

VISUAL DNA



...the language of
photographs

Ellen Cantor

"IT'S NOT WHAT
YOU LOOK AT THAT
MATTERS, IT'S
WHAT YOU SEE."

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

The enigmatic puzzle of the lives portrayed in vintage family photographs is intriguing. Who are the people in the stacks of photographs I inherited? How did their DNA determine who they were and how did it impact the following generations? Is it really possible to learn anything about a person from a photograph? Or, is it a narrative that has been passed down to us? Pondering these questions, I sifted through old family photographs to see if gestures and faces alone could give us clues. Focusing on certain gestures and facial expressions "VISUAL DNA...the language of photographs" introduces another way of deciphering information in photographs and encourages the viewer to ask what is the most important part of an image.

Reading parts of the photograph allows the viewer to interpret the image through their own experiences. Roland Barthes in "Camera Lucida" talks about "studium," the intention of a photograph and "punctum," the unknown part of the image that "pricks" one's imagination. Since we all view images in different ways, "VISUAL DNA...the language of photographs" encourages us to intimately participate in our own unique and personal involvement with each image. Mysterious connections create a different reality or "punctum" for each viewer. Barthes says "its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with a higher value."

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

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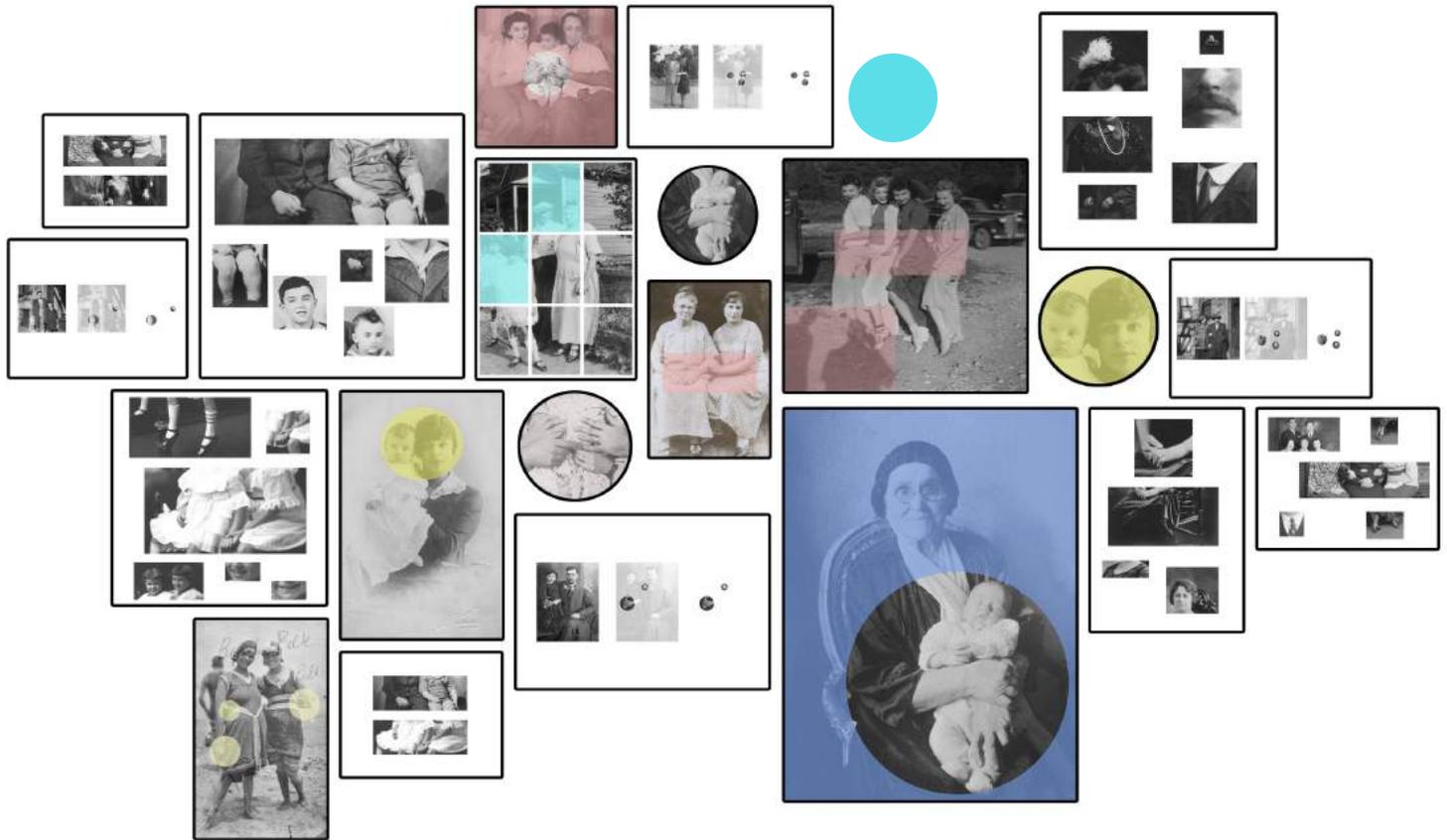
Influenced by vernacular photography, **VISUAL DNA**...the language of photographs references John Baldassari's photographs that used colored circles to hide the faces and to put the focus on gestures. John Sular's "Photographic Psychology: Image and Psyche" reminds us that "Although a photograph cannot record body movement over time, as does video, it excels in portraying the essence of a person disclosed through body language at a particular moment in time."



"DNA IS THE
FUNDAMENTAL AND
DISTINCTIVE
CHARACTERISTICS OR
QUALITIES OF SOMEONE
OR SOMETHING,
ESPECIALLY WHEN
REGARDED AS
UNCHANGEABLE."

Using family vintage photographs, **VISUAL DNA**...the language of photographs suggests the passing of time and the fading nature of memory. The images challenge us to "read" and interpret a photograph filling in the visual language and context as best we can.

Installation Mock-up. Each image will be uniquely framed.



EXHIBITION CONCEPT

VISUAL DNA uses overlays of color and cropping to re-imagine the family album hiding certain parts of each image. This body of work contains eighteen photographs. This manipulation challenges the viewer to “read” and interpret the picture by filling in the visual language associated with the missing content as best as he or she can.

Inspired by the display of the photographic series, the exhibition design takes on a dynamic element resulting in a unique wall treatment. Cantor isolates the fragments of her work by creating vinyl cutouts emphasizing the elements the viewer

should concentrate on within her haunting images.

The exhibition design creates a mural or large-scale installation effect deepening the visual impact. By reworking the vernacular image, the viewer can concentrate on the gestures and isolated areas of each image in an individual manner.

Since my ancestors are no longer here to explain the context of each photograph, I am toying with the multiple truths and viewpoints hidden within each image. This installation invites the viewer to share in the anthropological investigation. What do we keep of our past and why?



**Installation View at
South Bay Contemporary SoLA
Los Angeles, 2018**

ARTIST LEAD WORKSHOP

Using vintage/vernacular photographs and mixed media materials, participants will create new images. They will have the opportunity to use their own personal images or ones provided by the artist.



SELECTION OF IMAGES

...and Baby Makes Three, 2018,
Archival Pigment Print



Birdie and Faye, 2018,
Archival Pigment Print



Rose and Sarah, 2018,
Archival Pigment Paper

SELECTION OF IMAGES

BFF, 2018,
Archival Pigment Print



Nonny and Sydel, 2018,
Archival Pigment Print

SELECTION OF IMAGES

Etta, 2018,
Archival Pigment Print



I Think They Are My Great Grandparents, 2018,
Archival Pigment Print



Bubbe, 2018,
Archival Pigment Paper

BIO

Ellen Cantor is a Southern California artist who uses the camera to reimagine the family photo album and objects that hold personal histories in order to explore the distillation and persistence of memory.

She received a BS from The University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and continued her education in Interior and Architectural Design at UCLA.

Her work has been featured in 17 solo exhibitions including dnj gallery, Santa Monica, CA, The Griffin Museum of Photography, The Center for Fine Art Photography, and The Spartanburg Museum of Art. She was a Critical Mass finalist in 2015 and 2016 and winner of the Julia Margaret Cameron Award for Women Photographers as well as first place in the Fine Art category. Since 2016, she has participated in over 25 national and international group exhibitions which include the Italian Cultural Exchange in Naples, Italy.

Her photographs have been published in Harper's Magazine, Muzee Magazine and SHUTR Magazine and online in Lenscratch, f-stopmagazine, fraction magazine, rfotofolio, Voyage LA Magazine, My Daily Photograph, Lightleaked, a photo editor, Float Online Magazine and Silvershotz.

Ellen is represented by dnj gallery, Santa Monica, CA, Susan Spiritus Gallery, Newport Beach, CA and Truth and Beauty Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

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Visiting Grandparents, 2018,
Archival Pigment Paper