Die gaat terug op een foto van de hand van de Nederlandse architect Gerrit Rietveld, terwijl hij een maquette omhooghoudt van zijn beeldenpaviljoen voor de IIIde Internationale Sonsbeek beeldententoonstelling in Arnhem, in 1955. Kunstenares Céline Condorelli liet me haar zien. Ik weet bijna niets van die foto af, dus ik kan alleen maar haar effect beschrijven. Rietvelds hand ziet er onverklaarbaar smerig uit, alsof de maquette die ze vasthoudt net uit de grond is uitgegraven. De maquette is simplistisch, een pretentieloze kartonnen structuur. Maar die context zorgt voor een transformatie. De hand van de architect verheft deze minimale verzameling van verbonden vlakken naar een hoger plan, waardoor je gaat geloven dat ze de substantie van architectuur zelf is.

Reflection
James Langdon

I have a growing collection of photographs of a very particular type, and something of a ritual for finding more. I regularly search for these images at various amateur archaeological websites. Let me describe what I'm looking for. A typical example will show an artefact of some description that has just been excavated from the ground and is held, addressing the camera, by the hand of the person who discovered it. White gloves are conspicuously absent from these images, and their amateurism is significant. I suppose that no professional archaeological dig would allow artefacts to be handled in such an informal way, and with such a sense of ownership. But in this context, the handling gives the images the specific quality that interests me. Their unpretentiousness is immediately apparent. They are direct; they could hardly be less abstract.

Handling confers value onto the artefact. We implicitly understand that it deserves our attention. The gesture of offering it to the camera makes this appeal on behalf of the object. At the edge of the image there is usually visible something of the situation. A view of the excavation site itself, or a glimpse of the broader landscape giving a clue to the location. These details inform our reading of the artefact. And, obviously, we learn something of the data of the artefact itself – its scale and weight – measured in relation to the body.

These images assert display as an elementary gesture – the action of showing something to someone. Understood in this

context, display becomes an important verb at the interface between art and design and other forms of everyday exchange. As a verb, display is so useful because it is comfortable in multiple vocabularies. We might speak of display in terms of the history of exhibition-making – the extraordinarily rich field of reference spanning the great museums of ethnography and natural history, the vast international expositions of the last century, and the practices of contemporary artists who embed this history so seamlessly into their work. Céline Condorelli, Louise Lawler, and Stephen Prina come to mind. Yet display also has more modest connotations. There are the commercial functions of display. Eugène Atget's beautiful photographs of window displays in early-twentieth century Paris are the archetype here. The simple repetition of mass-produced items projects them so convincingly into the imagination of the viewer. And, of course, objects in our domestic interiors lend themselves readily to display. Display is almost always a function of furniture. Only in the most aesthetically controlled dwellings are the surfaces of tables and sideboards and shelves deliberately kept free of objects of personal interest, for attention-seeking and conversation-starting.

This personality is what is most vital about my collection of archaeological images –the presence of the individual handling the artefact and the legibility of their gesture. We learn – and construct – something about the identity of this person and their motivations. We see their gender. We see the colour of their skin, the implications of which – also depending on our reading of the landscape – may be benign or suggestive of colonial narratives. We see their age and the texture of their skin, their experience in handling artefacts.

In gesturing to the camera the hand itself makes an assumption; subtly, almost unconsciously commenting on the artefact. We, in turn, decode these meanings unconsciously. I have many images showing fragments of rock, manually shaped to be useful for cutting meat. These sharpened rocks are tools, defining objects in the civilisation of the earliest humans. The hand that holds such a tool to the camera is predisposed to provide this narrative, gripping the rock as we collectively suppose its maker would have – telling the story of its utility. The hand makes many such didactic assumptions, it wields what it understands to be weapons; it cradles what it believes to be votives; it emphasises the important



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→ 'Missing Houses (2012)' - Céline Condorelli & Gavin Wade