

# **Recap: Game Boy Camera Photobooth at the NOSTALGIA/LOSTAGAIN Symposium**

In 1998, Nintendo released the Game Boy Camera: a cartridge-based digital camera that allows players to take digital pictures, edit their saved files, and even print them using the Game Boy Printer accessory. While relatively lo-fi by today's standards—with a 128×112 pixel screen beholden to the 4-colour palette of the Game Boy handheld—it was one of the earliest consumer digital cameras.

Game Boy Camera and Game Boy Printer are trademarks of Nintendo.

**PUT IT ON YOUR LIST!**

**PRINT, PEEL AND STICK!**

**DO TRIK WITH PIK!**

**LOOK! I'M ON GAME BOY CAMERA.**

YES BOYS AND GIRLS, JUST INSERT GAME BOY CAMERA INTO YOUR GAME BOY LIKE ANY OTHER CARTRIDGE AND START TAKING PICTURES. THEN PAINT, DOODLE AND PLAY GAMES WITH THEM. OR CREATE COOL SLIDE SHOWS AND ANIMATIONS. BECAUSE WITH GAME BOY CAMERA, YOU CAN TURN PHOTOGRAPHY INTO FUNTOGRAPHY.

**COOL PRINTER SOLD SEPARATELY. WOW!**

**THE CAMERA NEVER LIES...**

**GAME BOY camera FUNTOGRAPHY**

**BUT THIS ONE DISTORTS, MIRRORS, MODIFIES, ANIMATES, BLENDS, COMBINES, STAMPS, DOODLES, JUGGLES, PRINTS... AND PLAYS GAMES**

Stick Game Boy Camera into ANY GAME BOY and switch it into a mini DIGITAL GAMEPAL! Take single pics, or even a sequence, ANYWHERE you can fit Game Boy. GAVE UP TO 30 at a time, view them one at a time or play them back as an ANIMATION! Amazing LENS MODES like MIRROR and SPLIT SCREENING let you take bizarre pics, and the BUILT IN software lets you DOODLE all over them, apply CRAZY STAMPS, or see your face in a game. Add a GAME BOY PRINTER and print your masterpieces onto MINI STICKERS! The ultimate, SELF CONTAINED, FUNtography studio!

**Nintendo**

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Magazine advertisements for the Game Boy Camera

In 2023, we brought the Residual Media Depot's Game Boy Camera and Game Boy Printer to the NOSTALGIA/LOSTAGAIN Symposium at Concordia University. Our hope was to allow audiences to playfully interact with the now venerable camera while reflecting upon its limiting, yet enduring, aesthetic. During the workshop slot, we encouraged visitors to take pictures with the Game Boy Camera, print their photos using the Game Boy Printer, and pass along their email address so we could send them digital versions of their snapshots.

## **Pixels and Paper**

The technical assemblage that allows us to exhibit the Game Boy Camera and its peripherals is more complex than it seems. While the Game Boy is a fairly self-contained videogame platform, prized for its portability and requiring no external screens or power sources (beyond batteries), this solitary nature can also work against it.

For example, how do you transfer captured images off of a Game Boy Camera? Nintendo primarily intended this to occur using a link cable, which allows users to send an image to the official Game Boy Printer or to another Game Boy Camera. This is essentially a closed system—users can't save their photos to another type of device or print using a generic paper printer—which makes it difficult to export Game Boy photography to modern devices.

TOTAL GAMES GUIDE TO **GAME BOY** COLOR  
 HTTP://TOTALGAMES.NET  
 INTRODUCING... 10

**SNAP YOUR FAVOURITE IMAGES AND THEN PRINT THEM OUT ON THIS. PERFECT!**

# GAMEBOY PRINTER

ONCE YOU'VE SNAPPED AWAY TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT, HOW ARE YOU GOING TO SHOW OFF YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS OF ART? WITH THE GAME BOY PRINTER, THAT'S HOW!

**REPLACING PAPER**  
 Even though you get a free roll of paper with the Game Boy Printer, you'll soon find yourself in dire need of a new roll. Nintendo stocks fortunately retail packs of three printer rolls - on white, blue or yellow paper - which each contain 200 sheets. Each pack of three printer rolls cost £6.99 per set.

**ACCESS**  
 Access this menu by pressing Select on the Mode Select Screen.

**GAME BOY ?**  
 プリント オプション  
 From the Link Screen you can choose either to Print or access the Option menu.

**PRINTING FOR THE FIRST TIME**  
 The Game Boy Printer comes with a Game Link Cable which will need to be connected to your Game Boy. Pressing the Select button on the Mode Select Screen will take you to the Link menu. It's from here that you can choose whether to print or transfer your images from one GameBoy to another. From the Link screen choose Print, and you can choose the required image from your album that you want immortalised on paper. You can also adjust the Exposure of your image prior to printing. Once you're ready to print, the data will be transferred from your Game Boy to the Game Boy Printer. This will usually take about six seconds, but a display window will keep you informed of your printing progress.

**Give your printed images a unique twist by using these Stamp options.**

**75%**  
 Rating: At a £10 over the cost of the Game Boy Camera itself, the Game Boy Printer is pricey compared, but well worth it if you want to get the most out of your Camera.

INTRODUCING: THE GAME BOY PRINTER

INTRODUCING: THE GAME BOY PRINTER

PRICE £69.99  
 PUBLISHER Nintendo

*Magazine advertisement for the Game Boy Printer*

Identifying this issue, tinkerer Alexander Bahr designed the BitBoy. The BitBoy is a SD-Card port for the Game Boy Camera that allows users to transfer captured images to a standard SD-Card. Printing a photograph to the BitBoy creates a bitmap file that can later be resized, recoloured, and shared using any graphic editing software, allowing modern-day Game Boy photographers to easily share their images.

At the Depot, we typically execute a batch transfer of photographs following an event, pixel-perfectly resize them to 400% size (for greater visibility), and then add a faux Game Boy colour palette to them to mimic the screen of the original device. These exported PNG files toe a line between shareability and authenticity. Although higher resolution than the original bitmaps, they still maintain the Game Boy's iconic 4-colour aesthetic, pixelated rendering, and high contrast.

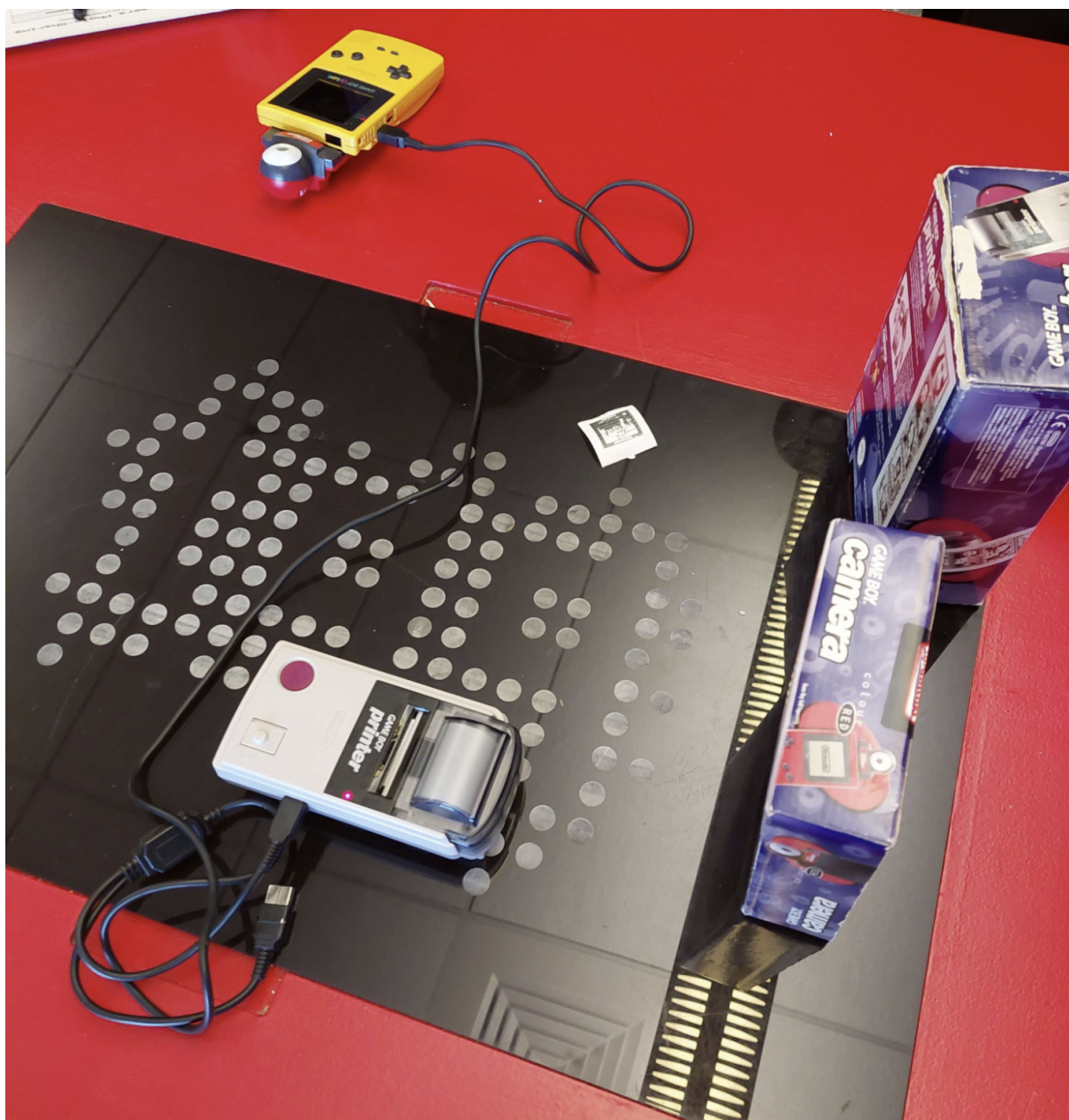


*Game Boy Camera picture from the LOSTAGAIN/NOSTALGIA Symposium, scaled up and recoloured.*

Transforming Game Boy Camera photos to PNGs and transferring them to a modern computer opens the door to all sorts of printing options. However, one of the mandates of the Residual Media Depot is to showcase the functionality of original game hardware assemblages, so we decided to operate the original Game Boy Printer “live” in front of guests. In addition to showing off the printer’s functionality—its speed, size, and sound were all commented upon by visitors—we were able to offer thumb-sized portraits for folks to take home.

While our Game Boy Printer still works near-flawlessly, finding paper for it can be challenging. The device was designed to use custom-made 38mm thermal printer paper with an

adhesive backing, allowing users to share their pictures as stickers after printing. Even if we could still find some of Nintendo's original supply of printer rolls, however, we would still not be able to operate the device. Thermal printer paper has an estimated lifespan of 3-5 years from the date of manufacturing, after which images will not properly transfer onto it.



*The Residual Media Depot's Game Boy, Game Boy Camera, and Game Boy Printer in action at the LOSTAGAIN/NOSTALGIA Symposium.*

Generic 38mm wide thermal paper is available for purchase—it is a common size for taxi receipt printers—but is usually only

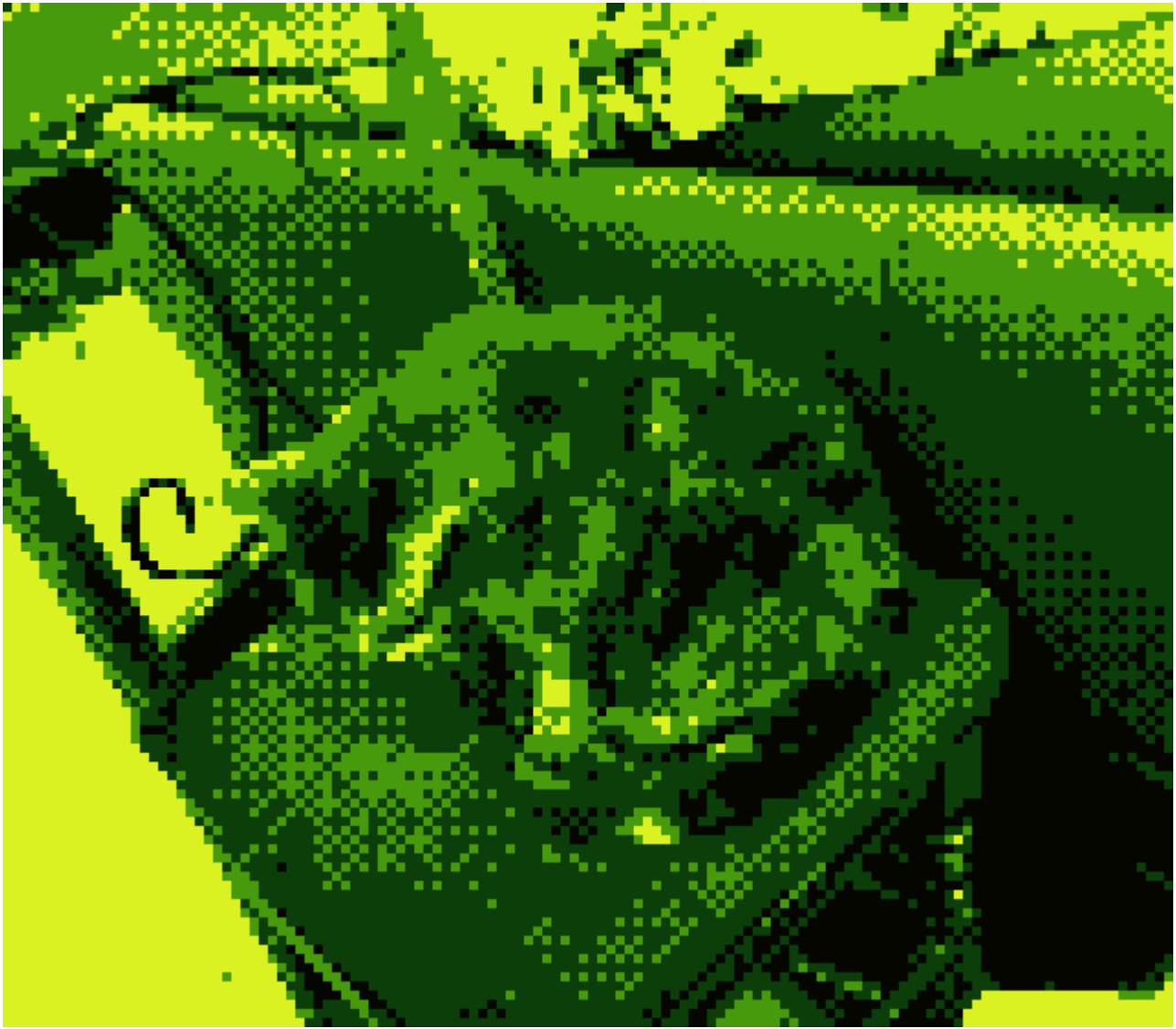
sold in bulk or on rolls that are too large to fit inside the Game Boy Printer feed. For the NOSTALGIA/LOSTAGAIN Symposium, we ended up sourcing our paper from an Etsy seller who cuts and rolls thermal printer paper to the Game Boy Printer's specifications, allowing us to run the workshop affordably and without having to grapple with improperly sized components.

By combining residual technologies with contemporary improvisations, we were able to provide guests with both digital and print copies of their photographs.

## **Afterlife**

As can be seen through pixel and paper adventures, the afterlife of the Game Boy Camera is vibrant. Tinkerers have developed ways to interface the device with modern computers, photographers have embraced its technical constraints, and cottage industries have risen to sell key components related to its operation. Not bad for an ostensibly obsolescent device!

The Game Boy Camera also lives on in a less direct manner, as an aesthetic that is mimicked through filters and software apps. Webgbcam, for example, is an intriguing skeuomorph that allows users to create photographs and animated gifs that convincingly mimic the style of a Game Boy Camera, facilitated with a webcam and a simple online interface. The results are uncanny and generally "close enough" to satisfy those interested in the style. We liked it enough to feature it as a backdrop for our workshop station, where attendees often posed and danced in front of it.



*An animated gif of the author's cat, as captured by webgbcam*

In our discussions with photobooth participants, we also learned more about the Game Boy as a durable nostalgic device. So many people commented that they still had a functional Game Boy at home, ranging from clunky grey DMGs to vibrantly encased Game Boy Colours. The compact nature of the handheld, along with its toy-like qualities, seem to make it exceptionally difficult for people to part with. They may hibernate in desk drawers or serve as tchotchkes on shelves, but can easily re-emerge as ludic devices due to their self-contained nature (as long as folks have a few AA batteries lying around).

Showcasing and sharing the Game Boy Camera allows us to explore the emotions that many hold toward the device,



elicited as they capture pixelated photographs that resonate with their early videogame experiences. Either taken uncritically, as a revived element of one's past, or reflectively, as an avenue for deconstructing "retro" aesthetics, Game Boy Camera photographs are a potent tool in exploring both residuality and nostalgia.