

Campbell, Craig. 2012. "Natural Subjects." Installation work for Artless Photographs, an exhibition to be held in September and October 2012 in Cincinnati as part of the Fotofocus Biennial. <http://artlessphotographs.tumblr.com>



### **Natural Subjects.**

From a short distance a small television monitor can be seen, hung from the ceiling. The monitor's screen faces up at a 45° angle; an image flickers on the screen. The monitor is suspended three feet from the ground. Directly below it is a sheet of paper. Approaching the installation it is evident that a video is playing on the monitor. There is no sound. The sheet on the ground is large and printed with the following text in English and Russian:



*In creating ethnographic photographs, attention should be paid to people's costume, every single pose, tools and household goods, and also paintings showing the use of any individual object; also dwellings, settlements, towns, etc., various paintings, scenes from public life, and pets.*

Russian Geographical Society, 1872

The video shows scenes a remote Siberian reindeer camp in early autumn. The camera carelessly records scenes of a camp: plants and trees, fences, teepees, reindeer, Evenki reindeer herders. As the image comes into focus, becomes framed, it is

suddenly frozen and replaced by an array of archival images portraying similar subjects. The little rupture only lasts a second—enough to be recognizable but not long enough for serious scrutiny—then the camera drops but continues to record, awaiting the next subject and roving carelessly in the hand of the ethnographer.

The work is meant to demonstrate genealogies of looking and unrecognized histories of the ethnographic gaze. Its problematic asks what is most important in ethnographic photography; the roving camera discloses other subjects mysteriously overlooked by the operator and suggests a thousand additional but neglected scenes.