

PLAYFUL APPROPRIATION AND THE ALL

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As a tool, play is used both in terms of uncovering and intervening with the found material, as well as in the sense of bringing a collection of images to life in a new, contemporary context beyond its original scope. In some both cases, by virtue of the found images having been created and collected by unseen hands or unknown created and collected by unseen hands or unknown and to invade the archival space. This is in response needed to invade the archival space. This is in response to a freedom that potentially wouldn't be present if to a freedom that potentially wouldn't be present if originator.

The treasure hunting, unlocking stories, and tracking down long forgotten bodies of work activates the archive and transforms it from a passive repository, outside of time, into an active site for re-engaging and reactivating images. This allows for new readings of the work, as well as inserting second hand ideas into artistic work, as inserting and appropriation, whether material for inspiration and appropriation, whether practice-based or personally driven.

In examples given here, and in portfolios throughout the magazine, it is often an artist or curator who becomes the keeper of a found archive. They play the role of explorer, interpreter and owner of the newly found collection, as well as its translator. The original desire collecting and shaping an archive is now overlaid for collecting and shaping an archive is now overlaid with a second set of readings, meanings and intentions. With a sinterpreter, the new keeper of the collection Acting as interpreter, the new keeper of the collection is imbued with a sense of ownership and possession, is imbued with a sense of ownership and possession, no matter how tenuous or unrelated the content may no matter how tenuous or unrelated the content may he to the discoverer at first glance. Without this playful intervention, the archive faces an uncertain future of remaining unearthed — a type of relegation.

Artistic archival appropriation works on many levels.
One of these being almost automatic and unavoidable,
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and 'claimed'. In the moment an archive is discovered
archive moves from one set of experiences, knowledge
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and intentions into a different realm by dint of its new
and intentions into a different realm by dint of its new
context. This new ownership is often evidenced by
context. This new ownership is often evidenced by
laying on the surface of the image, a performance that
playing on the surface of the image, a performance that
playing on the reinterpretation. Painting, scratching, mark
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ativity and reinterpretation. Painting are all elements
making, breaking down and degrading are all elements
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ativity and reinterpretation. Alternatively, this disand subsequent state of inaction. Alternatively, this disassociation can be achieved through a careful (re)curaassociation can be achieved through a rearratives with
tion of the found images, rebuilding narratives with

these images already in existence. A found archive is a fixed space; it is no longer being added or attended to.

The connotation of the word appropriation can often be negative or undesirable, the suggestion being that an object has been taken from its original context simply to be used for its surface value without regards to its history. There is a far-reaching legacy of colonialism and archives, working hand in hand. With motivations ranging from misplaced, and what could nearly be described as benign curiosity to racialised ideas of cataloguing and categorising, photography has been responsible for archiving people and cultural material with neat labels, often ignoring nuances or differences between groups of people. The act of taking a photo, and then storing it in an archive can in itself be an intrusive, disrespectful or damaging process. This runs in parallel to current debates on museums repatriating physical objects which possess cultural significance to the communities from which they were taken. From Easter Island statues – moai – which possess the spirits of leaders and ancestors, to shields used in the battle on the coasts of Australia, these objects have fallen prey to a devastating appropriation.

In the case of photographers appropriating imagery, the action of taking is accurate, but the disregard for history can be circumvented through play. Playing lifts these negative associations by resetting expectations, and well casting an irreverent, often light-hearted and well expectations are also associations by resetting expectations, these negative associations by resetting expectations, and well casting an irreverent, often light-hearted and well expectations are also associations by resetting expectations, and the revived material. Playing can be a meaning feel to the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly associated and the revived material and the revived material and the revived material. Playing can be a nearly association and the revived material and the rev

An impeccable example of a mindful approach is the project by Patrick Waterhouse, Restricted Images—Made With the Warlpiri of Central Australia. Waterhouse combines collaboration, archives, play and photography to demonstrate a considered and considerate approach to working with and re-interpreting sensitive imagery. There are archives across Australia which have very limited access as viewing images of ancestors can often be ited access as viewing images of ancestors can of material a transgression. This leaves a huge amount of material undiscovered. Waterhouse worked with local Warlpiri undiscovered. Waterhouse worked with local warlpiri artists in the Northern Territory of Australia to exert artists in the Northern Territory of heat autonomy over their own images. After spending years photographing people from the Warlpiri community, he handed back the images and asked them to

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indicate their own censorship on the photos, blocking out identities and features, and highlighting their heritage using a traditional dot painting technique. The result is a colourful, conscious depiction of working with archives and sensitive material, using playful techniques to maintain respect and dignity.

This reinterpretation moves beyond working on the literal surface of the image and widens its gaze to include the intersections of cultural understandings and ideas. Seen at these different levels, the archive is fundamentally changed through how the image is played with, whether surface or context-wise. The function is to provoke new meaning, whether by playful response or by encouraging new ways of understanding how to work with cultural material.

Approaching from another angle, Thomas Sauvin's approach to creating and managing the Beijing Silvermine archive is a skillful and distinctive example of rethreading narratives. The collection has been ushered into being by Sauvin and his dedicated approach in saving thousands of rolls of film, purchased by the kilo, from a recycling plant on the outskirts of Beijing. Sauvin carefully sorts, scans and selects the negatives, adding them to a rapidly-growing archive, now numbering over half a million photographs. A recent short clip on the Beijing Silvermine Instagram account shows Sauvin upending a cloth sack full of springy, coiling rolls of processed film in preparation of him sifting through the finds. The chosen images form a narrative, previously unseen, detailing the lives of everyday, unknown Chinese citizens between the years of 1985 and 2005. The vernacular images aren't necessarily revealing in themselves, yet understood within the context of the scale of the archive, they have the ability to tell a greater story of this period of time in China. The notion of play enters the equation in its role of discovery and recovery, as well as within the images themselves. While a handful show people standing stiffly in front of monuments in the standard vacation photo pose, many more of them show people of all ages leisurely enjoying their free time or engaging in childish games. Adults blindfolded with luridly coloured and patterned scarves lean into the fun at hand, whether trying to blindly sketch a face on a sheet of paper, or gently force feeding their good-natured friends or colleagues. Large-scale statues of animals also seem to feature strongly, shrinking children and adults and lending a sense of returning to childhood.

Because of their age, and their relegation to a recycling plant, the negatives were left in limbo. The damage has taken its toll on many of the images and this neglect can be seen on the faces of the photos. The unintentional destruction of the surfaces, corroded and breaking apart, gives an almost fluorescent hue, as if glowing with all of its infused history. The new context given to these images helps them to bridge the gap between then (when the photos were taken) and now (when the photos are displayed). Despite the huge number of images in the archive, there are still gaps in this history but through the process of being printed, included in publications, talked about, and Instagrammed, the chosen individual images have the chance at a second life, and to indicate the shape of the still-missing history. Photography has often been used to play with the narrative and order of history. These images are helping to show what has been overlooked up until now. Like Vivian Maier's posthumously discovered treasure trove of negatives documenting US street life, the power of these photos showing everyday life may have been slightly delayed, but not deleted.

Likewise, the Archive of Modern Conflict also adopts a process of acquiring images and reanimating them through new contexts, including publishing them in magazines and books, and featuring them in exhibitions. The initial collected photos, objects and ephemera shared a common focus of depicting images of conflict but over time has steadily grown to become a hugely diverse and reflective collection which is among the largest of its kind in the world. Through its many outputs, groupings or individual images from the collection are called upon to weave new narratives out of the source material. Dipping into the collection and retrieving

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