

Image Matter

by Dave Kemp and Kevin Robbie

Image Matter - is an artistic project produced through collaboration between Dave Kemp (a visual artist) and Kevin Robbie (a physicist specializing in nanostructured materials) that investigates the nature of value and new forms of value resulting from advances in digital technologies, specifically as related to photographic images.

The project makes use of a scanning electron microscope (SEM) to image a variety of photographic materials edge-on. By displaying the edge view (thickness) of the photographic material on a very large scale, the physicality of the photograph is emphasized and all trace of the image contained within the photograph is eliminated. The only reference to the image content is through the use of captions and associated text. By removing the image, the viewer is left to consider the photograph on new grounds, as both a photographic object and a photographic image and to establish where different forms of value attributed to photographs actually exist.

Value as attributed to a photograph can manifest itself in a variety of ways, from straightforward use-value and market-value, to the significance attributed to the memory of a loved one or of times past. Value can also be assessed through Walter Benjamin's notion of cult-value and exhibition-value and even through Benjamin's concept of *aura*. Although this property was not originally attributed to photographs, one could argue that over the years, certain photographs, particularly vintage photographs do in fact develop a "unique existence in time and space" (Benjamin, 1978, p 220) and display "changes which it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in ownership" (Benjamin, 1978, p 220) as with the case of the included military identification photograph that has quite literally been through World War II.

Thanks to the support of the Project Open Source Open Access initiative at the University of Toronto, an online, digital version (<http://davekemp.ca/imagematter/>) of this project is made available under a Creative Commons *Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.5 License*. Releasing the artwork in this manner will result in wider distribution and a much larger audience than could be achieved through a physical gallery exhibition. It will allow individuals to download, print and thus own a copy of the artwork (at no cost to the creators of the artwork) and allows for the images to be used as building blocks by other artists. Ideally, this project may help to set a precedent for other artists to release work in a similar fashion.

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