

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 7, 2020

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE IN TWO SPRING SHOWS
AT THE DAVIS MUSEUM



WELLESLEY, Mass. – Two exhibitions this spring celebrate the Davis Museum’s rich collection of vernacular photography, from twentieth-century snapshots to nineteenth-century studio portraits. *Going Viral: Photography, Performance, and the Everyday, Snapshots from the Peter J. Cohen Collection Gift* and *Making, Not Taking: Portrait Photography in the 19th Century*, both curated by Carrie Cushman, Linda Wyatt Gruber '66 Curatorial Fellow in Photography, will be on view February 7 through June 7. An opening celebration, free and open to the public, will take place at the Davis Museum February 6 from 6:30 to 9 p.m.

Today, the phrase “going viral” describes the rapid reception and reproduction of media on the internet. But the mania for snapshots has existed ever since cameras became small enough to hold in our hands and accompany us on adventures. With the dawn of amateur photography came the evolution of innumerable stock poses, subjects, backdrops and gimmicks that appear over and over again. *Going Viral: Photography, Performance, and the Everyday* features approximately 150 early-twentieth-century American snapshots, part of a recent gift to the museum from collector Peter J. Cohen. The exhibition considers our everyday relationship to photography: the ways in which we mediate, understand, and narrate our lives through the snapping and sharing of photographs, and how and why certain types of images become socially infectious.

“These are pretty unusual objects to show in museums,” said Cushman; nevertheless, snapshots are so woven into the human experience that “they are the most common way that a common person would engage with photography before the age of ever owning their own camera.”

The exhibition is organized into eleven sections that explore various performances, rituals, and gestures that have gone viral in photography: Viewing Vistas, Monuments Men, Showing Skirts, Fake Fighting, Cross Dressing, Snapping Shadows, Pyromania, “Me,” The Ends, Costumes & Caricatures, and Pictures of People Taking Pictures. In addition to the snapshots, the exhibition will also showcase an original Kodak camera, early amateur photography manuals, Kodak 1s and 2s, twentieth-century album pages, and six photo albums. The exhibition concludes with the latest from Kodak—the Printomatic—which will allow visitors to shoot and print their own snapshots in the gallery and share them on social media using #davisgoingviral.

Going Viral is supported with funds given through the generosity of Linda Wyatt Gruber (Class of 1966) and Wellesley College Friends of Art at the Davis.



Mounted in conjunction with *Going Viral, Making, Not Taking: Portrait Photography in the 19th Century* tells an earlier history of vernacular photography—that of nineteenth-century studio portraiture. Before photographs were taken or snapped, they were *made*. Early photography was a process that involved a great deal of time, labor, and costly materials. This exhibition explores the materiality, the craft, and the event of photography in its earliest iterations.

The first section of the exhibition, *Materials*, draws from Davis Museum’s extensive collection of daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, *cartes de visite*, cabinet cards, and tintypes to demonstrate how photographic portraits shifted from preciously framed and cased photographs, focused on the human bust, to more elaborate depictions of sitters among high-end furnishings and whimsical backdrops. *Studios Around the Globe* examines the ethnographic function of studio photography with a display of “types” from Japan, the Philippines, Egypt, Mexico, and North America. And finally, *A Visit to the Portrait Studio* combines photographs with ephemera, such as broadsides, studio imprints, and posing

manuals, to evoke the experience of having one’s portrait made in the nineteenth century. With generous loans from private collectors Peter and Barbara Schultz, the exhibition will recreate a historic photography studio outfitted with an original backdrop, antique posing props and furniture, a camera and tripod from the studio of John Roberts in Boston, and all of the tools needed to create a daguerreotype.

The goal, notes Cushman, is to “get people thinking about what a process this was; that the portrait was something that was made not just by the camera operator but also by a whole host of people working in a factory setting, and also you as the customer, making choices about how to present yourself.”

Making, Not Taking is supported with funds given through the generosity of Linda Wyatt Gruber (Class of 1966) and Wellesley College Friends of Art at the Davis.

RELATED PROGRAM

Symposium: Handmade Photography Today

Saturday, March 7

11 a.m.–5 p.m.

The Bern Schwartz Family Foundation generously sponsors this day-long symposium, co-hosted with the Photographic Resource Center at Lesley University’s College of Art and Design. Featured photographers Myra Greene (ambrotypes), Will Wilson (tintypes), Edie Bresler (cyanotypes), and Takashi Arai (daguerreotypes) will investigate how the specific material conditions of early photographic formats have the potential to inform and produce alternative understandings of our contemporary relationship to historical imagery. Free and open to the public; advanced registration available at

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/handmade-photography-today-symposium-tickets-83063943491>.

ABOUT THE DAVIS MUSEUM

A vital resource for communities on the Wellesley College campus and beyond, the Davis Museum is one of the oldest and most acclaimed academic fine art museums in the United States. Its signature Rafael Moneo building houses collections that span the history of art worldwide, from antiquity to the present. Guided by commitments to diversity and inclusion, excellence and innovation, and access for all, the Davis is at the core of Wellesley's liberal arts mission of educating women to make a difference in the world. With exceptional encyclopedic holdings, rotating special exhibitions, and enriching public programs, the Davis warmly welcomes all visitors, including scholars and students of all ages. For visitor information: <https://www.wellesley.edu/davismuseum/visit/directions>.

ABOUT WELLESLEY COLLEGE AND THE ARTS

The Wellesley College arts curriculum and the highly acclaimed Davis Museum are integral components of the College's liberal arts education. Departments and programs from across the campus enliven the community with world-class programming—classical and popular music, visual arts, theatre, dance, author readings, symposia, and lectures by some of today's leading artists and creative thinkers—most of which are free and open to the public.

Since 1875, Wellesley College has been the preeminent liberal arts college for women. Known for its intellectual rigor and its remarkable track record for the cultivation of women leaders in every arena, Wellesley—only 12 miles from Boston—is home to some 2,400 undergraduates from 49 states and 58 countries.

###

Image Credits:

Top: Anonymous snapshot photograph, Gift of Peter J. Cohen, 2019.400.

Bottom: Abraham P. Beecher, *Portrait of a Man*, 19th century, albumen cabinet card, 6 1/2 x 4 1/4 in., Gift of Rosamond Brown Vaule (Class of 1959), 2009.316

Media Contact: Mary Agnew

617-512-7489, Magnew@wellesley.edu

High-resolution images and interviews available upon request