

Introduction to *The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual*

Carson & Miller

Abstract: Written as Carson & Miller, collaborative artists who explore narrative and the places where narrative intersects with material culture and everyday experience, this introduction presents the stakes of the larger project that entails the exhibition *The Story of Things* (2009), the conference *The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual* (2010) and the double issue of *Image (&) Narrative*. It mainly focuses on the interdisciplinary approaches to the relationship between object and storytelling.

Résumé: Portant la double signature de Carson & Miller, un duo d'artistes avec un intérêt particulier pour la narration et les rapports entre les interaction entre culture ordinaire et manières de raconter, cette introduction présente les enjeux du projet plus large qui regroupe une exposition *The Story of Things* (2009), un colloque *The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual* (2010) et ce numéro double d' *Image (&) Narrative*. Elle aborde essentiellement les approches interdisciplinaires des rapports entre objet et récit.

Key words:

Interdisciplinarity, objet, ordinary culture, storytelling

We write this introduction as Carson & Miller, collaborative artists who explore narrative and the places where narrative intersects with material culture and everyday experience: our impulse is to tell and re-tell stories from these places, to one another and to the viewer, the listener and the reader. Our editing of this double issue of *Image [&] Narrative* emerges from our explorations, and our desire to provide a platform for an interdisciplinary discussion about the relationship between narrative and objects, images, ephemera and memory.

In September 2009 our exhibition *The Story of Things* opened in Manchester (UK). As artists we took on the role of curators, exploring the ideas of collections and narrative. In producing the exhibition we worked with material from Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections and the North West Film Archive. Our curatorial process provoked further discourse around narrative and the visual. We chose to continue this investigation in

the conference we convened against the backdrop of the exhibition. The conference, *The Story of Things: reading narrative in the visual*, took place in January 2010 and this issue of *Image [&] Narrative* (and the following issue) takes the premise of the conference and develops a number of the themes presented there. The articles in this double issue reflect interdisciplinary approaches to the subject matter. We include a range of contributions from both theorists and practitioners, and are pleased to incorporate a number of visual essays which investigate the subject matter in an alternative form.

This issue addresses two particular themes. The first, *Telling the Story of Things*, allows us to further investigate the ideas at the heart of the exhibition *The Story of Things* and its accompanying artists' book *Scrapbook (the story of things)*. The second, *Object as Catalyst: the potential for narrative within the artefact*, sees a number of contributors consider the manner in which objects carry meaning and provoke narrative as a result.

The following issue pursues two further themes. *Visualising the Remembered Narrative: archetype, biography, autobiography* explores the ways in which we recall stories, particularly in relation to the images that are closely connected to the story being told. *Authoring and Reading the Sequential Narrative: linear and non-linear approaches* is the concluding section of this second issue, examining the tension between seeing and reading images and the affect this has upon our understanding of them.

Patricia Allmer begins this issue with her text *Relating the Story of Things*. Here she takes a theoretical approach to our curatorial activities, unpicking our decision making and strategies of display. Reflecting on the manner in which we 'interfered' with a museum collection, Allmer particularly considers the relationships we made between objects and materials. *Scrapbook (a visual essay)* follows, allowing us to investigate the central concerns of our collaborative art practice: narrative and play. This visual essay deliberately reworks images of material held by Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections and the North West Film Archive, demonstrating the multiplicity of meanings triggered by the connections that emerge when 'things' are combined.

The second part of this issue begins with *Artefacts & Anecdotes*, where Karen Bassi considers the possibility for narrative within the historical artefact. Framed by archaeological discourse, Bassi discusses the way in which the past is interpreted through the objects that are left behind. In turn, Mary O'Neill considers the art artefact in her essay *Ephemeral Art: Telling Stories to the Dead*. O'Neill explores the transient nature of a number of artworks and the way in which the artist and the art object relays a narrative. This issue ends with a visual essay by artist Samantha Donnelly: *European Destinations Dreamed with a Limited*

Imagination. Donnelly utilises a collection of mass-produced, everyday materials as a vehicle through which she articulates the richness of ubiquitous objects and the potential meanings they possess.

This issue is the first part of an exploration of the themes we present here; this exploration will be concluded in *Image [&] Narrative*, fall-winter 2011.

Our thanks to all contributors and peer reviewers, and to Jan Baetens for his support in the preparation of this double issue. Special thanks to Patricia Allmer.

A short biography of each contributor is included with their abstract.

Peer Reviewers

Andrew Bracey is an artist based in Manchester, UK and is currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at The University of Lincoln. Recent solo exhibitions include firstsite, Colchester, Transition Gallery, London, Wolverhampton Art Gallery and Manchester Art Gallery. Bracey curated the exhibition *UnSpooling: Artists & Cinema*, Cornerhouse, Manchester in 2010 with Dave Griffiths and sits on the board of *Desearch*, a postgraduate journal of Art & Contemporary Culture.

Anna Catalani is a Lecturer in Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Salford. Her research interests are in the area of material culture, museums and heritage studies.

Fiona Curran is an artist, a Senior Lecturer at The Manchester School of Art (UK) and is currently undertaking a PhD at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London researching the effects of technology on concepts of natural and artificial space.

Theresa Wilkie's research interests are in the practice and theory of photography, and community participation and engagement in the production and interpretation of heritage and the visual arts. Wilkie is currently Director of Design & Culture at Salford School of Art & Design, University of Salford.

Guest Editors

Carson & Miller have worked collaboratively as artists since 2000. Their practice is driven by their need to tell and re-tell stories; recent work has increasingly used the book and the game as forms for collaboration. In 2009 Carson & Miller curated *The Story of Things* for Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections (14.09.2009 – 29.01.2010). Other work has featured in exhibitions including *Swap/Vaihto* (UK & Finland, 2008) and *Universal Shipping Box* (Argentina, Germany and UK, 2010). Carson & Miller have played a series of games in a number of gallery settings in Liverpool, Manchester and Berlin. Jonathan Carson and Rosie Miller are both Lecturers in Critical & Contextual Studies in Salford School of Art & Design, University of Salford.