

## What we see: A modest atlas of survivals

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Deadline: Jun 29, 2018

Amy Hamlin, St. Catherine University

Call for Proposals for future volume of tiny collections, an imprint of punctum books.

This call is for the volume titled *What we see: A modest atlas of survivals*, to be published in 2020.

*What we see: A modest atlas of survivals*

Many contemporary art historians have cultivated a daily practice of picture making, a practice that is arguably spurred by the advent of digital photography and is increasingly apparent on numerous social-media platforms. Photographs may feature curated, cropped, and captioned works of art that figure in scholarly research, but frequently extend to net more vernacular imagery from contemporary advertising and media, personal snapshots taken from ordinary life, and scholarly travel. With a hat-tip to Baudelaire, this species of art historian is a kind of scholar of modern life, who everywhere delights in incognito. This relative anonymity is afforded by the precarious nexus of formal art historical training and a society that at best misunderstands the value of that training. The images that emerge as a result of this *flânerie* are symptoms of cultures and histories that are vital, fraught, and complex. Art historians may be said to possess an idiosyncratic, occasionally revelatory visual intelligence. Shaped by innumerable close encounters with works of art in person and in reproduction, this intelligence is earned over time as images accrue in the mind from years of study for endurance tests that range from comprehensive oral exams to original research. Not insignificantly, that intelligence is also shaped by the spaces in which the work of art is encountered, the places where scholarship happens as well as the quotidian banalities and political realities that condition the life of a scholar. *What we see* is filtered through a studied lens that frames the world in idle observation, in urgent political critique, in solidarity with a novel idea, in an unexpected joy in discovery. This practice of documenting what we see occasionally surfaces – at its most resonant – survivals.

Inspired by the art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929), this book takes as its guiding principle his notion of *Nachleben*. A key concept in Warburg's underappreciated understanding of the history of art, *Nachleben* denotes the survival or afterlife of an image or motif that emerges transformed in and metabolized by another (visual) culture in time. Indeed, Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* established a model that has endured in the politically trenchant dimensions of John Berger's book and television series *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and more recently in the lyrical sensibilities of Teju Cole's *Blind Spot* (2017). As a gentle rejoinder to the empirical impulse of so much objective art history, this book also valorizes the intuitive visual intelligence of art historians at the confluence of critical scholarship and some combination of street photography and studio practice. Channeling the

spirit of Warburg's *Nachleben*, it aims to countenance the survival of images and motifs from an expanded history of art (i.e. inclusive and beyond the province of Warburg's concern) that circulate in both the outer world of modern life and the inner world of mind and memory. In this way, it wishes to vindicate an alternative model of art historical practice that privileges image over word. It assumes a rhetoric of temporality that is more allegorical than symbolic, more fragmentary than hermetic, more anachronistic than linear, more heuristic than axiomatic, more speculative than masterful. Readers of this volume will be provided not with runes to decipher, but with tools for thinking.

Proposals may take a variety of forms, including short visual essays, single images, or a series of single images. Captions are welcome, but not required, and can range from just a few words to 250-300 at maximum. High-quality digital files of proposed images are a must.

By June 29, 2018, please send the following to this volume's editor: Amy K. Hamlin (akhamlin@stkate.edu)

- ☒ a mock-up of your proposal that assumes 6x6" (15x15cm) book format
- ☒ an abbreviated 2-page cv
- ☒ a brief cover letter that outlines the relation of your proposal to the theme of a particular volume

What we see: A modest atlas of survivals will be published in print (for sale and on demand) and in PDF format (gratis and on demand).

#### About tiny collections

tiny collections, for the Material Collective, is an imprint of punctum books. tiny collections form one expression of the Material Collective's mission to foster a safe space for alternative ways of thinking about objects. tiny collections push at the boundaries of art history's methods and practices; they value the lyrical and the speculative; sometimes they are group projects; they cross boundaries and invent forms; they are not monographs or traditional scholarly research studies; they are not the kinds of art historical projects that could find publication in established journals. tiny collections are gatherings: thoughtfully assembled things, presented in warm light with a murmured "lookit" for introduction. tiny collections are the things we do, together. Editor of tiny collections: Maggie M. Williams (williamsm11@wpunj.edu)

Amy K. Hamlin is Associate Professor of Art History at St. Catherine University, where she teaches courses in Art History, Visual Culture, and Women's Studies. A scholar of modern and contemporary art, she has published articles on Paul Cézanne, Max Beckmann, William H. Johnson, Jasper Johns, and Kara Walker. She is co-founder with Karen J. Leader of Art History That, a project that aims to curate, crowdsource, and collaborate on the future of art history.

#### Reference:

CFP: What we see: A modest atlas of survivals. In: ArtHist.net, Mar 29, 2018 (accessed Mar 26, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/17743>>.