Ian Dean - Nostalgicons

Nostalgia can be a powerful trigger of emotions and memories, sometimes even invoking forgotten moments from our past. Nostalgia also sells, and products that call back to the 1980s and 1990s have seen a surge (resurgence?) of popularity recently, and are often marketed to younger generations who are fascinated with the decades, right along with the adults who actually owned the original items—or still do, who may feel compelled to buy a remixed, revised trinket, as if by doing so they can relive, if only briefly, that feeling of receiving a surprise gift as a kid.

After finishing up my 4-D Portrait Room series, which used a room’s objects capture their owner’s personality without showing the owner, I began a similar, personal project. I never shot my own room for that series, but rather had the idea to shoot my old toys, fragments of personal history. These things float in a blank, dark space; tiny moments of memory floating in a void—products that at one point entered my life before being buried away again. There are the iconic and popular creations, the well known toys that invoke a collective nostalgia. And there are obscure tokens, the items made by companies that no longer exist, and have histories which have been lost to time.

As I archived the many things I had kept, I pondered their origins, their designers and creators, the persistence of similar colors, how many were made, how many still exist, and how each object picked up its own unique set of bumps and scratches, the marks of years that only grow more distant. I then play with the colors and shapes of 100 images, and create new art out of the mass-produced trinkets both forgotten and cherished. New memories out of the old.

The series concludes with a small look ahead, in an eleventh set with objects from the early 2000s that are facing a new direction, and I shift away from toys and towards games, movies, and computer accessories. Materials, designs, and technology all begin to change rapidly, and their forms come together into an icon that has defined the new, noisier, wireless world of the 21st century.

Items were owned (some of them re-acquired used) or otherwise interacted with by the photographer, born in 1985, and were created from 1980 to about 2005.

The collection can be viewed online at the creator’s website, iandeanphoto.com