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- BUSINESS
- LOCAL
- SPORTS
- ARTS & LIVING
- GOING OUT GUIDE
- JOB
- CARS
- REAL ESTATE
- RENTALS
- CLASSIFIEDS

SEARCH: go | Search Archives

washingtonpost.com > Arts & Living > Museums and Galleries

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Page 2 of 2 < Back 'One Hour Photo,' at the Katzen Arts Center

Most every "One Hour Photo" piece will never see life in hard copy. They're shot digitally, uploaded and then transferred to a gallery computer for the show. Both the server and computer hard drive will be wiped clean once the show is over. It'll be like the pictures never existed.

"A lot of being an artist is: How many people can you get to see this work?" says photographer Chajana denHarder, 28, who, along with Kelley, was brought on to curate and who also submitted work. "I wanted to make a piece and see what happens when no one sees it. It's an experiment."

To delight in one's work never being seen is a perverse pleasure that only an artist could embrace. To their credit, the curators enticed an impressive roster of artists to sign the waiver.

Penelope Umbrico, head of Bard College's MFA photography program and creator of "5,377,183 Suns from Flickr" currently on view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, scavenges found photos, often from eBay or Flickr. "I'm interested in the photograph as a visual currency in a social collective," Umbrico says. "One Hour Photo" is about how that kind of photography gets expressed and distributed.

Tim Davis, Umbrico's colleague in the Bard photography department and a regular on the international gallery circuit, contributed an image because he thought Good's concept spoke intelligently to problems in contemporary photography. "I've always been very skeptical of the attempt to make photography too grand and too permanent," Davis says. "All photographs, even the most archival, are unstable and prone to disintegration. There's been this trend in the last 15 years of photographs getting bigger and bigger and trying harder to compete with painting. I always felt that, that ignored their transitory nature."

But even as "One Hour Photo" attempts to transform the "permanent" photograph into something fleeting, you've got to wonder. If the Library of Congress is archiving tweets, you know that these images aren't going anywhere. "At this point it's on good faith with the artist," Kelley says. "The release doesn't say that the image has to be destroyed by the artists. It just can't be shown publicly."

Such edicts haven't stopped at least one Facebook prankster from vowing to take pictures of the pictures while they're being projected.

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But most everyone else is embracing the concept. Brooklyn artist Megan Cump, whose work will be shown on opening night, takes a Zen approach to her photo's imminent passing.

"This project is like fishing," Cump says. "Capture and release."


"It's there for a moment and then you let it go."

Dawson is a freelance writer.

"One Hour Photo"

Opening Saturday, 6-9 p.m., at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, 4400 Massachusetts Ave. NW, as part of the "inSPIRATION" exhibition. Runs 11 a.m.-4 p.m., Tuesday to Sunday, through June 6. 202-885-1300. <http://www.onehourphotoproject.com>. <http://www.american.edu/cas/museum/index.cfm>.

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'An experiment': Chandi Kelley, left, Chajana denHarder and Adam Good see "One Hour Photo" as a way to dial back time, sales and endless replications. (Sarah L. Voisin/the Washington Post)

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