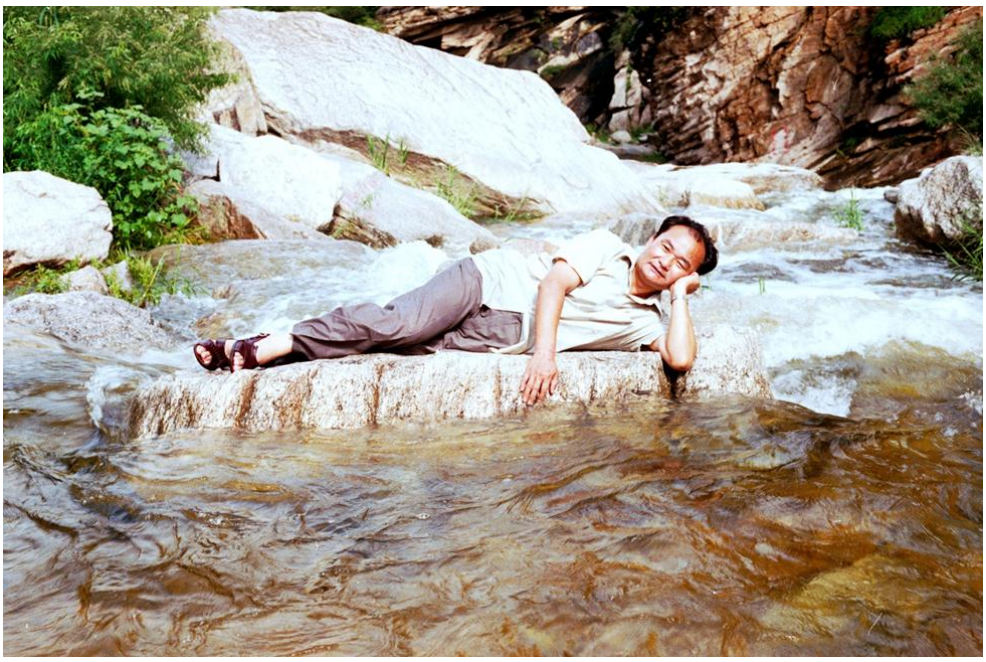
Museum of Contemporary Photography
Columbia College Chicago

ARCHIVE STATE

Jan 21 — Apr 6, 2014
Arianna Arcara and Luca Santese; Simon Menner; David Oresick; Thomas Sauvin; Akram Zaatari



Thomas Sauvin
From *Beijing Silvermine*, 2010-present
C-print
Courtesy of the artist

Educator's Guide

This guide was produced as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Archive State* and contains information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, and classroom activities. You may download this resource from the museum's website at www.mocp.org/education/resources-for-educators.php. A PDF with images that can be projected for classroom use can also be found there. Aimed at high school and college age students, this resource is aligned with Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts Incorporating the Common Core and can be adapted for use by younger students and integrated into a variety of fine arts and humanities curricula. To schedule a free docent-led tour of this exhibition see www.mocp.org/education/viewings.

The MoCP is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. The Museum is generously supported by Columbia College Chicago, the MoCP Advisory Board, individuals, private and corporate foundations, and government agencies including the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency. Support for Archive State is provided by the Italian Cultural Institute Chicago and the Goethe-Institut Chicago

Archive State

The artists featured in *Archive State* use found photographic materials and videos to investigate significant political and economic transitions specific to particular places—the waning epicenter of the twentieth-century American auto industry, China's burgeoning capital city after the Cultural Revolution, young American soldiers in a war zone in Iraq, an oppressive East German state during the Cold War, and the activities of Arab youth on the eve of the Arab Spring. Whether the artists collect discarded photographs, work with state-run archives, or create montages of videos posted to the internet, they all appropriate selected imagery and edit the original context with their personal observations. Playing with histories, both public and private, Arianna Arcara and Luca Santese, Simon Menner, David Oresick, Thomas Sauvin, and Akram Zaatari complicate issues of authorship and original intent. These artists provide unique portals into individual stories, and in the process they not only expose dominant characterizations of a society but also occasionally stand in contrast to them. At times sinister, and in other moments sensitive, the artworks on view reveal how found records, many of them anonymous, contain particular insights into the circumstances of a time and place—and tell compelling stories of shared history.

-Natasha Egan

Getting Started: Questions for Looking and Discussion

- Look carefully and describe what you see in one body of work. What pulls your attention? Why?
- What can you tell about how the artist made this work?
- Can you tell when or where this work might have been made? How?
- What do you learn about the subjects of these images? What details reveal that information?
- What moods or feelings are expressed through this work? How?
- Is there anything noticeably absent in this work?
- What do you notice about how this work is presented and installed?
- What does the work make you think of or remind you of? Why?
- What do you think this work is ultimately about? Why?

1. **Collective Stories and Histories**

To create their works on view, the artists in this exhibition appropriated found photographs and videos that when combined can tell collective stories: Arianna Arcara and Luca Santese collected photographs and other items dating from the 1970s to the 2000's found near abandoned homes in Detroit and shuttered Detroit institutions including police stations, hospitals, and schools; Simon Menner worked with the archives of the former German Democratic Republic's State Security Service (STASI) that became public, with certain limitations, after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989; David Oresick gathered videos posted online by US soldiers in Iraq and their families in the mid-2000s; Thomas Sauvin

collected color negatives from a recycling center in Beijing mostly likely made between the end of the

Cultural Revolution and late 1990s; and Akram Zaatari complied videos made by young Arabs and posted on YouTube on the eve of the Arab Spring.

- What do you already know about the people or cultures represented in each of the bodies of work?
- What do you learn about the place, time, and culture depicted in these works?
- How does each body of work connect or speak to larger issues related to culture and history in ways that are different from the intentions of the original creator of the images?
- What do you think each artist is saying about each culture or historic moment? Why?
- Each series addresses the past. How might we better understand the present by looking at these works?

2. Image Context, Purpose, and Function

In each of the bodies of work on view there are differences between the original intended function of the images and the artist's use of that work. What are some differences between an artist making or taking their own images and an artist collecting existing images and using them for another purpose?

Compare and contrast each artist's use of appropriated imagery.

- For what purpose were the images originally made? Who made them? Who was the intended audience?
- How does each artist select and recontextualize those images?
- What do you notice about the physical qualities and condition of the archival images used by each artist? How do those physical attributes impact your interpretation of the work?
- Do the artist's intentions and use of particular images or archives change the meanings of the images? If so, how do these differences affect how you view and understand the work?
- Since each of these exhibiting artists did not create the original images, why is their name on the work? For what do they receive credit?

3. Artists and Ethics: Making Personal and Confidential Information Public

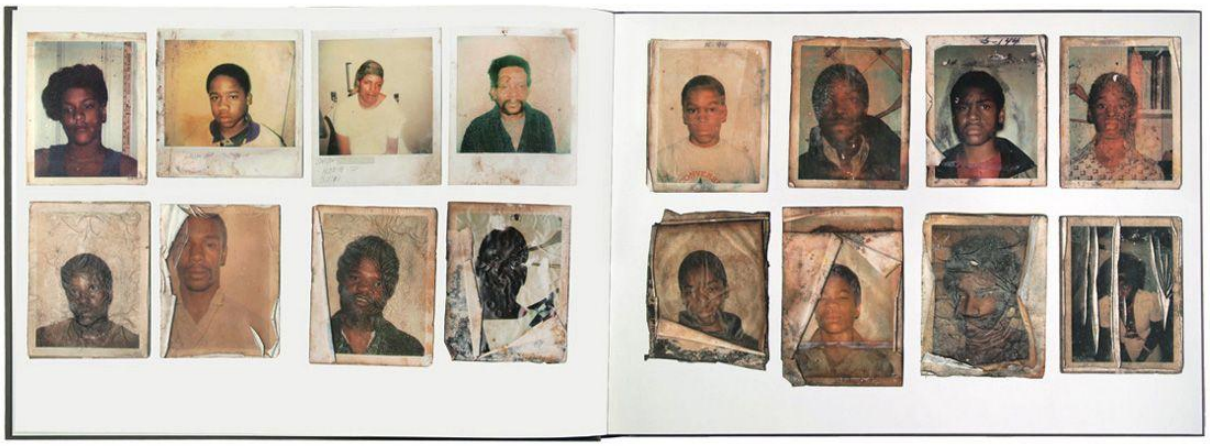
Compare and contrast Arianna Arcara and Luca Santese's use of their archive of images from Detroit; Thomas Sauvin's collection of snapshots from China; Simon Menner's works that were culled from the STASI archive, and David Oresick and Akram Zataari's use of videos pulled from social media sites.

Each of these artists made choices and decisions with ethical implications in the creation of their work including how they obtained images; the level of sensitivity of the images they chose to display; whether

the subjects of the images could be identified in the images; and whether to seek permission to use the images from the agencies that housed them and the individuals pictured.

Thomas Sauvin
From *Beijing Silvermine*, 2010-present
C-print Courtesy of the artist

Thomas Sauvin: Made artwork from discarded personal snapshots collected from a recycling center in Beijing used without the permission of those who made or appear in them.



Arianna Arcara and Luca Santese, from the *Found Photos in Detroit* project, 2009-2010.
Found objects
Courtesy of the artists

Ariana Arcara and Luca Santese: Made artwork from sensitive and confidential images and information abandoned by institutions and individuals, used without the permission of those who made them or are depicted or the institutions that created and held them.

Simon Menner
From a Seminar on Disguises
Images from the Secret Stasi Archive, 2011–12 C-prints
Copyright of the artist and the BStU, 2013

Simon Menner: Made images from potentially sensitive images from a government archive, used with permission from the agency that houses them but without the permission of those in the pictures. The identities of those in the pictures are obscured.

David Oresick
Still image from Soldiers in Their Youth, 2009
Single-channel video installation
Courtesy of the artist

Akram Zaatari, *Dance to the End of Love*, 2011
Installation view at Musac
Four-channel video installation
Courtesy of the artist and his gallery

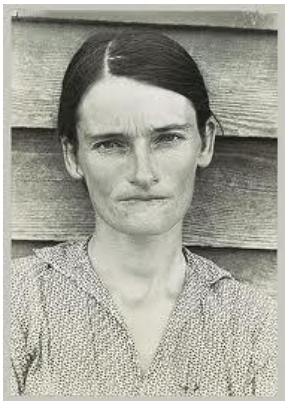
David Oresick and **Akram Zataari** appropriate videos from YouTube without the permission of the original maker or subjects.

- Consider and describe the ethical choices made by each artist in the creation of their work.

- In each body of work, what is to be gained and what is the potential harm that could result through the artists' making these images public?
- How do you feel about the choices each artist made?
- Do you think if personal information is left unprotected, anyone has the right to use it however they choose?
- Would you feel ok about similar pictures of you or your family members being used in this way?
- What do you think the moral and ethical boundaries should be surrounding making the personal and confidential information of others public?
- What if any rights to personal privacy and confidentiality do you think should be protected by law?
- If you feel that ethical boundaries have been violated in any of these bodies of work on view here, who in addition to the artists share responsibility for those violations?

Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*
(documentation of sculpture),1917

Shepard Fairey
Hope,2008
Credit: Mannie Garcia / Associated Press



Sherry Levine
After Walker Evans, 1979

4. The Appropriation Tradition in Art

In art "appropriation" refers to artists who create works with preexisting images and objects. This tradition dates back to the early 20th Century when artists began recontextualizing non-art objects as art. Marcel Duchamp described his use of this practice as creating "ready mades." In 1917 Duchamp famously exhibited a urinal in the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York and titled the work *Fountain*. Since that time, other artists who have become known for creating work through appropriation include Andy Warhol, Sherry Levine, Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, and Shepard Fairey.

The work of several artists who create work with appropriated images has been surrounded by controversy. Most debates and lawsuits regarding appropriation have been connected to artists who borrow elements of images or text made by the work of other creative professionals without permission, which can be a copyright infringement. Additionally, the First Amendment of the United States Constitution generally protects artists rights to free speech, but free speech can be limited when the work of an artist has potential to do harm to a person. Rules guiding "fair use" of intellectual property and the freedom speech of artists are complicated. Some basic guidelines can be found here: http://www.onlineartrights.org/issues/depictions-real-people/depictions-real-people. Several well-known controversial cases are discussed here: http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/No-longer-appropriate/26378

Activity: Research and Report Look into the artwork of and controversies surrounding the above-mentioned artists who work with appropriation. To what traditions did they belong? What did they create? Why was it controversial? Was there legal action related to their work? If so, what was the result? Do you agree or disagree with the controversy and decisions surrounding that artist's work?

5. Mining "Found" Images and Information

There are connections between the work in this exhibition and the work of the artists listed above who are known for appropriating from others. There are also few key differences, mainly the fact that instead of appropriating from artistic works, the artists in *Archive State* accessed and made work from "vernacular" photographs. This genre refers to everyday, commonplace, or utilitarian photographs made by amateurs since after around 1900 when the use of cameras became widespread and encompasses a wide range of imagery including family snapshots, class and team pictures, and official photographs such as drivers' license head shots and police mug shots. Rather than making their own new images, contemporary artists and curators sometimes mine and display vernacular photographs to consider, question, and rework the potential meanings and implications of everyday images. Examples include the exhibitions *In the Vernacular* (Art Institute of Chicago, 2010); *Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000); and Martin Parr's publication *Boring Postcards* (Phaidon Press, 1999).

Vernacular photography displayed in a fine art context is often referred to as “found” and “anonymous” because the images have become detached from their original contexts including their makers and subjects.

- Do you think the source images used to create each of the bodies of work on view in *Archive State* can all be considered “found?” Why or why not?
- Do you think the images in each body of work can be considered “anonymous?” Why or why not?

Some of the works in this exhibition make public the sensitive and confidential information of private individuals, potentially violating those people’s rights to privacy.

- What if any connections do you see between how artists in this exhibition made their work and the work of hackers such as the group “Anonymous” who have been prosecuted for accessing institutional archives to retrieve and use private information?
- How should we as a society decide where to draw the line when writing laws that protect individual’s rights to privacy?

6. “Offending Images”

The series *Found Photos in Detroit* by Ariana Arcara and Luca Santese depicts graphic scenes of the aftermath of violence and disaster that can be difficult to look at. Among these images we see photographs taken from confidential police files that document marks on the bodies of two young boys who have been physically abused--their faces are clearly visible--and the body of the victim of a fatal car crash next to his smashed car. In a series of exterior and interior photographs documenting the aftermath of a fatal house fire, we see the legs of a woman who has otherwise been burned beyond recognition on the floor of the home’s living room.

In his book *What Pictures Want* in a chapter titled *Offending Images*, scholar WJT Mitchell says:

> *…I find it disturbing for instance that a New York art Gallery would display early 20th century photographs of lynchings. What purpose, I want to know, is being served by putting these terrible, harrowing images of evil on display for the voyeuristic gratification of the gallery-going public? Still, I would not censor them if I had the power - only protect and veil them from idle curiosity and disrespect… People have a right not to have offending images thrust in their faces. People also have a right to look at images that others might find offensive. The questions about the freedom to show offending images are really, then, questions about context more than content - about where and when and to whom an image is displayed.*

A. How do you think Mitchell’s statement applies to Ariana Arcara and Luca Santese’s work?
B. What purpose do you think is being served by this display of images?

C. Do you think this context, a college art museum, is an appropriate place to display these images? Why or why not?
D. Do you think our right to see these images should override these victims' right to privacy and confidentiality?
E. Who is responsible for protecting the identity of these victims? The City of Detroit? the artists, the venues that show this work? Others?
F. How does the fact that most of the subjects of these images are African-American and likely low-income impact this work?
G. What are connections and differences between this work and a photojournalist creating and publishing potentially shocking images in periodicals and online?

7. Appropriation in the Digital Age

David Oresick and Akram Zaatari make artwork by editing and combining personal videos posted on social media sites.

- How does technology impact discussions around fair use?
- Do you think if a person posts photographs, videos, and other types of information online that it is anyone's right to use it to make art? If so, why? If not, what should the limits be?

Many of the videos that Oresick and Zaatari used to create their works were staged by individuals for the camera to be posted publically.

- What do you notice about how these individuals present themselves to the camera?
- To what degree do you think we can learn about these people and events, such as the experience of young soldiers at war, through these images posted on social media? What do we learn? What do we not learn?

8. Activity: Mining and Appropriating Social Media Archives

David Oresick gathered personal videos posted online by US soldiers in Iraq and their families, making editorial selections from a seemingly bottomless archive of clips, then cutting, combining, and changing the context in which the videos are viewed to create an authentic and poetic view of contemporary war. Similarly, Akram Zaatari compiled videos made by young Arabs and posted on YouTube on the eve of the Arab Spring, collecting performances of playful heroics, machismo, and revelry to speak about revolutions in self-representation and political activism. Both Zaatari's and Oresick's compilations examine the role of social media in writing the collective story of a particular moment.

Drawing from the wealth of material posted on social media platforms such as Flickr, Facebook and YouTube, create your own story by mining someone else's personal archive. Gather images and videos posted by strangers. Look for patterns, repetitions, and archetypes in the kinds of images people post,

including examples of the everyday, moments that are photographed often (such as self-portraits, birthdays, babies, weddings, vacations, etc) and moments that seem striking, strange, or unusual. Like Oresick and Zaatari, you might choose to search for images pertaining to a particular place, lifestyle, or type of person.

> What memories, stories, places, times, and associations do these images evoke for you? Think of a narrative you could create through some of these images. Sketch out the story you would like to tell. Do not attempt to make a "true" or "factual" story - while there will be elements of authenticity in the material you have appropriated, you will reinterpret the material to create your own narrative.
>
> Which pieces of your collected archive could you use to tell your story? Think about those images like words in a sentence or sentences in a paragraph that will create meaning when combined. Select the ones that are most important to your narrative, and play with sequencing until you are satisfied with the story they tell.

Critique the work with your peers by asking them to "read" the story you have created? What story or stories did your sequence suggest to your classmates? How is that like or different from what you intended? How does your appropriation and sequencing recontextualize the original images?

9 Activity: Exploring Historic Archives

Simon Menner worked with highly sensitive historical materials during his two years of access to a portion of the archives of the former German Democratic Republic's State Security Service (STASI), one of the most effective and oppressive surveillance apparatuses in history. In his body of work on view, Menner has reproduced select pictures from the archive, cataloguing the images into varied groupings, including pictures from seminars and instructional handbooks for agents, actual observational images of secret house searches, and spies spying on spies. Most of the images speak to an invasion of privacy enacted against those under surveillance, but Menner believes that it is important to exhibit the photographs in order to stimulate public discussion.

Pick a specific place at a specific historical moment (for example, Chicago in the Roaring Twenties; the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression; London during World War II; South Africa during apartheid; New York City in the 1970's; etc)

What images and other material would you collect if you were making an archive to represent this place and period in history? Where might you go to look for that material? What kinds of pictures and text would you include? What groupings of images would you make?

> Browse these and other online resources to curate your own historical archive: The Library of Congress; National Archives; Historical Societies; Newspapers

Illinois Learning Standards for English Language Arts Incorporating the Common Core: Standards Addressed in This Guide:

CC.K-12.L.R.3 Knowledge of Language: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CC.K-12.R.R.1 Key Ideas and Details: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

K-12 R R.2 CC.K-12.R.R.2 Key Ideas and Details: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CC.K-12.R.R.6 Craft and Structure: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CC.K-12.R.R.7 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CC.K-12.R.R.9 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

K-12 R R.10 CC.K-12.R.R.10 Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.