

ANALOGUE

ZOE LEONARD

It was only as these old shops begun disappearing that I realized how much I counted on them—that this layered, frayed, and quirky beauty underlined my own life.... New technology is usually pitched to us as an improvement. But progress is always an exchange. We gain something, we give something else up. I'm interested in looking at some of what we are losing.—Zoe Leonard

Zoe Leonard's *Analogue* is an epic of urban change, a sweeping accumulation of nearly four hundred photographs taken between 1998 and 2007. The project chronicles the slow disappearance of local markets, shops, and similar independently owned ventures in the face of an ever-expanding global economy. Its images provide a poignant glimpse of a particular texture of American street life that has all but vanished.

The story begins in neighborhoods on New York's Lower East Side and in Brooklyn, where encroaching gentrification has almost completely displaced the businesses that once made these streets a kind of American casbah. The second large section follows a shipment of secondhand clothing from a clearing station in Brooklyn to markets in Kampala, Uganda. In this version of the globalized contemporary rag trade, garments that have been donated to charities in the U.S. are sold through chains of middlemen and reemerge as commodities for village merchants in the third world. There's an unmistakable sense of colonialism come full circle, as these garments (many originally made in sweatshops overseas) return to the developing world where many believe they are displacing indigenous textile traditions. Leonard also records the worldwide spread of multinational brand images and casts an unsentimental eye on changing patterns of daily commerce and survival in other corners of the world, from Mexico City and Havana to Warsaw, East Jerusalem, and Barcelona. She pauses to notice, and to photograph, the kind of unexpected hybrids that can result when objects discarded in one time or place reappear and are reused in another.

Analogue is filled with images of camera shops and photo stands, as well as such other examples of tenacious analogue technology as typewriters or hefty console televisions. Digital technology has transformed photography just as thoroughly as chain stores and multinational corporations have changed the face of commerce, and Leonard attempts to honor and preserve analogic photography against this pervasive tide. She shot the photographs of *Analogue* using a vintage Rolleiflex camera, and the project is a testament to both the endurance and the endangered status of photography itself.

Helen Molesworth, the exhibition's curator and the Wexner Center's former chief curator of exhibitions, brought this project to the center when she selected Leonard for a Wexner Center Residency Award in 2003–04. *Analogue* was already well under way at that time, but it took much of its final shape during the residency, which encompassed two major elements. First, the Wexner Center provided funding for Leonard and assistant Jocelyn Davis to travel to Uganda to photograph the destinations of the clothing bundles that had earlier caught her eye on the streets of Brooklyn. Leonard also spent two months in residence at the Wexner Center, working in a large studio space where she was able to develop the display structure for *Analogue*'s installation and plan an initial sequencing of the images. She has continued to rework the sequencing and organization, however, as well as to take new photographs for the project in New York City and elsewhere.

Analogue, 1998–2007

C-prints and gelatin silver prints

Courtesy of the artist, Tracy Williams, Ltd., and Galerie Gisela Capitain

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Zoe Leonard was born in 1961 and grew up on the edge of Harlem in New York. She currently lives in Brooklyn. Her work has been featured in Documenta IX, two Whitney Biennials (1993 and 1997), and in shows at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Centre National de la Photographie (Paris), Kunsthalle Basel, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, among many others. *Analogue* will also be shown at Documenta 12 in Kassel, Germany, this summer and at Villa Arson, a contemporary arts center in Nice, France, in the autumn. A 20-year survey of Leonard's work is scheduled for November 2007 to January 2008 at Fotomuseum Winterthur in Winterthur, Switzerland.

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Look in the Wexner Center Store for the *Analogue* exhibition catalogue, which takes the form of a kind of artist's book with a selected sequence of images and an essay by Leonard made up of quotations from varied sources on photography, cities, and change.



In Analogue, history is embedded in things and images, and it is this very embeddedness that allows it to act upon the present. It is, in many ways, our first comprehensive and self-conscious document of the twentieth century as a historical period.—Helen Molesworth