

# snap shots

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## Phil Pressel Discusses Hexagon KH-9 Spy Satellite Stereo Cameras At PHSNE Meeting Sunday, May 1, 2022, 7:30 P.M., via Zoom Link to be sent to PHSNE members via email



Phil Pressel was the project engineer in charge of the design of the formerly top-secret Hexagon KH-9 spy satellite's stereo cameras. His presentation on May 1<sup>st</sup> will expand on and answer questions about his recent *Journal* article. The Hexagon KH-9 was the last film-based spy satellite, and it helped keep the peace during the cold war from 1971 to 1986. The program was declassified by the National Reconnaissance Office/CIA in 2011.

The Hexagon satellite was an invaluable asset providing photographic intelligence information during the cold war. It was responsible for President Nixon signing the SALT treaty and allowed President Reagan to say, "trust but verify."

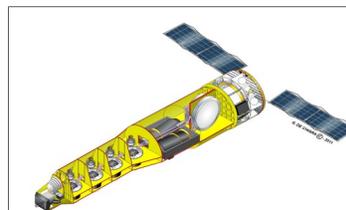
Pressel will explain how the stereo camera system worked in perfect synchronization with the incredible amount (30 miles of film for each camera) of fast moving film (200 inches per second), linearly and in rotation. This satellite was and still is considered the most complicated satellite ever put in orbit, one of America's best and most successful spy satellites. It was launched on the Titan IIID or the Titan 34D.

The presentation will include some photographs that the system took of some Russian assets and of some cities in the US. There were nineteen launches from Vandenberg AFB in polar orbits at altitudes from 90 to 140 miles; the CIA ran the first in 1971, then turned the program over to the Air Force in 1972.

Pressel retired after nearly 50 years working in the aerospace industry including 30 years at the Perkin-Elmer Corporation in Danbury, Connecticut that con-

tracted to the CIA. He continues to do consulting work.

Since the Hexagon program was declassified in September 2011 Pressel has lectured on the Hexagon program to many national technical organizations and museums including the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Museum in Dayton, Ohio (where the last remaining Hexagon vehicle is on display), at the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum and at the Spy Museum in DC.



Flight Configuration Cutaway

Pressel has written *Meeting the Challenge: the Hexagon KH-9 Reconnaissance Satellite*, a book on the importance of the Hexagon program to United States security; he describes in detail, with accompanying drawings and photographs, how the system actually worked. Its publication was approved by the NRO/CIA. His blog about Hexagon can be accessed at [www.hexagonkh9.com](http://www.hexagonkh9.com).

### **Journal Committee Seeks Feedback**

The *Journal* Committee would greatly appreciate your feedback on the recent 2021 issue. The 2022 issue is well under way, but we need and welcome suggestions for the 2023 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue.

Contact us at [journal@phsne.org](mailto:journal@phsne.org).

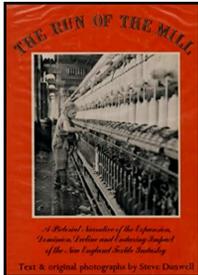
### Conversation Corner

John Quibbler came across an old issue of *snap shots* (November, 2020) that featured a description of the monthly program, *Documenting the World of Work*. Presenter Steve Dunwell had visited textile mills in New England and published his documentation in *The Run of the Mill: A Pictorial Narrative of the Expansion, Dominion, Decline and Enduring Impact of the New England Textile Industry* (Godine Press, 1978).

Quibbler wrote, “Glad I found this. I grew up in N. Grosvenordale, CT, in the 1970’s. I remember when Mr. Dunwell came to our mill village. I was around nine. I am in two of the pictures in the book. In one, I am on a bike in the row house yard, the other, on the rocks we would hang out on; there is a wall behind us. There are about a dozen of us in that picture, we called ourselves the Walker St. gang and lived in what we called the French Village.

I have a blown-up picture of that photo on my wall and still communicates with and see some of the old gang. The memories.”

If a story in *snap shots* particularly resonates with you, please let us know. And, as always, feel free to share stories about that special camera or image in your collection.



Text & original photographs by Steve Dunwell

### PHSNE Membership

**New members are invited to join for half the rates for the first year.** Regular PHSNE membership (U.S. and Canada) is \$20 for students, \$40 for individuals and institutions, and \$45 for a family; foreign membership is \$50. Join or renew online at <https://phsne.org/join> or <https://phsne.org/renew>, or send a check in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar denominated international money order. Please check the expiration date on the *snap shots* mailing label before sending in dues.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to PHSNE Membership Chair, 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453, email [membership-chair@phsne.org](mailto:membership-chair@phsne.org), or use the Web form at <https://phsne.org/application>.

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### Local Photography Exhibits

**Wellesley College** is offering *Self-Slowing Error* at the Davis Museum’s Levine Gallery. The exhibit features the recent installation by award-winning photographer Komatsu Hiroko who “uses 8x10 prints, large rolls of uncut photographic paper, and videos filmed during previous exhibitions to coat the gallery in monochrome, generating a uniquely embodied experience of photography” (<https://www.wellesley.edu/davismuseum/whats-on/current/node/189956>).

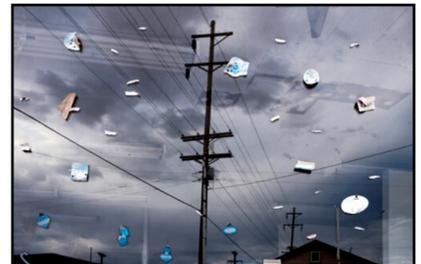


The artist’s work has been displayed in her native Japan and in several European countries, but this is the first exhibit of her work in North America. The MAST Foundation in Bologna and the Tate Modern in London have her work in their collections. In 2018 she received the Kimura Ihei Award for new photographers in Japan.

Her photographs depict “industrial building and scrap materials that await transfer to sites of new construction, or the dump. In the wake of massive redevelopment projects in her home city of Tokyo, the host of the Summer Olympic Games in 2021, this installation reflects on the logic of capitalism. Unveiling the environmental chaos and excessive waste that undergirds urban renewal, Komatsu’s work creates a space to consider the cycles of creation and destruction that define the twenty-first century city.”

**The Griffin Museum** in Winchester, MA is hosting *Veiled Actuality* and *Silent Scenes* through June 5<sup>th</sup> (<https://griffinmuseum.org/>). Explaining *Veiled Actualities*, photographer Philip Sager says,

“Normally our eyes see all of the visual information but our brains simplify to one or two major objects. In taking these pictures based in the real world, the camera lets us see the rich visual complexity and multiple layers that we do not conventionally perceive.”



Untitled 4, 2017 © Philip Sager

*Silent Scenes* features the work of Stephen Albair who claims, “Life’s ambiguities—love, loss, and longing—are subjects for my artworks.” He uses “found objects combined together in a tight space” to “create a dialogue.”

## Kodak 3A Folding Pocket Camera

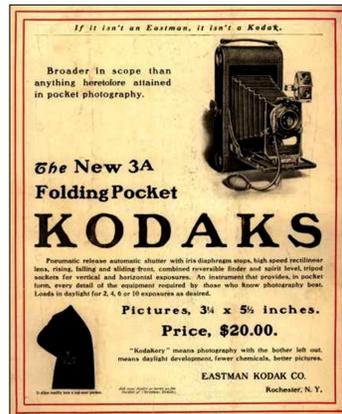


PHSNE member Roger Galbert brought the Kodak 3A Auto-graphic to our attention via an inquiry to *snap shots*. It's called the No. 3A Folding Pocket Kodak, but it wouldn't fit in most pockets—and would be uncomfortably heavy if it did.

Introduced in 1903, the 3A features a postcard format that produces 3 ¼ by 5 ½ inch exposures using 122 roll film.

Various models were produced from its inception through 1915, (B series—B through B5, C, and G), though cameras using the postcard format continued to be manufactured until 1943.

After you captured an image, a variant of the 122 roll film enabled you to record information about it using a metal stylus attached to the back of the camera, hence the “postcard” designation. That film is quite



hard to find now, and the camera can accommodate standard 122 film.

Opening the folding camera is the first challenge; you need to locate and press a hidden button on the bottom. Once it's opened, it's a relatively easy camera to use.

“Like most early Kodak folding cameras, the lens on the 3A is quite modest: a simple anastigmat with a maximum aperture of f/7.7 and a

minimum focus distance of six feet. Coupled to the lens is a homegrown ball bearing shutter with five different speeds: Time, Bulb, 1/25, 1/50, and 1/100 seconds” (<https://vintagecameralab.com/kodak-no3a-autographic/>).

Galbert's camera, pictured here, is a 3A C, covered in Moroccan leather, a real beauty. It features an atypical Zeiss lens, Tessar series IIB.



## What Can You Do With a 130 Year Old Camera?



Among other things, you can create a most interesting coffee table, a great conversation piece, especially in the room housing your collection. An avid PHSNE collector was fortunate to find the 1890s camera pictured here at an antique shop on Long Island almost

50 years ago, and the table has moved with him four times since.

The 130 year figure is a guess based on the camera's appearance and features. There is no identifying information on the camera as to who manufactured it, when, and where. It might date from the very early 20th century.

One very special feature is the red leather bellows preserved with a special Russian process (see below). A visitor from the George Eastman Museum in Rochester explained that these specially treated bellows remain in excellent condition despite their age, never drying or cracking.



The beautiful brass lens was obtained separately. The original camera could be converted to an enlarger to print glass plate negatives which would later be processed in a darkroom. It accepted various size glass plates.



When the owner of the camera began a career as a technical sales rep for Eastman Kodak in 1980, one of his clients was actually using a similar camera in his photo studio. Exposures were determined by estimating the number of seconds that elapsed.

\*\*\*\*\*  
 Wikipedia offers this description of Russian leather: “a particular form of bark-tanned cow leather. It is distinguished from other types of leather by a processing step that takes place after tanning, where birch oil is worked into the rear face of the leather. This produces a leather that is hard-wearing, flexible and resistant to water. The oil impregnation also deters insect damage” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_leather](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_leather)).

## NECCC Conference To Take Place In July



The non-profit New England Camera Club Council is holding its first post-COVID conference at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in July. Registration opens April 13<sup>th</sup>. For details, visit <https://necccphotoconference.org/>.

PHSNE is a member of NECCC.

### A Very Basic Question

In an essay in *Wired*, Rashed Haq raises a provocative question about the nature of photography: “Are You Sure You Know What a Photograph Is?” He recalls browsing through family albums as a child, following the Bangladesh liberation war in 1971. At the time, “I thought I had a definition of photography. . . . Sitting in my studio surrounded by thermal cameras, lidar, 3D printers, and AI software, I am not so sure anymore.” (<https://tinyurl.com/2p8j3xz9>).

Haq notes that, “Much of photo criticism and theory today still actively debates the past, with very little consideration of what is coming up.” In a critique of *Photography Theory*, Haq notes that it promotes “the idea that taking a photograph leaves a physical trace of the object that was photographed. This was questionable in analog photography but is absent entirely with digital photography, unless information is to be considered a trace. . . . The book says nothing about new or emerging technologies and how it affects photography.”

The provocative questions Haq asks about the definition of photography include, “Is something a photograph when it is capturing only light? Is it when it is physically printed? Is it when the image is 2D? Is it when it is not interactive? Is it the object or the information? Or is it something else?”

Haq laments the fact that after war in Bangladesh in 1971, film was scarce and the family camera was broken; therefore no photos exist of him until he was eight.

### PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held on the first Sunday of each month, September to June. Meetings are being held online during the COVID restrictions.

#### Upcoming meetings:

**June 5**—Vladimir Khazan, Exakta

#### Connect to PHSNE Online and by email:

PHSNE’s Web site is online at <https://phsne.org>. See <https://www.facebook.com/PHSNE/> for items of PHSNE interest. Comments are welcome, so join the discussion of photo history. Visit <https://snapshots.phsne.org> for *snap shots* issues since 2005.

Stay connected to PHSNE via our emails: a *snap shots* e-copy, and *Photographa* show announcements. Sign up at <https://phsne.org/emails>.

For information on all available PHSNE publications, see <https://phsne.magcloud.com>.

### Another Major Acquisition for LOC

The photographic legacy of Robert Cornelius, credited with America’s “first selfie” for the self-portrait taken in 1839, has been donated to the Library of Congress. The treasure trove includes “camera lenses, portraits of his children, and patent applications” (<https://tinyurl.com/2p88bnae>).

“The collection expands the Library’s holdings that complement Cornelius’ famous 1839 self-portrait, which is the world’s oldest surviving portrait photograph.” The self-portrait was acquired by the LOC in 1996.



Cornelius, a metal worker in Philadelphia who experimented with daguerreotypes, used a “makeshift camera with a lens fashioned from an opera glass” to take the self portrait. He wrote on the back, “the first light Picture ever taken. 1839.” A print of the photograph is included in a current LOC exhibition *Not an Ostrich: And Other Images From America’s Library*.

“To create this breakthrough portrait, Cornelius would have had to remain motionless and gaze forward for 10 to 15 minutes to create the image – no small task.”