

CAMERA CRAZY

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14–17 Wells Street
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Tel. +44 (0)20 7323-5004
Fax +44 (0)20 7323-0271

Prestel Publishing
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CAMERA CRAZY

CHRISTOPHER D. SALYERS & BUZZ POOLE

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CONTENTS

006 TOY CAMERAS: MARKETING A MEDIUM BY BUZZ POOLE

012 IT'S NOT THE PHOTOGRAPHER, IT'S THE CAMERA BY CHRISTOPHER D. SALYERS

019 NOVELTY CAMERAS

097 DIANA, HOLGA & THE PLASTIC CAMERA BOOM

106 INTERVIEW WITH MR. T.M. LEE, CREATOR OF HOLGA

123 LOMOGRAPHY & THE ANALOG MOVEMENT

125 INTERVIEW WITH LOMOGRAPHY



171 INSTANT CAMERAS: THE RISE, FALL & RESURGENCE OF POLAROID

172 POLAROID: THE LOOK OF INSTANT GRATIFICATION

176 INTERVIEW WITH CREED O'HANLON, THE IMPOSSIBLE PROJECT'S CEO

189 JAPANESE CAMERA CULTURE

221 DIGITAL TOYS

222 INTERVIEW WITH SHREE K. NAYAR, INVENTOR OF BIGSHOT CAMERA

TOY CAMERAS: MARKETING A MEDIUM AND THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE UNEXPECTED

BUZZ POOLE

When Susan Sontag wrote that photography's "main effect is to convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation," she most certainly was not thinking of toy cameras. But the sentiment aptly applies to this photography industry niche and the deft marketing strategies implemented to shift the perception of photography from being an expensive professional's pursuit to an affordable, everyman's activity.

Not only were the earliest cameras expensive, they were large and the creation of an image required time and knowledge. As cameras were refined and made smaller and more efficient they were marketed to appeal to hobbyists. No longer was photography defined by long spells of sitting in portrait studios or the lugging around of bulky cameras, fragile plates, and corrosive chemicals. Photography became an off-the-cuff novelty, capturing candid family moments and scenes of leisure.

The evolution of photography from being a rarefied medium to something so commonplace we hardly even think about it anymore has as much to do with savvy marketing as visual aesthetics and artistic practice. From the very early days of photography, camera manufacturers tapped in to popular culture trends in order to promote, and package, their cameras.

An indispensable resource for understanding the genesis of toy cameras is John Wade's slim but detailed *Cameras in Disguise*, which charts a clear trajectory from "disguised cameras," made as early as 1862, to the toy cameras of today. As Wade sees it, in the United States, as well as in Europe, the public was interested in everything about detectives, especially their covert ways. Whether it was Pinkerton's National Detective Agency in the United States, which started in 1850, or the publication of the first Sherlock Holmes story in 1887 in the United Kingdom, both real and fictional detectives were curiously popular.

In 1862, an English designer known only as Thompson, working with A. Brios in Paris, received a French patent for a Revolver Photographique. Compared to the cameras made to look like pistols and rifles that would follow in its wake, this first revolver camera really only looked like a firearm in that it had a wooden handle similar to one that would be found on a pistol, and the lens resembled the barrel of a gun.

Up until this time, cameras used wet plates, which required chemical preparations prior to an exposure and then needed to be developed immediately after the photograph was taken. As Wade points out, the advent of dry-plate technology permitted photographers to shoot an exposure and develop it at another time, giving designers of disguised cameras much more flexibility.



▲ The Eastman Kodak Brownie Camera, Model No. 2.

An impressive array of disguised cameras was made during the last two decades of the nineteenth century; it is also worth noting how several of these cameras incorporated technological developments that went well beyond outward appearances. In 1882, Etienne Jules Marey made a Gun Camera, not to be secretive about his taking of pictures but to better aid him in his scientific study of birds in flight. According to Wade, the camera “housed a long focus lens in the barrel that acted as a telescope to enlarge distant objects. A large circular dry plate was housed in a special magazine and as the gun’s trigger was pressed a mechanism revolved the magazine to expose twelve pictures in rapid succession.” The following year, the Photo-Revolver de Poche, designed by E. Enjalbert, used parts from a real revolver, looking almost identical to a European gun from that era.

More and more patents followed and with them new ideas for cameras that didn’t look like cameras. E. Enjalbert also designed the Postpacket Camera, which looked like a wrapped parcel. As Wade writes, “Models were also launched disguised as binoculars or opera glasses, with one lens for the exposure, the other for the viewfinder. Others appeared disguised as handbags, and there was even one made to look like a picnic basket.” Cameras were hidden behind vests and inside men’s hats; in 1890 Bloch’s Photo Cravate hit the market. Books became a popular disguise for cameras, often housing the lens in the spine.

Individual inventors and tinkerers developed many of these cameras in disguise, and their proliferation indicated a demand for cameras marketed to consumers

who did not identify themselves as photographers. George Eastman, already holding patents for crucial elements of photographic processes, such as film and film roll holders, recognized the potential for such cameras. According to Eastman biographer Elizabeth Brayer, a patent was issued in 1886 for the Eastman Detective Camera, which was inspired by the 1883 release of the first commercially produced hand-held box camera invented by William Schmid of Brooklyn, New York. In June of 1887 fifty of Eastman's detective cameras, set at a retail price of \$45 USD, were ready to be released on a trial basis. For reasons not wholly known, Eastman distributed only a handful of these trial cameras, presumably retraining his focus on the development of the first Kodak, and its release in 1888.

Of course, the first Kodak changed photography, and in truth human culture, bringing the medium to the people. The logo promised: "You press the button—we do the rest." It was an ingenious model in how it empowered people to be excited about taking pictures and as a result of that excitement insured that the entire range of Kodak photographic accessories—from cameras to film and processing fees—would always be in demand.

In 1900, Kodak introduced the Brownie camera, the launching pad for the toy cameras featured in *Camera Crazy*. Using Palmer Cox's illustrated "Brownies"—beetle-like sprites that were already popular culture fixtures—the Brownie was marketed explicitly for children.

As mainstays of American popular culture since 1883 these mischievous but moral characters borrowed from Scottish folklore had already been on ample adventures before teaming up with Eastman Kodak. Jeanne Solensky, a librarian in the Joseph Downs Collection & Manuscripts & Printed Ephemera at the Winterthur Museum in

Delaware, writes at the museum's blog: "Throughout, the Brownies were on the cutting edge of trends, engaging in sports like bicycle-riding and tennis, riding cars, and visiting the Brooklyn Bridge and the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago even before the fair opened." Popular? Adventurous? Trend setting? What better spokespeople could there be to try to convince every family in the world to buy a camera? Of course, leveraging the popularity of one brand to help promote another was nothing new. In fact, the Brownies had lent their hippy, spindly-legged likenesses to all sorts of products:

By the 1890s, the Brownies could not be confined to the printed page and burst into the advertising and merchandising worlds as companies sought to ride the Brownie wave to increased sales. Small Brownie paper dolls were placed in packages of Lion Coffee and the New York Biscuit Co., prompting children to beg parents to buy more to collect entire sets. A band of Brownies playing musical instruments paraded across trade cards for Estey Organ Co. Twelve characters were fashioned into seven-inch cloth toys manufactured by Arnold Print Works of Massachusetts, a very successful dress goods printer. The Brownies transformed into rubber stamps, card games, blocks, puzzles, and even bowling pins. They even appeared on household furnishings like carpets, wallpaper, fireplace sets, china, glassware, flatware, and of course, Kodak cameras. The Brownie empire reigned.

The first model, known as No. 1 Kodak Brownie—an eight-ounce, palm-sized box camera with the capacity for six exposures and four square pictures, without reloading—retailed for \$1 USD. The carrying case cost an additional fifty cents. According to Kodak, 150,000 Brownies were shipped out in the first year alone, far exceeding expectations.

Attracting kids with the cute characters they recognized from comics, and appealing to parents as a cheap and easy-to-use camera that their child could play with, Kodak capitalized on a cross-promotional marketing scheme that only became more dynamic with every new model. By 1933 Eastman Kodak forged marketing alliances that resulted in the Boy Scout Brownie and the Century of Progress Brownie, an official souvenir of that year's World's Fair. Throughout the twentieth century, as the popularity of photography skyrocketed, this approach to marketing photography would only become more sophisticated, making the medium big business.

How big a business? Between 1948 and 1953, Polaroid sold 900,000 Model 95 Land Cameras, the first commercially available self-developing instant camera. While Polaroid cameras were not toy cameras (though several toy Polaroid cameras were manufactured over the years) this impressive sales figure makes clear that cameras were in demand, giving camera companies plenty of incentive to promote their products in every imaginable manner. It is no surprise, then, that camera makers and companies that had nothing to do with photography partnered to promote their respective products.

Photography started as a scientific art but the insistence on the part of Kodak, and the companies that have followed it, that photography should be fun and easy blurred the line between "serious" photography and "recreational" photography. All because of the marketing of a toy, that happened to be a camera.

In his essay "The Philosophy of Toys," Charles Baudelaire recounts a childhood trip to a mansion where a woman of means, wanting to give him a memento of his visit, takes him to a room where "the walls were invisible, so deeply were they lined with toys. The ceiling had vanished behind

a great towering bouquet of toys, which hung down like wonderful stalactites. The floor barely afforded a winding path for one's feet. Here was a world of toys of every kind, from the costliest to the most trifling, from the simplest to the most complicated." If it were possible to install every toy camera ever made in a single room, it would be as colorfully jumbled as the room Baudelaire describes.

What are we to make of all these nontraditional cameras that fill the pages of this book? They all are functioning cameras in that they are capable of taking pictures. Some were created to do nothing more than promote a brand. Some were created for specific reasons but became popular for unintended reasons. Some seem to fall into both categories. And here they all are: cute and cutting edge; clunky and junky; hokey and vintage. They all share one thing in common, however—they are all toy cameras.

Baudelaire places great importance on toys because they instill the "facility for gratifying one's imagination." He doesn't understand the parents who do not permit their child to play with a toy because it is too nice for the child, and he laments the child who prefers to preserve her toys, as if they are part of a museum collection, rather than use them to have fun. Baudelaire insists, "toys become actors in the great drama of life, scaled down inside the *camera obscura* of the childish brain." For the purpose of *Camera Crazy*, this is an extremely fitting quotation. For Baudelaire's purpose, *camera obscura* refers to a child's mind as a dark chamber awaiting imagination to fill it with the colors of life. But writing this piece in 1853, he doubtless also had in mind the medium of photography and its genesis in the ancient *camera obscura*, that seemingly magical phenomenon of light passing through a tiny aperture into a dark room and projecting onto the wall an inverted image of an object outside the room.

At its core, photography is the act of collecting images. Why shouldn't it be playful? For a long time, this was not the case, however. But after the success of the Brownie, all of that changed. When Baudelaire wrote, "The toy is the child's earliest initiation into art, or rather it is the first concrete example of art," no one thought of cameras as playthings. Only trained professionals used them. But by the twentieth century this was no longer the case and different schools of photography emerged, most simply divided between professional and hobbyist. There were photographs worthy of hanging in museums and snapshots only suitable for family photo albums.

This split actually began near the end of the nineteenth century when members of longstanding photographic societies parted ways in an international wave of "photo-secession," forming new groups dedicated to securing photography's status as an art form as important as painting. By this time, no matter how divisive opinions regarding the medium, there was no shortage of potential customers for the photography industry. The industry just needed to understand the consumers they were trying to reach.

But then something curious happened—everything blurred and the clarity of distinction between professional artists and everyday hobbyists dissolved, leaving a bokeh of camera enthusiasts.

In 1973, when Walker Evans first started playing around with his first Polaroid camera, he famously referred to it as a toy. But it was the toy he favored for the rest of his life, finding his subjects "all strangely enhanced by the technical limitations of the camera." After World War II, photographers like Garry Winogrand and Lisette Model came to the fore of the art world for their candid street photography. More and more, aesthetic standards

were shaped by the authenticity of the unexpected. No matter what side of the camera people were on, they wanted to see, make, and take part in images that they could relate to, cataloging, in the words of Evans, an "inventory of American memory," or the memory of the human experience. It didn't matter if the composition of the shot was perfect, or if the lightning was right, or if the colors on the print were a bit washed out. Life is all about the unexpected and photography learned to embrace this fact, and profit from it.

All of the cameras in this book were borne out of promoting fun and imagination, very much in line with why Baudelaire so valued toys. Yes, it is in the name of selling product, but these cameras make users forget that, even when they are holding something as garishly branded as a beer can camera. Holga, Lomography, SuperHeadz, and the smaller companies making equally exciting toy cameras, prioritize a user experience that is about fun and being in the moment, the opposite of the time when photography was a slow, expensive process.

The cameras are quirky, sexy, silly, plain, and audacious, reflecting their users and permitting them to be comfortable with how the medium has changed so dramatically, and making sure they realize how they are active participants in this change.

It is easy, and fair, to be critical of how the proliferation of photography has forever changed our relationship with the image and how the image informs perspectives of reality. This is what Susan Sontag called to attention in the essays that comprise *On Photography*. Her concern was how the ubiquitous photograph had become a stand-in for reality: "Photos, rather than the world have become the standard of the beautiful." This, as Sontag saw it, demeaned photographic subjects, treating

them like nothing more than objects to be consumed. To be sure, if you agree with what Sontag identified as problematic about the popularity of photography, the question deserves that much more scrutiny since the advent of digital photography and the accelerated modes of image delivery and sharing.

What Sontag decried, the companies and cameras featured in *Camera Crazy* celebrate, though not in the name of the mindless consumerism suggested by Sontag's "department store" world. These cameras are the kinds of toys Baudelaire so admired, embodying the whimsy of materialism and its inherent frivolity that nonetheless yields stunning results. The results might not hang on museum walls, sell for huge sums in sterile galleries, or be included in surveys of art. But then again, plenty of images made by toy cameras have done such things. The "toy" in "toy camera" is a tool for the imagination, whether in children or adults, self-identified artists or proud amateurs, reminding us all of the importance of not over thinking and not taking everything too seriously. These cameras invite us to treat the world like the toy-choked room that left an indelible impression on the young Charles Baudelaire, where the whole photographic process is a matter of playing, from selecting the camera to choosing the shot and looking at the image. We should all be so lucky to surrender, in Baudelaire's words, to "that admirable and luminous alacrity which is typical of children, in whom desire, deliberation and action are so to speak compacted into a single faculty—and which sets them apart from degenerate man, almost all of whose time is on the contrary eaten up with deliberation."

The unwavering popularity of toy cameras is deliberate to be sure. But that is in large part due to the cameras being made and marketed for users who want to shirk

deliberation, preferring to indulge desire and ego. In 1859, in the June issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. dubbed photography a "mirror with a memory." When I look in the mirror, I do not see the same face that someone looking at me sees, or the same one portrayed in a photograph. As Holmes rightfully pointed out, photography documents the fabrications of memory. All cameras encourage people to capture the stories of their lives, not quite as they happened, but how the user makes viewers believe that is how they happened. Toy cameras and the images they produce unapologetically call attention to the schism between object and image, letting us forget about mimetic principles and shutter speeds to enjoy the simple act of creation, triggered by an individual who wants to add something new to the world.

IT'S NOT THE PHOTOGRAPHER, IT'S THE CAMERA: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MODERN TOY CAMERA

CHRISTOPHER D. SALYERS

UNLIKELY BEGINNINGS

The history of the modern toy camera starts in the early 1960s, with a small company in Kowloon Bay, Hong Kong, called the Great Wall Plastics Factory. It is here that they created the Diana—a lightweight, extremely cheap (at the time of production, less than \$1 USD), plastic-bodied 120 film camera with a plastic lens. It had one shutter speed, three aperture settings—sunny, sun with clouds, cloudy—and manual focus from 1m to infinity. And cheap it was: the shutter release caused a loud cracking noise, and the film winding sounded forced and fragile as it chattered with each turn. The Diana also suffered terrible light leaks, and many resorted to covering the body in multiple layers of gaffer tape.

It was imported to the US by the Power Sales Company of Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, and wholesaled by the case (144 cameras) at around fifty cents per unit—and though this original Diana experienced success as an inexpensive export, production at Great Wall ceased in the mid-'70s. In part, their failure can be attributed to the Chinese market, which was flooded with clones. These copycats had a wide variety of altered features, including electronic flashes, longer lenses, fake light meters, and extra shutter speeds. They also each had their own take on the “Diana” logo that encircled the lens: “Snappy,” “NorthAmerican” (page 102), “Sam Toy,” “Mego Matic,” “Candy,” and “Acme,” to name a few.

The Diana challenges the photographer to see beyond the equipment and into the image... [It] summons up the Dadaist traditions of chance, surprise, and a willingness to see what can happen.

—Robert Hirsch, *Photographic Possibilities*

The Diana had an artistic appeal all its own, and arrived at a time when unconventional photography was being recognized by galleries and institutions. When photographer Nancy Rexroth discovered the Diana in a graduate class at Ohio University in 1969, it immediately struck a chord. The images she was able to create with this cheap plastic camera evoked a mysterious and dreamlike exploration of her own childhood. With Rexroth's *Iowa* in 1971, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, held the first major exhibition of photography shot with a Diana. Subsequently, Violet Press's 1977 publication of *Iowa* was the first monograph of images taken with a toy camera.

The Friends of Photography gallery in Carmel, California, held a juried exhibition in 1979 titled *The Diana Show*, where more than one hundred participants submitted photographs shot with a Diana. The show's catalogue includes the first major essay on the toy camera, “Pictures through a Plastic Lens,” in which The Friends of Photography's Executive Associate David Featherstone wrote:

In a medium so deeply rooted in the technology of its making, it is not surprising that many photographers reach a point of technical confinement which must be overcome in order for their personal creative growth to continue. The conflict is resolved in many ways; explorations of alternative print-production processes and major changes in subject concerns are examples. The search for visual spontaneity through use of a simple camera such as the Diana is yet another.

Questions about what constitutes professional or artistic photography were quite prevalent at the time, with Ansel Adams famously quipping that the technical obsession with the photographic process created a “sharp image with a fuzzy concept.” The toy camera is a direct response to this. The “confinement” perceived by Diana users at the time carries over into the digital age, as the technical aspects of each new and improved digital camera may seem daunting to the aspiring photographer.

By the end of the '70s, the Diana had become scarce—even production of its clones was dwindling. Collectors and enthusiasts scoured flea markets and thrift stores hoping to stumble upon an original. Yet, unaware of the toy camera movement growing in the United States, Hong Kong entrepreneur T.M. Lee created what was to become the Diana's spiritual successor: the Holga.

In the late '60s, Lee began his career at Yashica. Not long after, he formed his own company, Universal Electronics Industries, where he achieved initial success making flashes for cameras. But as the '70s market moved toward built-in electronic flashes, he was forced to rethink his business model. The first medium-format camera with a built-in flash, the Holga was released in 1981. (The name is an Anglicization of the Cantonese phrase *ho gwong*, meaning “very bright.”) Like the Diana before it, the Holga

WHAT IS A TOY CAMERA?

A toy camera—typically—is a simple plastic box camera with fixed focus, limited aperture settings, and (in most cases) a single shutter speed. Toy cameras have unique and sometimes unpredictable characteristics that define them, such as light leaks, vignetting, and soft focus. Though the term is ever-changing and often argued about in enthusiast circles, most of the cameras in this book are toy cameras. Some may not be inexpensive; some may have electronic shutters; and some may be digital; but the most important aspect of the toy camera is the unexpected fun you can have with it.

was prone to malfunctions and produced results that appeared impressionistic or surreal. At the time of its inception, the Holga was made for 120 film, but just a few years later 135 took over in popularity across China. So it was in the United States that Lee found his niche market, where sales soon reached 10,000 units per year (today, that number is somewhere around 200,000). First adopted as a low-tech instructional tool for institutional workshops, the Holga is now internationally recognized as a creative, unconventional camera for photographers looking to stand out against a digital norm.

NOVELTY TOY CAMERAS

The Diana may have been the frontrunner of the toy camera movement, but it wasn't the first. Throughout the '50s and early '60s, a variety of “toys” were manufactured as compact beginners' cameras. (These included, but were not limited to, the Ansco Panda, the Brownie Holiday,

the Coronet 4-4 Mark II, the Fujipet, and the Imperial Mark XII.) The retail model changed in 1963, when Kodak released their Instamatic line of point-and-shoot cameras alongside a new, easy-to-load, cartridge-based film: the 126. Now that the backing plate and exposure counter were built into the cartridge itself, this allowed for simpler and cheaper cameras to be produced.

With budgets lowered, some truly bizarre novelty cameras were released for 126 film. Disney has seen their characters branded onto many different toys, but in 1971, Child Guidance Products of the Bronx, New York, released the Mick-A-Matic (page 20). What made this unique wasn't the fact that it was a Mickey Mouse camera, but that the camera was Mickey Mouse: a lens for a nose, a viewfinder

for a forehead, and (in early models) an ear that acted as the shutter lever. (A label on the back of his right ear reads: "Treat me gently, I'm your pal.")

Similarly strange is Whitehouse Products' Brooklyn-made Charlie the Tuna 126 camera (page 22), released in 1971. In exchange for three StarKist can labels and \$4.95 USD, you could own your very own oversized (241 mm tall) tuna-shaped camera, complete with his signature thick-rimmed glasses and red cap. As the original ad stated: "Just give 'em the old fish eye—they'll never know it's a camera."

In 1972 Kodak released a more compact version (13×17mm vs. 28×28mm image size) of its 126 film: the 110. This format was extremely popular at launch and led to the production of a wide variety of novelty cameras over the next two decades. Cameras were released disguised as cigarette packs, cans of soda or beer (pages 64–67), a car tire (page 68), a miniature airplane (page 70), *Webster's Dictionary* (page 84), a He-Man toy (page 36), and even a bag of French fries (page 60).

The production of toy cameras saw a decline in the late '80s and '90s, largely due to the popularity of inexpensive single-use 135 disposable cameras. Though iterations of disposables have existed since 1949, the first truly successful disposable was Fujifilm's Utsurun-Desu (translation: "It takes pictures") released in 1986. Kodak released its version, the Fling (\$9.95 USD), in 1987, which was later rebranded the FunSaver in 1989. Versions of cheap disposable cameras found their way into just about every retail outlet, catering to the growing need for immediate, simple, and inexpensive photography at a time before cell phone technology placed a camera in everyone's pocket. Still, the nostalgia factor for these cameras is growing, and—like in notions of lost art or



▲ The Mick-a-Matic camera.



- ▲ The Majestic and the Brownie Holiday served as inspirations for modern day toy cameras. Compare these images with the Sprocket Rocket (page 153) and Golden Half (page 204).

shared experiences, where cameras are left for strangers to use—many artists are finding new ways to experiment with single-use cameras.

Though toy cameras were still being produced (for mostly 135 film) with interesting designs and quirky, in-camera effects, they were mainly marketed toward children. Throughout the '80s, '90s, and early 2000s, there were brand tie-ins such as Barbie (page 58), Star Wars (page 50), Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (page 44), Hello Kitty (page 56), and Pokémon (page 52). Then there were oddities like the Nickelodeon Photo Blaster, which captured four images per frame yet had, quite possibly, the ugliest camera design ever produced. In 1998 Nintendo released the Game Boy Camera (page 226), which at the time was the world's smallest digital camera (*Guinness Book of World Records*, 1999). Though crude in result (256×244 pixels [0.014MP], black-and-white, thermal-paper printing), the camera was innovative in concept, with a rotating lens allowing for front-facing “selfies” that could then be used interactively on built-in

games or edited in-screen—features now common on just about every modern handheld device.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY TOYS

Like in many art scenes, the toy camera had its own movement: Lomography. The Lomography Society was founded by a group of Viennese students in 1992, after they became enamored with the image quality captured by the 1984 Russian-made compact point-and-shoot camera, the Lomo LC-A. Far from a cheap plastic camera, the LC-A was made of metal with a quality Minitar 32mm lens. Many international photography exhibitions later, Lomography has become synonymous with toy cameras, opening showrooms worldwide and releasing their own variants on the plastic toy camera (Supersampler, Fisheye, La Sardina) and re-creations of classics (including the Diana and Holga) every year.

With the advent of the new millennium, the concept of the toy camera shifted into the digital realm, thanks in large part to novelty cameras (many Japanese-produced) and

phone apps (like Hipstamatic) that re-create the effects of many popular plastic-bodied box cameras. Instagram, a Facebook-owned camera app with social media functionality, has the ability to take normal, low-resolution photographs and tweak them using various filters to give photos a retro, hazy, analog-like appeal. You might Instagram the cover of this book, for example, quickly choose a filter you like, and not think much on it before sharing the image with your friends. But what you've really done is digitally mimic the results of a vintage camera. The Lomo LC-A, Yashica Mat, Diana, Holga, and Polaroid are all inspirations for these filters.

The Japanese company SuperHeadz (and its parent company, Powershovel) creates cameras that fully embody the modern spirit of the toy camera—inventive,

unique, and fashionable. Its Harinezumi (page 191) digital camera, with the appearance of a tiny roll of 110 film, shoots video and stills that have the quality of an aged roll of 8mm. It's Wide and Slim line (a reimagining of the cult classic Vivitar Ultra Wide and Slim, page 206) is popular for its 22mm focal length and results that are unnaturally vivid, with oversaturation and high contrast. The SuperHeadz Golden Half looks like a modern, compact take on the Kodak Brownie Holiday camera—except it takes two shots per frame. Like other multiframe cameras, there's a playful interaction with the subject(s) as you consider not only the image in the frame, but the next shot, and how the two will relate side by side. The Blackbird Fly (page 196), one of their more recognizable cameras, is an all-plastic modern twin-lens reflex in a variety of bold colors that is sold in a faux plastic birdcage.



▲ Camera crazy: the ever-growing pile of plastic.

Another Japanese maker, Fuuvi, takes a more whimsical approach to their products, with even more digital offerings: a biscuit-shaped camera (pages 214–15), cameras that look like glasses, and more. Each is made to look like a novelty accessory and produces images that mimic analog-like effects.

With photography's much publicized—and once scorned, then ultimately embraced—move into digital, the way we see and interact with the medium has changed. No longer is photography an art exclusive to tech junkies. From Lomography to iPhoneography, it's clear that the age of the point and shoot as mainstream art is upon us—either that, or we're still all rebelling against the barrage of high-definition media.

It is the person behind the camera, rather than the machine itself, who created the image. This at least is one of the paradigms of creative photography.

—David Featherstone, *"Pictures Through a Plastic Lens"*

Many of us tend to think of the camera, not the photographer, when we view certain images, and this is a significant change in how we interpret the medium. Thanks in large part to the Internet, more people than ever perceive the camera as a specific filter to certain aspects of their lives. You might take a Diana to your friend's wedding, bring a Fisheye to the beach, color tint your online profile picture, or take your Holga on a sightseeing trip around town—each with a particular look or style in mind. We're constantly battered by imagery, and the more we interact with them via apps, social media, or simple online image sharing, the more we understand how they're made and which camera/filter/lens they came from. Whether or not you can tell the difference between a digital filter and an analog original, well, that's a whole other matter.

The toy film camera, in the simplicity of its form and the charm of its weaknesses, creates images that are unexpectedly personal. They act as a third-eye vantage point on life's chosen moments, seeing things as the photographer cannot. Toy cameras are, perhaps, the simplest ways to keep the spirit of film photography alive. Beyond the rhetoric and rules, they lend a romantic interpretation of the world, a mysterious way in which they make marks with light. They're quirky, inventive, and unconventional. They allow us to look at the art of photography with all the vibrancy and excitement of youth—for they are, after all, toys.

NOVELTY CAMERAS

MICK-A-MATIC

Manufactured in USA for Child Guidance Products Inc. Year: 1971. Film: 126. Flash: flash cubes.



In the earliest model of this camera, one had to pull up on the right ear to release the shutter, which would have made for awkward handling. This was quickly fixed for the model you see here, with a standard side shutter switch. A sticker on the back reads: "Treat me gently, I'm your pal."



👁 Sylvie frames her shot with the Mick-a-Matic.