

Julia Schlosser
Pet Culture series artist statement
www.juliaschlosser.com
julia.a.schlosser@gmail.com

With great respect for the spirit of photographer Anna Atkins and her pioneering cyanotype photogram work cataloging British ferns and plant life during the 1840s, I too have tried to give visual form to a subject matter that cries out for articulation. In western cultures, the only significant relationship most urban dwellers have with animals is with their pets. Yet, the image of the pet continues to be demeaned in the intellectual and fine art discourse. In numbers unheard of in history (60% of American households), homes are filled with much beloved and cared for companion animals that, for some, replace traditional families. Because of the private nature of our relationships with our pets, its non-verbal basis and deep connection with the home, images of pets are often reduced to one-note sentimentalized or clichéd tropes.

My series *Pet Culture*, consisting of cyanotype photograms, spatially represents objects from “pet culture”-- articles affiliated with domesticated animals. For the series I asked friends and neighbors to lend me different items they associate with their pets. Some gave toys, brushes, leashes and collars. Most of these objects are purchased but some are handmade. Some are in pristine condition and some are much used, many-times repaired or virtually ready for the trashcan. Many of these items have been preserved, stored away and kept with the same care that parents give their children’s grade school art projects. These carefully tended objects reflect the significant depths to which feelings for their pets have infiltrated these pet owner’s lives.

Other friends requested that I document special items that they associate with animals who have passed away: lockets of dog fur, hospital tags or medical accessories. To a great extent, concern for our own mortality is intertwined with the concern we have for our pet’s health, as evidenced by the burgeoning veterinary industry in the United States. The cherished lockets of dog fur become reminiscent of the Victorian memento mori custom of keeping locks of hair from dead loved ones. Still other photograms in the series depict consumable products-- dog and cat food, treats or cat litter-- categorized by brand. The booming consumer industry that has sprung up trading in a wild variety of goods to entertain, bathe, feed, brush, exercise and tend pets reflects our obsession with and concern for our animals. Looked at as a group, these photograms help to elucidate the complicated and multilayered relationships that can be formed between people and their pets.