THE TIES THAT BIND: ARTISTS AND ARCHIVES
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ANNA CRAYCROFT
AURÉLIEN FROMENT
ELISE MCMAHON
MICHAEL OATMAN
KATEŘINA ŠEDÁ
SHANE ASLAN SELZER
BRYAN ZANISNIK

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UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY
THE TIES THAT BIND

The Ties That Bind: Artists and Archives presents seven artists who use the archive in its myriad forms to explore our collective histories and shared humanity. Working in various mediums including video, photography, drawing, and installation, these artists comb a host of sources—the news, the Internet, their own basements and attics—in search of images, objects, and memories that build upon the social and cultural ties that bind us together, for better or worse.

For these artists, the concept of the archive is wide open and readily remixed. An archive contains boundless potential for those who wish to stake a claim to its contents, read its enigmatic signs, and then preserve, protect, understand, and share what lies within. An archive is mutable. It becomes a tool to play with, a mental or actual space where the artist can think anew, activate long-dormant materials or memories, and invent new hierarchies, while disassembling old ones. To create or investigate an archive, to revel in its depths, and to pull meaning from its contents is an affirmation of our existence, a devotional activity. In the context of this exhibition, archives assembled over time and presented publicly can become a unifying force, one that makes cultural connections, as well as emotional ones.

The artists in this exhibition follow subjective paths as they give shape and meaning to their archival investigations; they ask their own questions and follow their own logic. They respond emotionally and aesthetically to their chosen material. Their investigations may begin with idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects, and events in art, culture, and personal or public history. Artists Anna Craycroft, Michael Oatman, and Shane Aslan Selzer are drawn to the possibilities of an archive as a means to make lost or displaced historical information physically present, whereas Kateřina Šedá, Brian Zanisnik, and Elise McMahon are driven by the desire to make sense of other people’s private experiences. Aurélien Froment culls from historic and personal sources to draw out visual affinities across time and cultures. Each artist poses these questions: what happens to objects and images when remixed into new systems and categories; what memories and emotions are sparked; what new meaning and ideas arise?

Believing that we can comprehend culture through our relationships to pictures and objects, these artists invite us to join them in archival spaces that give visual form to their research. Through strategies that include appropriated images, expressive arrangements, idiosyncratic ordering, interweaving montages, serial formats, and informational structures, each artist reimagines relationships and connects what may never before have been connected. Whether presented as
videos, photographs, or immersive environments, their findings are ultimately meant to be upended. While there is much that is familiar here—popular icons, familial longings, social inequities, the trappings and rituals of modern life—there is much that awaits future reordering.

Each body of work in this exhibition contains images and objects bound to our collective ideals. In this sense, the respective archives these artists investigate and present become our mirror, a collective space that metaphorically becomes a place for memory and imagination to meet.

Corinna Ripps Schaming
Curator
Michael Oatman

Michael Oatman presents an unfolding archive based on several past projects sourced from an Albany Hall of Records archive of 18,000 glass-plate negatives of early 20th century criminal portraits. Oatman obtained the plates after promising to digitally scan the entire archive. He used the actual glass plates to create Conservatory, 2005, an 18-foot greenhouse replete with vegetation grown in the original wooden crates used to store the negatives. Other works based on individual criminal portraits followed, including several videos and a projection. Portions of each project have been reconfigured for this exhibition, demonstrating how the archive can mutate into myriad forms under the artist’s imagination to reveal the individual humanity buried within a floodgate of arcane data.

Nocturne, 2005
Video still

Albany County Jail photo plates
Glass-plate negatives depicting criminals, 1898-1923
Anna Craycroft’s The Agency of the Orphan, 2006–present, is an intimate collection of archives and observations that questions why the archetypal orphan portrayed in books and movies has such a hold on the public imagination. Playing off the dual meanings of the word, Craycroft’s “agency” is both an imaginary franchise and a source of power and action. An exhaustive display of over 300 orphan “head shots” from Oliver Twist to Harry Potter, large-scale drawings of orphans with signature attributes, and a ceramic fountain with running water are part of the mix. An air of melancholy permeates Craycroft’s project, pointing to larger cultural yearnings for emotional connectedness.

The Archetype of the Orphan: Dorothy, The Beguiling Orphan (detail), 2007-2008
Graphite on paper with embossed matte

The Agency of the Orphan, 2006–present
(Oliver Twist, Dolores “Lolita” Haze, Arnold Jackson, Annie, Chihiro, Vito Corleone)
Inkjet prints and plastic frames
Shane Aslan Selzer

Shane Aslan Selzer’s video project Social Action Archive: University Libraries, University at Albany, SUNY, 2015, presents a stream of subtly altered black-and-white images of the UAlbany campus from 1910 to the present. Selzer worked with researchers culling material from the M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany. United in their effort to understand the pictorial shape of social action at a public university over time, they formed the Social Action Archive Committee (SAAC) and are working on several additional projects. The events depicted in their inaugural video reflect a range of educational, cultural, and social experiences. From classroom lectures to student protests, we see the university community come together in shared social spaces to celebrate milestones, challenge the status quo, and promote change. In an accompanying broadsheet that includes a newly created archive of signs from recent campus protests across the United States, SAAC posits a link between past UAlbany events and the current efforts of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.
Aurélien Froment

In Aurélien Froment’s video Théâtre de poche (Pocket Theatre), 2007, a magician pulls a seemingly endless stream of random images from his pocket, including family photographs, playing cards, and film stills, arranging and rearranging them in midair. Inspirations include Arthur Lloyd (1891–?), the magician known as the Human Card Index, who dazzled his audiences by pulling out images on demand from coat pockets filled with over 15,000 pieces of paper, and art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), who created the Mnemosyne Atlas, an encyclopedic archive of black-and-white photographs ranging from ancient Babylon to Weimar, Germany. Representing yet another attempt to contain the uncontainable, Froment’s mesmerizing video is a paean to the excess of images that feed our cultural memory.
Elise McMahon

Elise McMahon’s installation *Everybody’s Coffin*, 2015, features a hand-milled walnut coffin made by the artist in collaboration with dairy farmer Ken Crane, 81, and his granddaughter Shawna Luke. Beginning with wood pulled from Crane’s farmland, the coffin took two years to complete, allowing time for a firm bond of friendship to develop between Crane and the artist. McMahon videotaped their conversations and, with Crane, collected significant objects and archival material from his life and work. While Crane initiated the idea of making a coffin for his own funeral, McMahon advances the concept by offering an alternate environment for the presentation and containment of a life filled with “problem solving, hard work, and family.”
Kateřina Šedá

*It Doesn’t Matter, 2005–2007,* is an expansive drawing archive resulting from a collaboration between artist Kateřina Šedá and her grandmother, Jana Šedá (1930–2007). In an effort to break through her grandmother’s severe depression, Šedá devised a drawing regimen that required her grandmother to record details from a more active period in her life. Pen and paper in hand, her grandmother began making drawings of as many items as she could remember from her thirty-three-year tenure as inventory manager at a home supplies store in Brno, Czech Republic. Amazingly, Šedá’s grandmother produced more than five hundred renderings over the course of two years, a large selection of which are presented in this exhibition.
Bryan Zanisnik

Bryan Zanisnik’s videos, photographs, and performances stem from the neatly organized cardboard boxes stored in his parents’ New Jersey basement. He refers to the toys, trophies, tchotchkes, home movies, and snapshots in this underground realm as “an archive of family memories.” Filtered through the artist’s unbridled imagination, this tucked-away and largely forgotten material is transformed into elaborate constructions that speak to what lies beneath the seemingly generic suburban experience. Zanisnik does not want the work interpreted as the study of one family, but rather to speak more broadly about familial relationships and the psychic weight embedded in once-desired and now discarded objects.

Aquarium Painting, 2014
Video stills
ARTISTS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Anna Craycroft

Selected solo exhibitions include NYC’MON LANGUAGE! at Portland Institute of Contemporary Art in Portland, Oregon (2013); Drawn to Repeating Patterns at Tracy Williams, Ltd. in New York, New York (2011); and Object of Study/Subject of Learning at The Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas, Austin (2010).

Selected group exhibitions include On the Blue Shore of Silence at Tracy Williams, Ltd. in New York, New York (2014); Time-Based Art Festival at Portland Institute of Contemporary Art in Portland, Oregon (2013); Champs Elysees at Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2013); One Minute Film Festival 2003–2012 at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts (2013); and Workspace Program Exhibition at Dieu Donné in New York, New York (2012).

Craycroft received a B.A. from University College in London and an M.F.A. from Columbia University in New York, New York in 2004.

Aurélien Froment
Born in 1976 in Angers, France. Lives and works in Dublin, Ireland.

Selected solo exhibitions include Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, Germany (2015); Fröebel Fröbeled at Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, Canada (2014); Montage des attractions at Le Plateau/FRAC Île de France in Paris (2014); and De l’ombre des idées at Marcelle Alix in Paris (2014).


Froment received a D.N.A.P at École Régionale des Beaux Arts in Nantes, France in 1999 and a D.N.S.E.P in 2000.
Elise McMahon

McMahon received a B.F.A. at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island in 2009.

Michael Oatman


Oatman received a B.F.A. at Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island in 1986 and an M.F.A. at University at Albany in Albany, New York in 1992.

Kateřina Šedá
Born in 1977 in Brno, Czech Republic. Lives and works in Líše□ and Prague, Czech Republic.
Selected solo exhibitions include Everything is Perfect at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Project Los Altos in Los Altos, California (2013); This Is Not A Czech Pavilion at Venice Biennale in Venice (2013); From Morning Till Night at Tate Modern in London (2011).


Šedá studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague from 1999-2005.

Shane Aslan Selzer
Selected exhibitions include Rush Art Gallery and Andrew Kreps Gallery in New York, New York; The Suburban in Oak Park, Illinois; BRIC Rotunda Gallery in Brooklyn, New York; The Poor Farm Contemporary Art Center in Manawa, Wisconsin; Dimensions Variable in Miami, Florida; Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, New York; and PS.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City, New York.

Selzer has been an artist in residence at The Bag Factory in Johannesburg, South Africa; Socrates Sculpture Park in Long Island City, New York; Jamaica Flux, Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning in Queens, New York; and Studio Chicago at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois.

Selzer received a B.S. at University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin in 2000 and an M.A. and M.F.A. at California College of the Arts in San Francisco, California in 2004.

Bryan Zanisnik

Selected group exhibitions include Crossing Brooklyn at The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York (2014); She Was a Film Star Before She Was My Mother at Dorsky Gallery in Long Island City, New York (2014); Queens International 2013 at Queens Museum of Art in Queens, New York (2013); and Double Life at Sculpture Center in Long Island City, New York (2013).

Zanisnik received a B.A. from Drew University in Madison, New Jersey in 2001 and an M.F.A. from Hunter College in New York in 2009.
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Anna Craycroft

Reading Room at the Agency of the Orphan, 2008
Painted wood table, four painted wood chairs, three copies of the book The Agency of the Orphan by Anna Craycroft, and brass fixtures
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York

The Amazing Luminous Fountain is an Autonomous Childhood, 2008
Ceramic, wood, water, gravel, and fountain pump
8 x 2 x 2 feet
Courtesy of the artist and Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York

The Agency of the Orphan, 2006-present
306 inkjet prints and plastic frames
10 x 8 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York

Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Private Collection

Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York

The Archetype of the Orphan: Dorothy, The Beguiling Orphan, 2007-2008
Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Private Collection

The Archetype of the Orphan: Oliver, The Piteous Orphan, 2007
Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Private Collection

Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Collection of Angie Keefer

The Archetype of the Orphan: Webster, The Beguiling Orphan, 2007
Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Collection of Shala Monroque

Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Private Collection

Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Tracy Williams, Ltd., New York

Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Private Collection

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The Archetype of the Orphan: Webster, The Beguiling Orphan, 2007
Graphite on paper with embossed matte
51 x 40 inches
Collection of Shala Monroque
Aurélien Froment

Théâtre de poche (Pocket Theatre), 2007
HD video, 12:27 minutes; color; sound
Courtesy of the artist and Marcelle Alix, Paris

Elise McMahon

Everybody’s Coffin, 2015
Walnut, steel, and brass hardware
74 x 26 x 16 inches
Courtesy of the artist, Ken Crane, and Shawna Luke

Everybody’s Coffin, 2015
Video, 3 minutes; color; sound
Courtesy of the artist, Myles Beeson, and Ken Crane

Swamp elk’s skull, 1994
20 x 14 x 8 inches
Cow’s skull, deer antlers, wood, glue, hardware
Courtesy of Ken Crane

Shop lamp, n.d.
72 x 14 x 14 inches
Wheel rim, aluminum, found lamp
Courtesy of Ken Crane

Shop chair, n.d.
34 x 24 x 24 inches
Marker, found chair
Courtesy of Ken Crane

Michael Oatman

Dead Reckoning: A Found Archive and Its Cumulative Errors, 2015
Courtesy of the artist and Falling Anvil Studios

Project documentation from:
Taken: 1° The Photograph, 2° The Confession (traveling version), 2001
Taken: 1° The Photograph, 2° The Confession, 2000
Conservatory, 2005
Coffered, 2007
9 framed digital prints
16 x 16 inches each

Taken: 1° The Photograph, 2° The Confession (traveling version), 2001
Modified clipboard, paper, pencil, string, miscellaneous objects, video monitor, video, 80 minutes; black and white; sound
15 x 9 x 1¼ inches

Nocturne, 2005
Sepia-toned photograph
24 x 30 inches
Courtesy of Kiera Coffee

Nocturnes (292*, 4519*, 4521, 4567*, 5530*, 5544, 5769, 5844, 6162, 7651), 2005
Sepia-toned photographs with Xerographic overlay and custom matting 5 x 7 inches each
*Collection of the University Art Museum, University at Albany; purchase of State University of New York and The University at Albany Foundation, 2006.
Nine copies of the Crimefiles series, circa 1937 (w/ 1970s/80s/90s-era reprints)
Selected titles include Murder Off Miami; Who Killed Bolitho Blaine?; The Malinsay Massacre; Who Killed Robert Prentiss?; File on Rufus Ray
10½ x 8¼ x ½ inches each

Achilles Standard, 2001-2007
Custom case; catalogued samples of materials from the artist’s body: hair, fingernails, toenails, blood, semen, urine, saliva, skin cells; casts of upper and lower teeth; size 10 shoe soles; handwriting samples; glasses; rubber stamps made from the artist’s fingerprints, ink pads, fingerprinting manual; various time/date stamps; various tools, rack and folios
12 x 29 x 12 inches
Facsimile reproduction glass-plate negative boxes (Cramer’s and Seed’s), 2005
Ten chipboard boxes with custom labels, rubber stamping, sepia-toned photograph based on historic negative, Xerographic overlay, Conservatory Songs CD by composer/harmonica performer Douglas Johnson, 30 minutes, ten editions of ten
Courtesy of the artist with Falling Anvil Studios and Douglas Johnson

Kateřina Šedá
It Doesn’t Matter, 2005-2007
144 facsimiles of graphite drawings
18 x 24 inches each
Courtesy of the artist and Franco Soffiantino Contemporary Art Productions, Milan
It Doesn’t Matter, 2006
Video, 5:05 minutes; color; sound
Courtesy of the artist and Franco Soffiantino Contemporary Art Productions, Milan

Shane Aslan Selzer
Social Action Archive: February 2015 Broadsheet, 2015
Ink on paper
33 x 22¾ inches unfolded
Social Action Archive: University Libraries, University at Albany, SUNY, 2015
Video, 11:18 minutes; black and white; sound
Courtesy of the artist in collaboration with Social Action Archive Committee Editor & Chief, Shane Aslan Selzer; Senior Photo Editor, Robert Hickerson; Senior Research Archivist, Melissa McMullen. All images courtesy of the University Archives, M.E. Grenander Department of Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University at Albany, SUNY.

Bryan Zanisnik
Aquarium Painting, 2014
Two-channel HD video, 3:21 minutes; color; sound
Courtesy of the artist and Aspect/Ratio, Chicago
The Ineluctable Modality, 2012
HD video, 2:44 minutes; color; sound
Courtesy of the artist and Aspect/Ratio, Chicago
Just Another Thing Without You in It (50 years), 2011
C-print
42 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Aspect/Ratio, Chicago
Off Season, 2010
Triptych C-print
40 x 78 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Aspect/Ratio, Chicago
The Bough That Falls With All Its Trophies Hung, 2009
C-print
35 x 83 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Aspect/Ratio, Chicago
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University Art Museum
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State University of New York

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COVER:
Bryan Zanisnik, The Bough That Falls With All Its Trophies Hung, 2009
C-print, 35 x 83 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Aspect/Ratio, Chicago