

**ENCOUNTERS WITH A VERY-LARGE PICTURE COLLECTION:  
THE JOSEPH SELLE COLLECTION OF STREET VENDOR PHOTOGRAPHY**

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My presentation chronicles ongoing creative ventures in working with the more-than one million street vendor photographs in the Joseph Selle collection of the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester, New York. Following a brief introduction of the collection, the digitization project, and “Selle Circle” collaborators, the talk will focus on the philosophical possibilities and challenges of very large picture collections, their distinct potentials apart from “normal” picture collections. I will use visual samples from projects done so far as well as describe opportunities for future projects:

1. Digitization and archival organization

Because of its sheer volume and physicality, the collection was unapproachable in the pre-digital era. It consists of 970, 100 ft. rolls of black and white negatives, each containing about 1500 images. Two pilot digitization projects have already been undertaken, with the intention to digitize the entire collection by June 2011.

2. Historical research and cultural studies

The collection was donated in 1977 by Joseph Selle who owned a street vendor photography business, whose photographers were active in San Francisco from the 1930's to the 1970's, selling souvenirs. The Selle collection is unique in that it is the only known collection of this size with images so densely similar and unvaried. The collection provides tremendous potential for future historical and visual culture studies.

3. Creative projects and art works

We have completed several projects that were based on the files rendered by the first digitization project including: an exhibition; an award winning video; two artist's books; and a critical essay.

Our current ambition is to create a gigantic mural for the streets of San Francisco, showcasing all the images in an extensive grid connecting the frames. In so doing, our project would open a frontier of undiscovered possibilities concerning the digitization, organization, research, and creative work with "very large picture collections."

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