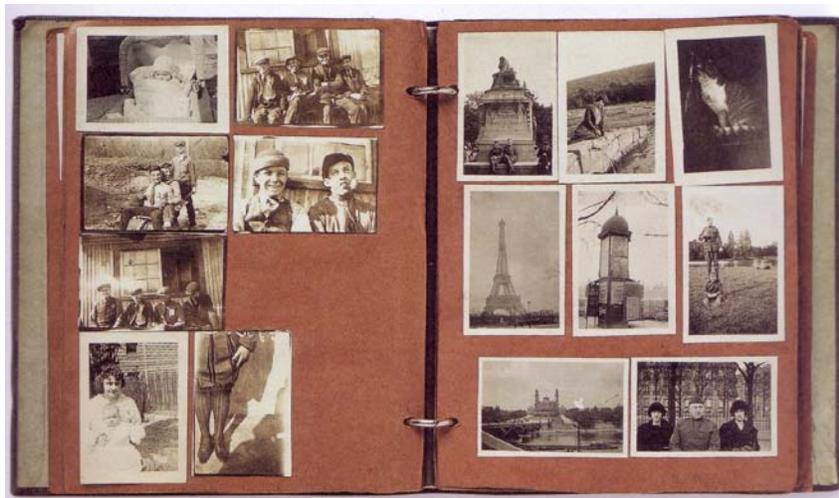


Figure 8: *Wilbur Knies, 1918*, Barbara Levine Collection, from *Snapshot Chronicles*, 6.

As the curators of this show, Snyder and Levine have the benefit of finding much more context in their chosen objects than curators of exhibitions of individual, anonymous snapshots. Toedtemeier notes that “an album provides insight into the interests and aesthetic sensibilities of its maker or makers. Extracting an individual snapshot from an album, for whatever reasons, is to remove it from this interesting and informative context.”¹⁰³ Unlike single snapshots, scrapbooks offer increased familiarity as we can

¹⁰² Stephanie Snyder, introduction to *Snapshot Chronicles: Inventing the American Photo Album*, Barbara Levine, Stephanie Snyder, Douglas M. Cooley Memorial Gallery (New York: Princeton Architectural Press; Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, 2006), 13.

¹⁰³ Toedtemeier, 188.

often piece together at least a glimpse at the maker's life and his or her intentions in assembling the album.

However, it is much more than this choice to feature scrapbooks that changes the way audiences may perceive the images inside them. In striking opposition to work I have discussed in the previous two chapters, Snyder has presented and written about this exhibition in ways that emphasize the agency of snapshooters, particularly conveying early female photographers as aware of image-making strategies and the technological abilities of their Kodak cameras.¹⁰⁴ While I cannot completely agree with Snyder's assertion that Kodak actively encouraged such technological skill in female customers through its advertising, it is true that did release instructional manuals geared toward women and that many women as well as men were knowledgeable of the technology behind their camera. What is most important is Snyder's understanding that even as they took snapshots within the marginalized space of the home, women found the ability to personally construct their own narratives while recording and even commenting on their surroundings. As Val Williams notes, "Notions and expectations of domesticity and professionalism have been of greater concern to women artists than they have been to men, for it is the collision of family and artistic practice that has more acutely affected women... This is not to re-annex domestic photography from the naïve to the feminine, but rather to register the centrality of the family to much of women's photography."¹⁰⁵

Snyder also moves beyond the direct relationship between women and the camera to suggest more generally that the snapshot photograph cannot always be feminized as

¹⁰⁴ Snyder, 30.

¹⁰⁵ Val Williams, "Carefully Creating an Idyll: Vanessa Bell and Snapshot Photography, 1907-1946," in *Family Snaps*, 186.

innocent, naïve, unskilled, or unpremeditated. On the contrary, Snyder views many snapshots as revelatory in terms of the process behind and purpose of image making: “Snap shooters consistently captured themselves in the act of image making, posing with their cameras. Such images functioned as proof of the photographer’s authorship and competence, and as evidence of the individual’s agency in a world increasingly organized by visual signs.”¹⁰⁶

Though it is difficult to gauge the precise number of scrapbooks that have been exhibited, they are certainly common in the collections of museums and libraries throughout Europe and the United States. Many of these take on particular significance because of their makers, sometimes well-known artists such as Andy Warhol or Hannah Hoch. Exhibitions wholly devoted to scrapbooks tend to highlight these notable figures’ often personal work as a way to gain added insight into their public work. While important in their own right, such exhibitions cannot fully engage with this visual art form as something much more pervasive and widespread.

It need hardly be said that, perhaps to an even greater degree than with snapshots alone, scrapbooks have historically been linked with women. Snyder notes that “photography’s technical origins were decidedly masculine, but the material antecedents of the vernacular photo album were clearly feminine: emerging out of the traditions of the Victorian scrapbook, folk art, and home craft...these albums flourished in the domestic margins.”¹⁰⁷ As I discussed in the first chapter, the rise of consumer culture proved hugely important in not only the realities of women’s daily lives, but also in public perceptions of their lives. Snyder and historians such as Ellen Gruber-Garvey have

¹⁰⁶ Snyder, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 29, 11.

discussed the critical role of advertising and media in scrapbooking activities; by the latter half of the nineteenth century, scrapbookers could draw from numerous inexpensive or even free sources to adorn their books.¹⁰⁸ Tucker notes that “the scrapbooks of these avaricious Victorian consumers prove that they were not passive or defenseless in the face of advertising and the proliferation of goods,” but rather that they could assemble and manipulate products of a mass visual culture to suit individual desires and needs.¹⁰⁹ Though many were already incorporating studio portraits into their scrapbooks by the 1880s, the introduction of the snapshot offered a more flexible, casual way to include photography.

Scrapbooking (and the snapshotting associated with photograph albums) was and remains associated with women for more than just imagined or publicly perceived reasons. However, Buckler, Ott, and Tucker reemphasize my assertion that it is the feminization of the snapshot and related vernacular culture that has generally kept it from being a prominent part of museum exhibitions, particularly in the fine arts. As they say, “Scrapbook and album making was considered a female activity, linked to traditional female concerns of holding families together and preserving nostalgic items. However, this may well be a misperception, a product of the language used to define male and female activity and the gender fault line between leisure and work.” They suggest a broader interpretation of the everyday scrapbooker that includes artists, antiquarians, and even those who have kept financial ledgers, thereby integrating the home or personal

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 30; “Scrapbook, Wishbook, Prayerbook: Trade-Card Scrapbooks and the Missionary Work of Advertising,” in *The Scrapbook in American Life*, 97-115.

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Buckler, Katherine Ott, & Susan Tucker, introduction to *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 17.

photograph album within a broader, more complex spectrum of work and self-expression.¹¹⁰

Authorship is difficult to pinpoint in generally anonymous books, but *Snapshot Chronicles* explores scrapbooks' and snapshots' potential to serve as varying manifestations of masculinity as well as femininity. Several of these albums prominently feature men's experiences in war, particularly World War I, and blend the day-to-day events of battle with intensely personal moments and characters. An album entitled "Sailor's Log" from 1933 chronicles one man's experiences during a tour of duty on board the U.S.S. Neches. Early photographs feature images of the man's commanding officer and practice maneuvers, but other pages focus more on the personal interactions of these men outside, or perhaps on the margins, of the military. One photograph, titled "King Neptune's Domain," verges on the homoerotic in its depiction of sailors swimming together in a giant pool (Figure 9).¹¹¹ The scrapbooker describes this scene as a rite of passage for sailors crossing the equator for the first time, and his contextualization of the image as a sort of game helps us better understand a depiction of the complex, intimate relationships men might develop, their leisure time offering personal relationships in striking contrast to the impersonal framework imposed on military duty. An essay by Matthew Stadler in the exhibition catalog explores a scrapbook with photographs chronicling the experiences of loggers. The photographs in these albums, according to Stadler, "have conjured a tremendously pliable and risible ecology of gender, one distinct from more rigid codes of high art or society."¹¹² Using the supposedly "feminine" context of snapshot photography and the snapshot album, both men and women could redefine

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹¹ Snyder and Levine, 126-31.

¹¹² "A Pose Between Stillness and Motion," in *Snapshot Chronicles*, 176-7.

gender and sexuality on their own terms, a creative process *Snapshot Chronicles* recognizes and probes.

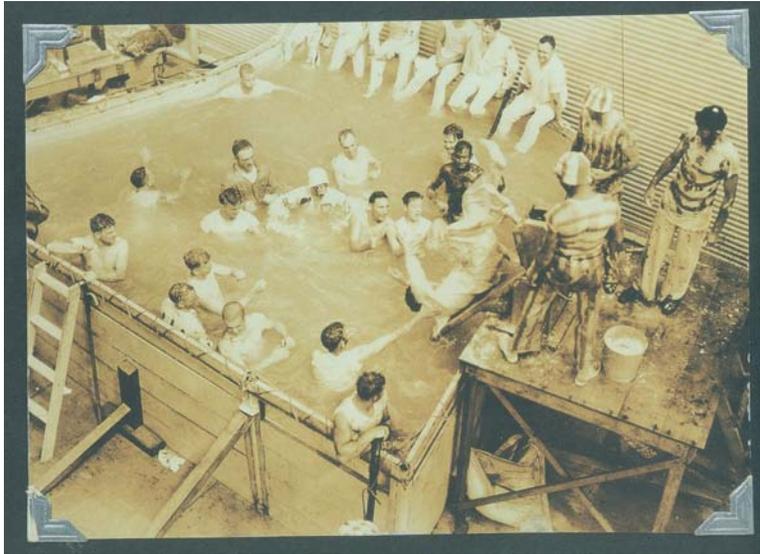


Figure 9: “*King Neptune*,” 1933, Barbara Levine Collection, in *Snapshot Chronicles*, 130.

This exhibition offers some alternatives to display methods that have gradually come to be typical of the modernist art museum. Again, these methods are not radical, but rather gradual steps toward audiences’ increased interaction and identification with snapshots as familiar, everyday objects that may nevertheless be perceived as culturally and even artistically significant. As audiences enter the gallery space, they are able to see individual scrapbook pages and full books that maintain the original intent of their creator, at least in how photographs are arranged. Displayed in glass cases, these scrapbooks are elevated to the status of precious cultural artifacts even as they are recognized for their intensely personal sense of individualism (Figure 10).



Figure 10: *Installation view of Snapshot Chronicles exhibition at Reed College, 2006,* http://www.projectb.com/browse/exhibition_services.

In part because of the difficulty of conserving and preserving three-dimensional objects, museums and libraries often choose to disassemble scrapbooks and store and maintain individual pages or even individual photographs.¹¹³ While these methods may be practical, they do not sufficiently consider the individual agency of the scrapbook's maker, the contextualized meanings of the snapshots, or the ways in which audiences may be able to relate to what is on display. Glenn Willumson, for instance, specifically discusses two of photographer Carleton Watkins's scrapbooks of images he produced featuring the American West. Sold by the University Club, a New York City library, to two different art galleries, the scrapbooks were unbound and the images displayed individually. Even though these books were produced by a professional, renowned artist, the galleries chose to ignore "traces of the object's history" to "make the images accessible for easy exhibition and, at the same time, available for effortless reinscription by curators and audiences."¹¹⁴ However, this method also masks the social history of these photographs, and while audiences may be able to reconfigure these images

¹¹³ "Preservation of Scrapbooks and Albums," *Preservation Basics: A National Cooperative Information Project*, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress), 1991.

¹¹⁴ Glenn Willumson, "Making meaning: displaced materiality in the library and art museum," in *Photographs objects histories: on the materiality of images*, edited by Elizabeth Edwards & Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2004), 77.

according to their own ideas of the subject at hand, they are unable to follow the maker's artistic process in assembling these works.

Snyder's approach, while subtly different, transforms the public's ability to understand these scrapbooks and the images inside them while still adhering to methods of display that remain practical and preservation-oriented. Audiences encountered a room filled with open, three-dimensional scrapbooks. Though glass cases offer protection, the books are open, offering at least a limited sense of ways that scrapbook makers have chosen over time to take and arrange snapshots according to their own backgrounds, tastes, and experiences. Some individual pages (often the way scrapbooks are sold) were displayed on the walls as well, but these also attempted to maintain the original intent of their makers. In a move that is becoming increasingly common as curatorial and educational perspectives within the museum merge, Snyder also chose to include a facsimile of a full scrapbook that visitors could handle and peruse to experience what was probably a very familiar sense of looking through a family photo album. Rather than focusing on how these objects and snapshots might be incorporated into a traditional art museum setting or related to canonical works, Snyder recognizes how they might be both deeply tied to the vernacular experience while still important enough to preserve and showcase.

Now Is Then

Now Is Then: Snapshots from the Maresca Collection, exhibited at the Newark Museum in the spring of 2008, builds on the work of *Snapshot Chronicles* and other exhibitions to continue this process of recontextualizing the anonymous snapshot

photograph.¹¹⁵ Though fully contextualizing most of these images in terms of their origins and personal histories may be impossible, *Now Is Then* offers new perspectives on their social significance and construction. Like *Snapshot Chronicles*, the exhibition does not minimize or ignore the aesthetic value of the snapshots presented; rather, it explores aesthetics and photographic technique as products of cultural history and offers consideration to the ways in which snapshooters may develop a sense of aesthetics that is both socially significant and different from what has traditionally been seen in the museum.

The Newark Museum, unlike the other major museums I have discussed in previous chapters, has a deeply rooted history of unconventionality, both in terms of collecting and exhibition. In 1922, *The New York Times* reported that founding director John Cotton Dana was determined to create a different kind of museum, one that would neither “put antiquities of great value out of reach” nor “make a museum merely a gazing gallery.” Instead, the paper reported, he wanted to present collections that showed an “obvious practical application to everyday life.” This does not mean Dana and the museum disregarded aesthetics in their art museum, but rather that they took a more inclusive approach that foreshadowed debates between high and low culture that continue today. In one exhibition, a selection of dishware was displayed with a card that read, “Beauty has no relation to age, rarity or price.” On another wall, a panel explained that these dishes were all bought at Newark department stores for no more than one dollar apiece. Like many museums of the nineteenth century rather than its early twentieth

¹¹⁵ *The Art of the American Snapshot* may be the most notable of these other exhibitions. Held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 2007, this work is particularly interesting for a framework that reinserts snapshots into a chronological, sociohistorical narrative that focuses on the patterns of picture making. See Catherine Zuromskis, “Outside Art: Exhibiting Snapshot Photography,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 425-441, <http://muse.jhu.edu>.

century peers, the Newark Museum largely focused on educating audiences about (largely middle-class) standards of beauty and aimed to “help people to be acquainted with art.” Unlike those earlier museums, Dana and the Newark Museum insisted that such beauty could be found even in the most mundane, everyday objects, including objects generally associated with domesticity, marginalized communities, and non-Western cultures.¹¹⁶ Here we again encounter a complicated, explicit relationship between the museum and the commercial sphere but can also see how a foundation developed for the Newark Museum to appeal to popular tastes even when other museums ceased to do so.

Because the museum began as a part of the Newark Free Public Library, this attention to the public was certainly fitting. The museum appealed to wider audiences by including science galleries as well as art (and continues to integrate the disciplines today). An early institutional devotion to what would then have been considered outside art was not an anomaly for the Newark Museum; on the contrary, the museum had already developed two exhibitions of photography in the 1910s and went on to become “the first museum to exhibit American folk art, in 1930,” only a year after Dana’s death led to the appointment of Beatrice Wilmer, his former assistant, as director.¹¹⁷

While the Newark Museum has certainly not chosen to ignore canonical artists, the consistent integration of outsider work and overlooked fields (as even art photography certainly was in the early twentieth century) and awareness of the social role of art objects uniquely prepared the Newark Museum to embrace the trend of snapshot

¹¹⁶ H.M., “Art for the People’s Sake the Newark Museum’s Idea,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1924, Proquest Historical Newspapers *New York Times*, <http://www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/login?url=http://proquest.umi.com.www2.lib.ku.edu:2048/pqdweb?did=822501982&sid=3&Fmt=10&clientId=42567&RQT=309&VName=HNP>.

¹¹⁷ Mary Sue Sweeney Price, “Foreword,” in *Now Is Then*, 6.

exhibitions and incorporate this work into the permanent collection. From 2002 through this exhibition, artist and collector Frank Maresca donated about 600 snapshot photographs to the Newark Museum, 150 of which were used here by guest curator Marvin Heiferman.

From the beginning of his essay in the exhibition catalog, “The Thrill and the Fate of Snapshots,” Heiferman challenges the multitude of artists and authors who have deemed snapshots “as innocent” simply “because they are so small and so frequently and easily made.”¹¹⁸ “Amateur photographers,” says Heiferman, “do not take pictures like professionals, but the pictures they produce are often no less dense and multifaceted. Snapshots reflect the needs and desires of all who make and appear in them, as well as the social, commercial, and visual worlds in which they are produced.”

With this, Heiferman presents a framework that immediately encourages audiences to reconsider their own process of snapshotting and the performative aspect that inherently makes snapshotting itself into a cultural event. These images not only *reflect* the personal and public lives of their makers, but also actively shape and reconstitute those lives, gradually helping to transform norms of appropriateness, family values, acceptable photographic subjects, etc. Snapshotters enjoyed and continue to enjoy the ability “to record life not necessarily as it was lived but as they wished to represent it.”¹¹⁹ Looking above at the anonymous sailor’s scrapbook snapshots, for instance, we may easily see how this young man has assembled a carefully edited piece, only tangentially related to the trials of violence and warfare. Instead, his photographs

¹¹⁸ Marvin Heiferman, “The Thrill and the Fate of Snapshots,” in *Now Is Then*, 41.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

emphasize the leisurely aspects of the military, the camaraderie developed among the men and the exotic life of travel available to a sailor.

The photo postcard below from *Now Is Then*, probably produced in the 1910s, also reinforces the significance of consumer and material culture in everyday life, and how snapshotters could use it to make their images meaningful (Figure 11). The back reads “Dear Aunt Myra, How are you now. I thought I would send you my dining table. Your Nephew, Vernon. Your see I got through Atlantic ave., all right. Don’t Worry” (sic).¹²⁰ Though we cannot comprehend the full meaning of Vernon’s casual note, we might take his choice of image as an important visual component of a reassuring message to his aunt. While not pristine, his table and the image of it convey a picture of stability and middle class values. By selecting such an object, not necessarily for its formal beauty but certainly for its social significance, Vernon demonstrates his visual competence and awareness.



Figure 11: Untitled, ca. 1910, Photo Postcard, from *Now Is Then*, 19.

Now Is Then and Heiferman’s essay also reveal an awareness of the importance of today’s technology in digital cameras and consider the divide between the exhibited

¹²⁰ In *Now Is Then*, 19.

snapshots (most taken from the 1920s through the 1960s) and the images new technology allows us to create and edit. As I discussed in the previous chapter, some snapshot exhibitions seem to exclude newer images not only because of the availability offered within a particular collection, but also because of a belief in the essential difference between these earlier, “innocent” images and those created with the tech-savvy of today. Heiferman certainly allows that there may be a difference in the way we take and use snapshots today, a time when Kodak’s advertising slogan has evolved from “You press the button—we do the rest.” to “The real Kodak moment happens when you share.”¹²¹ Still, Heiferman wonders about what may or may not have changed about the people and personalities producing these images: “If snapshots are no longer innocent or private pictures, maybe we need to question whether, in fact, they ever were.”¹²²

The museum also chose to solicit snapshots from the public for a digital snapshot installation presented at the end of the exhibition. Though not the first snapshot exhibition to include such a component, this seems to take on special significance in a show that emphasizes snapshots in social context and openly questions the relationship between images of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The museum set up a web site on the photography social media web site Flickr and invited users to contribute digital images, whether taken with a digital camera or scanned from printed snapshots. About 80 contributors uploaded over 500 photographs (Figure 12). The museum also produced a series of podcasts, narrated by Heiferman and downloadable on iTunes, that described

¹²¹ Stuart Elliott, “Modernizing the ‘Kodak’ Moment as Social Sharing,” *New York Times*, April 25, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/26/business/media/26adco.html?scp=1&sq=modernizing&st=cse>.

¹²² Heiferman, 42.

and analyzed individual objects or photographs from the exhibition.¹²³ Through these avenues, visitors are able to engage with the exhibition from multiple perspectives and can continue to interact with portions of it even now as part of what Hooper-Greenhill considers yet another important manifestation of the post-museum, “a nucleus of events which will take place both before and after the display is mounted.”¹²⁴



Figure 12: Older53, “Horsing around at sea,” 1968, Flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/23749767@N03/2328060174/in/pool-nowisthen.>; MichaelBlotsky, “The Wedding Guests,” 2005, Flickr, [http://www.flickr.com/photos/24232613@N07/2298718157/in/pool-nowisthen.](http://www.flickr.com/photos/24232613@N07/2298718157/in/pool-nowisthen)

Though there is no doubt that technology is transforming the missions and strategies of museums, it is doubtless only a single component among many that are shaping the emerging post-museum. As Ross Parry notes, “Technology such as digital media does not actually have a use inherent within it, but rather... this use is always constructed and constantly contested by the society that chooses to use it.”¹²⁵ Social media such as Flickr and podcasts, therefore, are not driving museological change themselves but are tools available for curators and administrators to strive toward the broader social goals of this new kind of museum.

¹²³ Marvin Heiferman, *Now Is Then: Snapshots from the Maresca Collection* Podcast, MP3, <http://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=272617697>.

¹²⁴ Hooper-Greenhill, “Interpretive Communities,” 81.

¹²⁵ Ross Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.

Exhibitions of snapshots and other work traditionally omitted from museum collections offer fascinating insights into the history of how collections have been developed and interpreted over time. As the museum becomes increasingly inclusive and community-oriented within the context of the burgeoning post-museum, it may also become more transparent. By exploring the social context of snapshots and their makers alongside their aesthetic value, the exhibitions I have discussed above have begun to acknowledge and challenge gendered readings of snapshot photography, thereby offering a part of the change necessary to transform the museum itself.

Conclusions

This thesis looks beyond the snapshot itself to see how it fits within a broader framework of the museum and the world of photography. I bring together a range of complex issues, ultimately showing how gender norms—developed by institutions, public perception, and advertising—have played a critical if often implicit role in how snapshots have been characterized and exhibited within the framework of the museum. While it is nearly impossible to define the snapshot or to measure its impact on Western culture, we can use characterizations of it, whether in exhibitions, advertisements, or literature, to note its important role as an object that has gained massive popularity, provoked debate, and captured the public and private desires of its makers.

The previous three chapters have used the snapshot as a central focus that allows us to begin exploring much larger questions about the history of photography and art, the ever-changing purpose and mission of the museum, the relevance and legitimacy of popular culture as a subject for critical study, and the ways in which gender has played a key role in shaping all of these fields. However important the snapshot is in itself, its location at the intersection of these major issues continues to offer a broader discourse.

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