

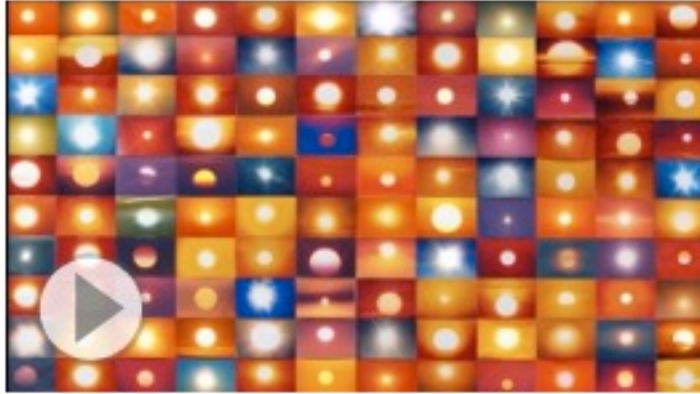
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The Brain Is Mightier Than the Camera When Remembering Art

Research Suggests People Who Take Pictures of Art Remember Less About the Works Than Those Who Don't

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By Ellen Gamerman



Americans now snap 4,000 photos every second. Ellen Gamerman joins Lunch Break with a look at how the explosion in digital images is having an outsized impact on the art world. Photo: Penelope Umbrico/Mark Moore Gallery.

who led the study. "The photos are trophies. You want to show people where you were rather than saying, 'Hey, this is important, I want to remember this.'"

In the study, university undergraduates were led to 30 works in the school's Bellarmine Museum of Art and told to spend 30 seconds looking at each work, photographing half of them. In a memory quiz the next day, they had to distinguish between objects they'd seen and new ones added to the mix. Ms. Henkel calls the resulting memory gap the "photo-taking impairment effect." She added that results improved slightly when people taking the memory test viewed photographs of the objects and not just written descriptions of them.

In a second phase of the study, Ms. Henkel instructed participants snap close-up shots of certain works and found that those people remembered the art just as well as those who looked without shooting. "It's a phenomenon called boundary extension," she said. "Our brains create a mental representation of that object. What the camera remembers is the photograph, but your mind remembers the object as a whole."

Such research comes as museums are encouraging the use of camera phones in their galleries. The Museum of Modern Art in New York recently introduced MoMA Audio+, an audio-tour program delivered on an iPod Touch that allows people to take pictures. At home, following their visit, they can access a dashboard that documents the artworks they photographed. MoMA plans to offer a publicly downloadable version of the app next year that will allow people to share pictures via social media while still inside the galleries.

Many museums allow visitors to snap their permanent collections but not special exhibitions. Over the past year, the Dallas Museum of Art has pushed harder to secure permission from lenders to allow visitors to shoot temporary exhibitions, too. "I am pleased that people linger

As museums swarm with visitors snapping photos in their galleries, new research suggests people who take pictures of art with their camera phones remember less about the works than those who don't.

A study released last week found that people remember 10 percent fewer objects and roughly 12 percent fewer details about the objects they've seen if they've photographed them rather than simply looked at them.

"When you press click on that button for the camera, you're sending a signal to your brain saying, 'I've just outsourced this, the camera is going to remember this for me,'" said Linda Henkel, a psychology professor at Fairfield University in Connecticut,

for more than a couple of seconds even if only to frame up a picture," the museum's director, Maxwell L. Anderson, wrote in an email. "Artworks at their best are powerful forms of communication—and taking a snapshot does nothing to reduce their power."