



*The Past Is Prologue:*

*Vernacular Photography, Pop Photographica, and the Road to Selfie Culture*

From the collections of Daile Kaplan, W.M. Hunt, Nigel Poor, Pete Brook, and Cynthia Elyce Rubin and featuring the works of Marcia Lippman and Cassandra Zampini

April 27 – July 28, 2019

Opening reception: Saturday, April 27, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

ArtYard is pleased to present *The Past Is Prologue: Vernacular Photography, Pop Photographica, and the Road to Selfie Culture*, an exhibition featuring vernacular photography from the collections of Daile Kaplan, W.M. Hunt, Nigel Poor, Pete Brook, and Cynthia Elyce Rubin, with original works by Marcia Lippman and Cassandra Zampini. This exhibition offers an experiential guide to the evolution of everyday photography from the late nineteenth century to Instagram, and charts a terrain comprised of unauthored and found photographs as well as commercial objects and images divorced from their original contexts. Works of vernacular photography encompass photo booth portraiture, family albums and snapshots, press prints from newspaper archives, and industrial catalogues.

The vernacular world inverts traditional art-world hierarchies: The creators of the original works generally remain unknown. The collector and curator, whose role is part treasure hunter, part art critic, and part artist, moves to center stage.

Daile Kaplan, Director of Photography and Vice President of Swann Galleries in New York and an appraiser of photography for *Antiques Road Show*, is known for her pioneering work in the creation of the genre Pop Photographica, representing a range of functional, decorative, and commercial objects, from coffee cans to funereal fans emblazoned with images of the deceased. The photographic costume works from her collection in this show range from high-fashion dresses to humble pajamas.

W.M. Hunt's collection of press prints from late-nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century newspaper illustrations are drawn from his Collection Dancing Bear and Collection Blind Pirate. The former consists of beguiling images of people whose eyes are obscured; the latter, of pre-1950s groups of Americans, from military infantries to beauty-pageant contestants. This is the first time that Hunt, a prolific collector and writer in the field of photography, has drawn from both collections for an exhibition.

Photographer Marcia Lippman's installation for this show is a meditation in found images about her lifelong search for an elusive biological mother. Originating in an era when adopted children were denied access to their own biographical information, Lippman's quest

has been a driving force behind her artistic practice. A short film by ArtYard's artistic director, Elsa Mora, about Lippman's process accompanies the work. In addition to being a photographer, Lippman is a teacher, a traveler, a collector, and a storyteller. For four decades, much of her work has explored the passage and residues of time along with the ephemeral nature of memory.

Curator, lecturer, and collector Cynthia Elyce Rubin's astonishing collection of nineteenth-century portraits of merchant carnival ladies are also on display. These images depict women in bustles adorned with everyday objects – from carpenter's tools to pastries and kitchen tinware. Before the advent of sandwich boards or electronic media, women dressed in such Dr. Seussian outfits would parade around carnivals to advertise the wares of individual merchants.

This exhibition also includes a selection of images from the archives of Nigel Poor, a photographer and co-founder of the San Quentin prison-based podcast *Ear Hustle*. In the course of her work at San Quentin, she happened on a trove of untitled photographs taken inside the prison during the 1960s and '70s. These arresting images illuminate a world that remains hidden from view to this day.

Independent writer, curator, and educator Pete Brook works at the intersection of social justice, photography, and art. With the Brooklyn-based gallery United Photo Industries, Brook created and curated *The Depository of Unwanted Photographs*, a crowdsourced archive of images and stories. A selection of the inventory is on view and visitors are invited to add to the collection by donating unwanted photographs.

Artist Cassandra Zampini's film *Datastream*, part of her current series *Data Mine*, is constructed from thousands of clips of selfie footage posted on social media last year. Downloaded, aggregated, and strung together by Zampini for the film, these clips or selfie movies contain reoccurring gestures, facial expressions, and camera perspectives. As one portrait disappears from the screen, it is replaced by another, revealing the uniformity of the modern-day portrait.

Other components of the exhibition include:

A sewn timeline of vernacular images dated from the 1920s to the present, a translucent wall constructed of illuminated X-rays from the 1930s by ArtYard's artistic director, Elsa Mora, and an homage to the Paper Moon photo booths of the 1920s and 1930s constructed by ArtYard's Steve Maiorano. The exhibition will also feature a rare 1939 photo album documenting a year in the life of a nine-year-old girl, palpably beloved by her family. The album can be experienced from a living room sofa upholstered with enlarged images of the eyes of the unnamed girl's intimate circle, constructed by Elsa Mora. At a table equipped with stereopticons and three-dimensional historical photographs, visitors are also invited to engage with early film technology documenting World War I trench warfare.