

How Thomas Barrow's 'Millennial Notes' Predicted Material Decline

By Matthew Sedacca — Aug 4 2015

In an age where we toss aside our memory-entwined physical objects for their digital counterparts, the exhibit *A Rare Earth Magnet* champions the members of a budding materialist counterculture.

Currently on display at the Derek Eller Gallery (<http://www.derekeller.com/>), *A Rare Earth Magnet's* wide range of art notes the nostalgia that accompanies the archaic, holding fast to story-tied miscellanies. Anna Rosen's *Tea for Two (2015)* and *Calendar (2015)* highlight the gaudy knick-knacks you'd find on the shelves of your grandmother's house. In fact, "The butterflies were her own grandmother's actually," a woman at the gallery's front desk told The Creators Project.

Meanwhile, the plastic arts and crafts in Adam Parker Smith's *Chatterbox (2015)* transport anyone born before four-year olds could use iPads back to their pre-school days.

The exhibit's most direct piece in capturing this loss of physicality, though, is Thomas Barrow (<http://www.josephbellows.com/artists/thomas-barrow/bio/>)'s *Millennial Notes (1999-2000)*. Situated atop a bowling ball, a looming mass of Polaroid pictures containing film and TV stills predominantly from the 80s and 90s, as well as magazine color photos, are held together by a snarling plaster mass.

"I was hoping the piece would last 10 to 20 years," Barrow explains to The Creators Project. "So historically people have begun to see that this thing [the piece] that was supposed to collapse in 2000 would be part of the language."

Fortunately, the piece has stood long past its prime. Crafted in light of the Y2K crisis—ironically, when we were worried that our reliance on digital technology would turn out to be our own downfall—*Millennial Notes* appears as if it's fated to collapse. The piece's falling façade, however, has instead converted it into a relic of cultural trends and concepts that would eventually fall out of fashion—just think about how often you see trip photos on Facebook or a phone versus film printed from Walgreens.

and digital photo. "Everybody is staring at their cell phone (<http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/exclusive-doc-brave-new-camera-how-smarphone-photography-is-changing-the-world>), and they hand it to you and say 'Oh here we were in the Hamptons last weekend.' And in a funny way—and I'm quite serious about this—even though it's digital, it's still serving the same cultural uses that it served in its original time."

Barrow mourns the impending downsides entailed by our transition from film to digital photography: rituals turned extinct, memories all but forgotten. "My children all love these archival albums, in cases, of the last 35 to 45 years. They come with their kids and they get that stuff out and they look at them. Now how's that gonna work [with digital]? They're not going to keep their last iPhone. They won't download everything to the new one."