

## Camper Obscura

[Camper Obscura](#) has an interesting relationship with the Diffusion Festival theme “Where are we now”. The project is inherently linked to the immediacy of its location, the image captured by the lens, and the experience of the participants, but at the same time, it is inherently linked to traditional photographic techniques and reconnecting participants to the photographic process – the science behind the camera.

The Camper Obscura project started in 2010 when [FOTONOW](#) (Jonathan Blyth and Matthew Pontin) installed a camera obscura onto the roof of a 1986 VW T25 camper van. The idea behind the project was to create a mobile, touring experience to engage young people and communities with photography, and the medium’s ability to explore concepts such as place, memory, history and society.

Like all camera obscuras, the device projects a moving, colour image of its surroundings on to a screen. In this version of the device, the camper van itself becomes a giant camera. Visitors are invited into the light-sealed space to sit on old cushions and wait for images of the outside world to become visible on a white board that has replaced the original dining table. The lens can rotate 360° to momentarily capture the outside world, the image only lasting for as long as the light is present. The experience is fleeting and unique, only shared by those present at that time. Rather than capturing these projected images (which the camera is currently unable to do), Blyth and Pontin photograph the Camper Obscura visitors to create a permanent reminder of a shared moment.

Living in a time where the potential to create digital images is practically omnipresent, the Camper Obscura looks to recapture the magic of photography, “the simple joy similar to the first time an image is developed before your eyes in a black and white darkroom”. Where as for some, the ability to constantly capture the world around you may have lost its magic, the Camper Obscura allows participants the time to view their location through a photographic gaze but without the ability to edit, delete or retouch the experience. Slightly removed from the ‘now’, the viewer becomes an observer, looking at the world outside mediated only by the direction of the lens, the speed it takes to rotate, and the immediate way in which the light is captured, reflected and projected to create an image.

This experience questions our relationship to the photograph, the temptation to view subjects as the ‘other’, separated and different from ourselves. To view the living streets, just a thin wall away, as the subject of the photograph somehow brings historical images of city streets or of far away countries closer; the people in those images perhaps sharing some of the same thoughts and concerns as the subjects in the living image outside of the camper van.

In this sense, the Camper Obscura not only reveals the magic of the photograph in a world awash with images, but also the magic of a place – the people, the location, the history, the present and the simple pleasure of observing the now.

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### Sources

<http://www.lomography.com>

<http://www.pophoto.com>

Camper Obscura Cardiff on [Flickr](#)