The Anonymous Project
From the period of the early 1960s, when prices for color photography had dropped to where it became accessible to non-professionals, to the rise of digital cameras, color photography soon developed into the dominant medium to capture daily life. Not just weddings and graduations, or friends posing for friends, or families gathering for portraits, but everything. Life, often unstaged, caught in lush Kodachrome color. These amateur photographs are a kaleidoscopic diary of that era, all the more fascinating and arresting because of their unpolished quality.

The magic of color photography is that when the chemicals on the film are exposed to light, color is created. The problem is that these chemicals degrade over time, eventually leaving no trace of the image. Most color negatives will not survive beyond 50 years. Unless urgent action is taken, this colorful piece of our collective memory, artifacts of daily life from the 60s up through the digital age, will fade out of existence altogether.
Our Mission

The Anonymous Project’s goals are to collect, scan, and catalogue these photographic negatives and slides. We will curate the collection and house them in a single database, which will become an invaluable resource for students and cultural historians, or simply anybody who wants to look back on life in these periods and see it as it was captured through this singular medium. This website would also provide a portal by which the collection could continue to grow, allowing people to log on and contribute their own recovered negatives.

Curating these images will be the most challenging part of this endeavor, but crucial for creating exhibitions, interactive events, catalogues and books. We foresee a multitude of exhibitions growing out of this collection, built around various themes, such as ‘love’ or ‘friendship’ or ‘loneliness.’ The possibilities for thematic exploration are limitless.
Different but the same

By preserving this important part of our shared experience, we learn about each other and our differences, but more importantly and to a much greater degree, we learn about our shared humanity. This is especially important now, at a time when the divisions in the world are so great and nationalism is on the rise particularly in the West. Through these images we will learn that our need for love, laughter, intimacy, and celebration are what binds us all.

Why ‘Anonymous’

The word ‘anonymous’ applies because the names of the people in the images as well as the names of those who provide them or those who took the pictures will never be known or shared. Nor are they relevant. This is not about any one person or a particular artist seeking to express something publicly. Almost always these photographs were taken for one’s personal desire to savor a moment in time. Often these amateur photos are technically imperfect—like life itself—and all the more compelling because of their imperfections. This project is akin to finding fading pages from an anonymous diary and placing them in a time capsule for future generations.
We’re Anonymous, however…

Lee Shulman is a graduate of the University of Westminster with a BA Hons in Film Video and Photographic Arts. For the last two decades, he’s been working as an award-winning filmmaker in the UK and France. He’s also an avid art collector and is very active in the international arts community.

Emmanuelle Halkin is a graduate of the Ecole du Louvre. She’s working independently on several photographic projects, from publishing to exhibitions to live events. In 2014, she joined the Paris-based Circulation(s) festival and she’s also the curator of Inter Kultur Foto Art, a biannual photography festival in Stuttgart, Germany.

The Anonymous Project
174, rue du Temple
Paris 75003 France

Founder : Lee Shulman
lee@anonymous-project.com

Head of development : Emmanuelle Halkin
emmanuelle@anonymous-project.com

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