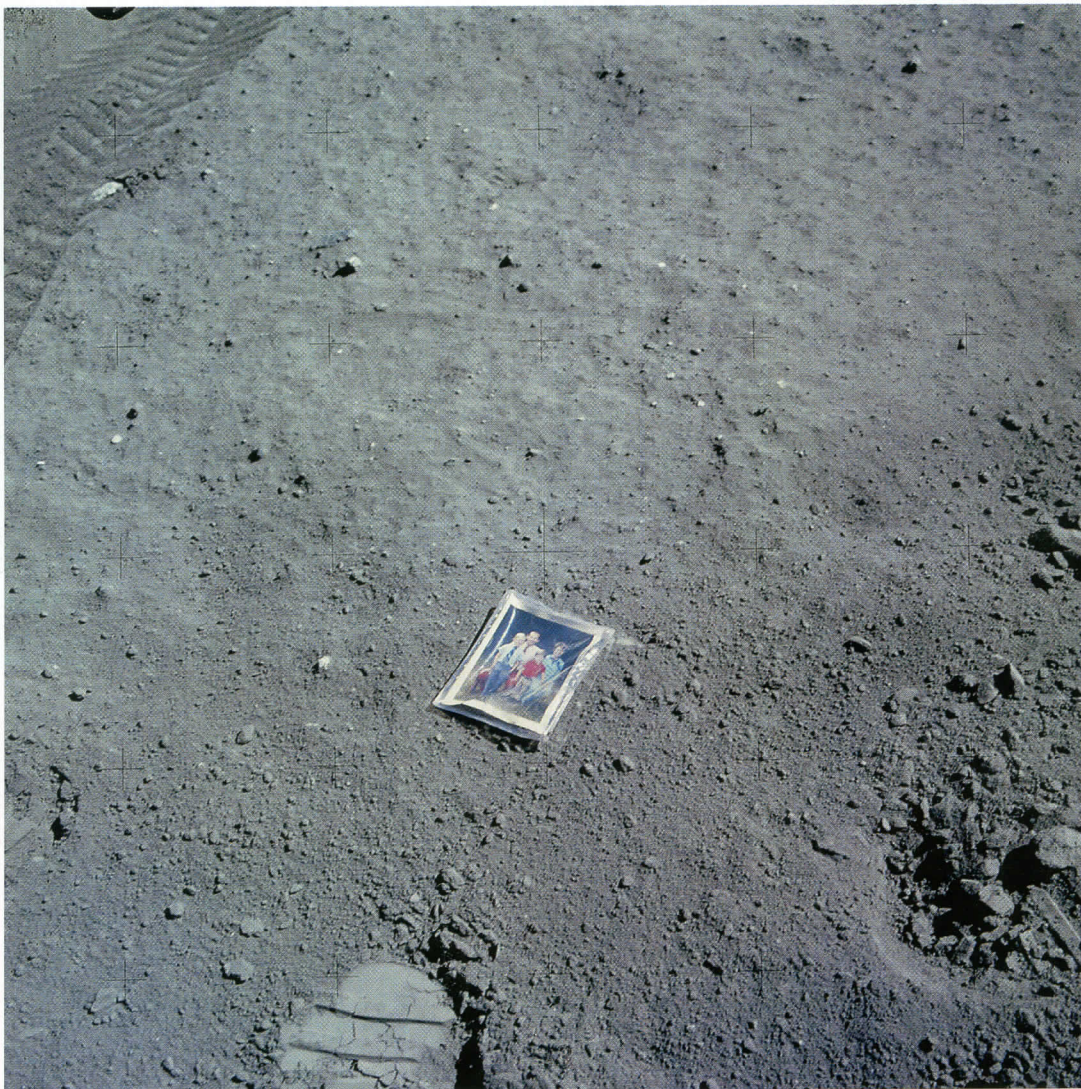


REMEMBERING THE MOON

Astronaut Duke's picture of the snapshot he left behind

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The snapshot has charmed and inspired art-minded photographers ever since our medium turned introspective—and, later, self-referential—in the late 20th century. Whether in photographers' embrace of the flawed image quality of plastic cameras or the widespread adoption of seemingly unstudied composition, the snapshot has become both an aesthetic influence and a critical reference point.

Apollo 16 astronaut Charles M. Duke Jr. was unaware of that artistic preoccupation when, in 1972, just before leaving the moon to return to Earth, he placed a plastic-wrapped snapshot of his family on the dusty lunar surface—then took a picture of it with his custom-made space camera. Yet in doing so, Duke created an image that is haunting in what it says about humanity and photography. The photograph is reproduced in **Who We Were: A Snapshot History of America** (Citifiles Press, \$45), a highly affecting collection by Michael Williams, Richard Cahan, and Nicholas Osborn.

Thirty-seven years later, with no turbulent atmosphere to disturb it, Duke's snapshot surely rests where he left it. How much it has been bleached by unfiltered ultraviolet radiation is hard to know. But the photograph Duke brought home, in which the unworldly location is conveyed simply by a cropped-off bootprint and the tire track of a lunar vehicle, elicits a certain sadness—at the thought that somewhere on that sphere, which humans would visit only one more time after Duke's mission, a simple record of a middle-class American family waits, and will probably still be waiting long after its subjects are gone, for a visitor to pick it up and wonder who those people were.

Somewhere on the lunar surface a 37-year-old family snapshot waits for a viewer. By Russell Hart

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