

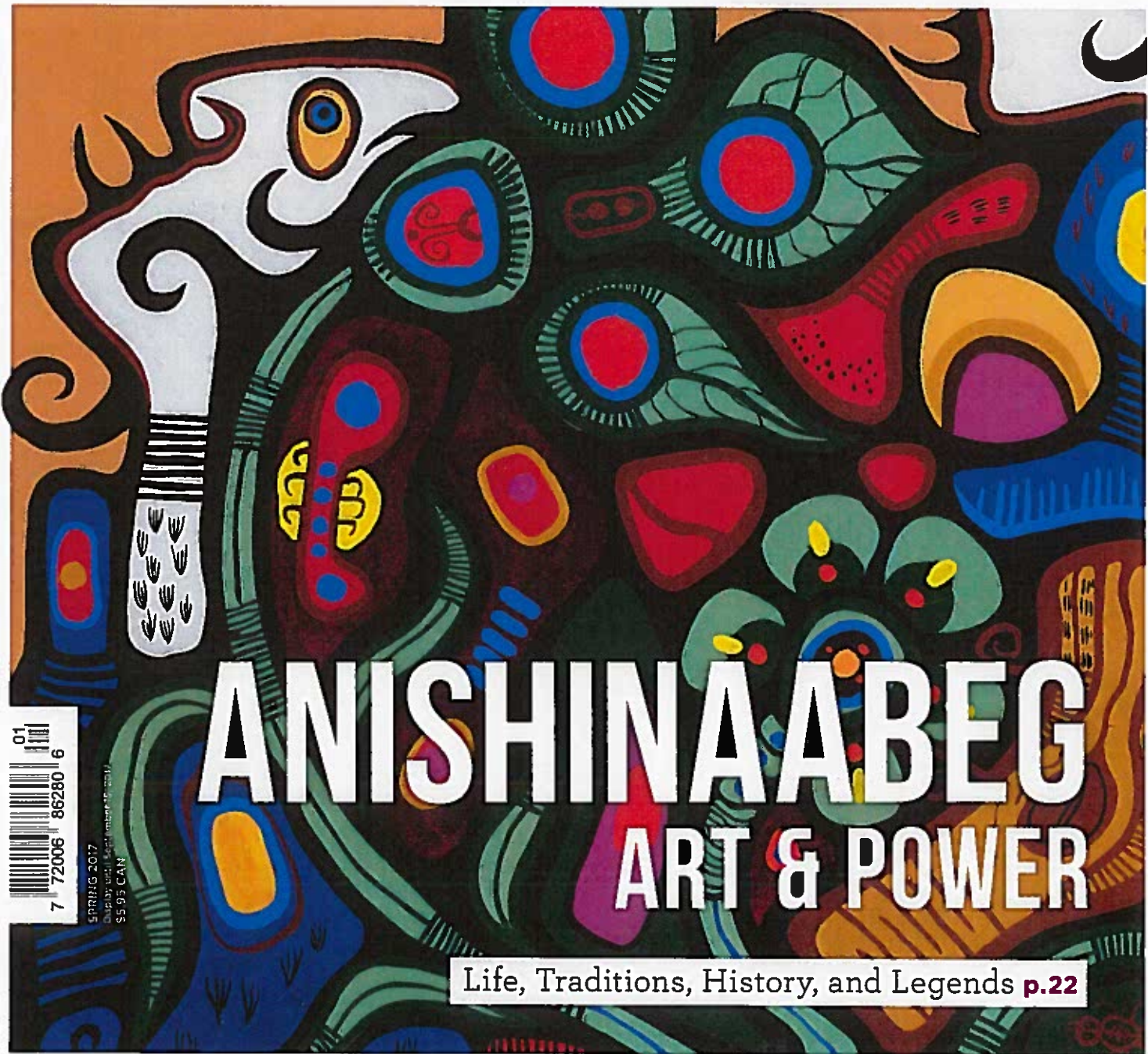
ROM

MAGAZINE of the ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

BLUE WHALE DNA
MORE COW THAN FISH p. 28

THE FAMILY CAMERA
BRINGING THE CANADIAN
EXPERIENCE INTO FOCUS p. 38

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH THE EVIDENCE ROOM
CO-CURATOR ROBERT JAN VAN PELT p. 14

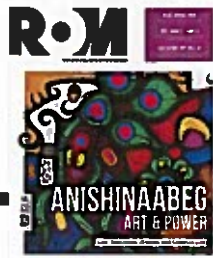


ANISHINAABEG ART & POWER

Life, Traditions, History, and Legends p.22

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SPRING 2017
Display until Sept. 1st 2017
\$5.95 CAN



contents

Spring 2017
volume 50, number 1

ON THE COVER
Detail of *White Women and Their Plants* by Saut J. Williams.

departments

- 3 FIRST WORD**
by Josh Basseches
- 4 MEMBER NEWS**
- 10 DISPATCHES**
- 16 BACKYARD BIO**
ROM ichthyologists
journey upriver
- 18 ASK AN EXPERT**
Canadian meteorite
discovered
- 19 BEHIND THE SCENES**
Assembling a blue whale

- 20 FIELD NOTES**
Conserving tropical wilderness
- 44 ROM TRAVEL**
Join fellow Members
on a journey to Greece
- 46 ROM STYLE**
A pearl by any other name
- 47 ROM GOVERNORS**
Celebrating incredible
philanthropy
- 52 EXHIBIT A**
The Hudson Strait Kayak

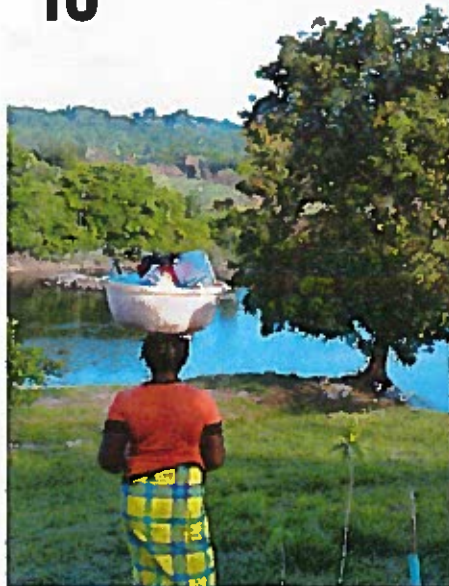
featured stories

- 28 BLUE WHALE**
More cow than fish
- 34 HU**
A glass of finely aged wine?
- 38 THE FAMILY CAMERA**
Shaping self, memory, and
family narrative

COVER STORY

- 22 ANISHINAABEG**
Life, traditions, history, and
legends

16



46



22

new exhibition

Family Photographs

Shaping self, memory, and family narrative

By DEEPALI DEWAN AND JENNIFER ORPANA

Family photographs are personal. They are also part of a shared cultural practice.

Family photographs record. They also shape our understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

Family photographs are seemingly universal. Yet for some families, they don't exist.

Family photographs are images. They are also objects that are created, held, shared, moved, lost, and sometimes abandoned.

Family photographs are snapshots. But they can also be any image that occupies a domestic space and is treated as part of a family archive.

Family photographs are produced by mass reproduction technology. And yet each has a unique aesthetic dimension that deserves our contemplation.



Luong with a 35mm camera
Photographed by Sang Thai
1962
Nha Trang, Khanh Hoa, Vietnam
Gelatin silver print
Courtesy of the Lu-Thai Family



new exhibition

The *Family Camera* exhibition invites visitors to see family photographs differently. It is part of the ROM's offering to celebrate Canada's sesquicentennial, and it explores the relationship between photography and the idea of family. Primarily, this exhibition examines how family photographs connect to experiences and memories of migration.

For Canadians, photographs in family collections are often linked to stories of movement, whether recent or in the distant past, over short or long distances, international or within Canada. Photographs play an important role in these experiences. They are taken at departures and arrivals, they capture the everyday moments and milestones, and they circulate through global networks to maintain connections across distances. Family photographs may be lost or destroyed along the way yet still linger in the imagination. This exhibition captures some of the many reasons why people and photos move and shows how photographs help reflect and shape our sense of family.

Most of the material in the exhibition has been collected or loaned as part of The Family Camera Network project (familycameranetwork.org). An important part of this project is creating public archives at the ROM and the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives that will collect and preserve family photographs and their stories. Since May 2016, The Family Camera Network has hosted oral history and photo preservation training sessions, conducted around 22 interviews, and collected over 10,000 photographs, 41 albums, and around 385 other objects (including letters and documents, slides, postcards, bibles with pressed flower petals, and ephemera).

Thus far, the breadth of material is impressive. People have donated or loaned tintypes, gelatin silver prints, instant photographs, dye coupler prints, and even USB sticks with digital photos, showing the range of materials that compose family photo collections. While all the photographs that have been contributed to the public archives come from Canadian homes, many are global in origin.

One of the unique features of The Family Camera Network public archive project is that it connects family photos with oral histories. These stories reveal information about who or what is represented in the photos, as well as about what the photos meant to the people who produced and displayed them, preserved them, inherited them, or passed them along. The archives help researchers and students consider what constitutes "family photography" and explore the role of domestic photographs in shaping different concepts of family. The archives will also help explore how photographs

reflect and shape experiences of dislocation, migration, and settlement for families at different moments in Canadian history. The Family Camera Network team will continue to conduct interviews and collect photos this spring, concluding this research in December of this year.

"A Canadian family photograph is not only one taken in Canada, it is any photograph from around the world now in a Canadian home."



Felicity cutting cake with her mother Kitty and friends on her 8th birthday. Photographed by Derry Martin, April 1948, England. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Somerset Family.

Reflections

The Family Camera Network illustrates how stories take us beyond what we see in the image, opening up new dimensions of understanding family photographs. Likewise, *The Family Camera* exhibition invites viewers to learn the stories behind family photographs, which are sometimes unexpected, and which inspire new ideas about family and the genre of family photography.

To help illustrate how personal reflections allow us to better understand the important role of photography in shaping a sense of self, memory, and family narrative, lead curator Deepali Dewan reflects on her family photographs.

What is it about family photos with pets that make them a mainstay of family albums? When I look at the one of myself at about a year old with our family dachshund, Tipsy, I don't even recognize myself. My chubby face and squinty eyes make it seem like I just woke up. I don't think I was walking yet, so sitting up like this in the chair was likely not my doing but rather the intervention of an adult figure beyond the camera frame propping me up this way. I look uncomfortable.

The dog, too, looks awkward, probably deliberately posed up on the wicker chair just like me. Amazingly, we are both looking directly at the camera. However, we aren't exactly centred in the frame, suggesting that the photographer had to work quickly to capture an image that was going to soon fall apart.

I've always thought the photo makes me and the dog look particularly chummy. And certainly that was the point. I remember being told many times over the years, usually at family dinners, how Tipsy was my first dog and that we had a special bond. I suppose after being told enough times, I believed it too. But the truth is I don't remember having particularly fond feelings for this dog. I'm not sure I'd have remembered her well, or at all, if it wasn't for this photo.

Deepali with her dog Tipsy on a wicker garden chair, 1972. Photographed by Anil Dewan, New Delhi, India. Dye coupler print (from black & white negative), 8.8 cm x 8.8 cm



Ever since I can remember, I've thought of myself as a 'dog person.' That has been part of my narrative. This photo shaped a memory of my childhood, and indeed a sense of myself, that may not have been there if the photo did not exist. In other words, the photo, and the memory world it is a part of, didn't reflect an experience, at least none that I remember, but produced it.

But there is more to this story. This photograph is not just about me and my dog, but rather it is about how photos of a child and their dog are part of many family albums. It fits into a shared cultural practice. In 1970s urban India, it wasn't common for people to have dogs as household pets. Dogs were considered dirty, an uncontrolled element of society, always threatening to



exhibition

break into the family space, which is clean, controlled, and safe by contrast. For those who did keep a dog as a domestic pet, they did so as a sign of their modernity, of 'Westernness,' and of upper middle-class status.

The modern shift in the association of dogs from street animal to family pet was introduced with Victorian culture, brought in, at first, by British civil servants during the colonial period, and later through English literature and Hollywood movies, as well as American and British periodicals. The *Lassie* TV series ran from 1954 to 1973, mythologizing the dog as a child's best friend. The special bond between the boy and dog in that TV series depicted the dog as parental figure, sibling, friend, and protector all in one.

In my family, there may have been another reason as well. According to family lore, Tippy arrived in our home so that my mother could "practice" before I was born. But in reality, Tippy may have been brought in to comfort my American-born mother, who had married my Indian-born father and travelled across the world to start a new life far away from her family and familiar surroundings. My mother had grown up in upstate New York with a family dog all her life.

There is something about dogs that is linked to a nuclear family, not the extended family. Ann-Janine Morey says the 'basic visual unit' for identifying family

is the child and dog (*Picturing Dogs Seeing Ourselves*, 2014). And so the presence of the dog in our family photos seems to assert my parents' nuclear unit within the larger extended family.

Our family photo album also has photos of me with our other dogs over the years: Bojo our sheep dog, Spotty our beagle, and Leo our mixed-breed rescue dog. The photos tell a story about our family. I can appreciate that story, but looking at these photographs of me and the dogs does not stir much emotion in me.

In contrast, photos of my daughter with our chihuahua, Kilo, have an entirely different feel. Unlike other kids, she didn't want him at first and cried when we brought him home. But soon she couldn't get enough of him, wishing for him to reciprocate all the feelings of love she feels toward him. The affection is genuine; he is a part of her childhood, a part of how she sees herself. She has many photos on her iPad of herself with the dog. Some are selfies and some she has asked me or her dad to take.

Unlike the photo of me and Tippy in my family's album, my daughter is the primary audience for her images. Will she remember any of these images in 20 or 30 years? I guess I'll just have to find the time to download them and show them to her again down the road so that she can either confirm the stories I tell her about them or come up with her own. ■



Kryshna with her dog
Kilo on the couch.
January 15, 2016.
Photographed by
Deepali Dewan,
Vaughan, Ontario,
Canada.
Digital photograph.



Madeleine, Ann, and Peter
 Photographed by Agnes Rees
 1969
 Elbow Falls, Alberta
 Dye coupler print
 Courtesy of Ann Bassnett

Ellen Montague and her son
 Christopher, her sister Ruth Brown,
 and her husband Spurgeon
 Montague on Christmas morning
 Unknown photographer
 December 25, 1961
 (printed February 1962)
 Windsor, Ontario. Gelatin silver print
 Courtesy of Dr. Kenneth Montague

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The Family Camera looks at family photographs as a shared, cultural practice through the lens of migration, and it considers the social, political, and technological factors that have impacted how individuals experience and represent family. Cultural shifts, such as marriage equality and transnational adoptions, can enhance notions of family, while the advent of instant cameras, smartphones, and social media transforms the kinds of moments that are captured, as well as how and with whom they are shared. This exhibition features over 200 objects, mostly photographs and stories collected through The Family Camera Network project. It also includes loans from private and public collections, and new works by artists Jeff Thomas, Deanna Bowen, and Dinh Q. Lê. A multi-sensory installation, using projection-mapping technology exploring the living room as a space where family photos live and stories are shared, has been created by students and instructors in OCAD University's Digital Futures program.

This exhibition is organized by the Royal Ontario Museum with the support of The Family Camera Network and presented concurrently at the ROM and the Art Gallery of Mississauga (until August 27). It is curated by Deepali Dewan, Jennifer Orpana, Thy Phu, Julie Crooks, and Sarah Bassnett, with the assistance of Sarah Parsons and Silvia Forni.

Special thanks to Toronto Photography Seminar, Digital Futures Graduate Program of OCAD University, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Ryerson University's Photography + Film Preservation and Collections Management Graduate Program, Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, Western University, and York University.

HOW TO SEE IT

ONE EXHIBIT: TWO VENUES
 At the ROM from May 6 to October 29, 2017
 At the AGM from May 4 to August 27, 2017

GOVERNMENT PARTNER



PRIMARY EXHIBITION



THE FAMILY CAMERA NETWORK

WHAT ARE FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS? HOW DO THEY SHAPE PEOPLE'S MEMORIES? HOW DO THEY MEDIATE EXPERIENCES OF MIGRATION? WHAT CAN THEY TELL US ABOUT OUR NATIONAL HISTORIES?

The Family Camera Network is a three-year research project that brings together six partner institutions to conduct a scholarly study exploring the relationship between photography and the idea of family. In particular, this research project focuses on stories of migration to and within Canada in the near or distant past. In May 2016, The Family Camera Network launched a public archive project to collect and preserve family photographs and their stories. This archive will hold family photo history for future generations and will provide a resource for teachers, historians, and scholars to write new histories of photography, family, and Canada. The photographs and video interviews are being preserved at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives. Materials will continue to be collected until December 2017.

LEARN MORE

Visit familycameranetwork.org. To participate, contact info@familycameranetwork.org. This project is generously supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Hon with the family's luggage in the Narita International Airport during a stop-over on the way to Canada
 Photographed by Luong Thai Lu
 March 1979
 Narita, Japan. Digital print from a negative
 Courtesy of the Lu-Thai family