Before photography, cameras, computer vision and facial recognition, in 1807 Sir William Hyde Wollaston invented *Camera Lucida* – an optical aid to help artists create realistic drawings. Around that time lenses and mirrors were the “cutting edge technology” of their day (and sometimes, the
trade secret) for making life-like images. Wollaston’s Camera Lucida was simple: a prism on an adjustable stand. When an artist looks down through the prism, they see the world in front of them, plus their hand on the page, combined in a perfect superimposition. By the mid-1800s, camera lucidas were everywhere and the device was so effective in assisting accurate life-drawing that, according to the controversial Hockney-Falco hypothesis, it’s now believed that many of the most admired drawings of the 19th Century, such as the Neoclassical portraits of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, could only have been made with a Camera Lucida. Unfortunately by the end of the century they were all gone and there was no Camera Lucida’s manufactured since then. If you wanted to obtain one now it would cost you hundreds of dollars, that’s if you can find one.

Earlier this year Pablo Garcia & Golan Levin teamed up to bring this simple yet amazing device to students, artists, architects, and anyone who loves to draw from life. But to be clear: their NeoLucida is not just a product, but a provocation. In manufacturing a camera lucida for the 21st century, their aim is to stimulate interest in media archaeology—the tightly interconnected history of visual culture and imaging technologies.

Now, Camera Lucida can be yours since their project is now on Kickstarter.

Their design is lightweight (9oz., or 0.25kg), sturdy, compact enough to fit in a handbag, highly adjustable, totally non-electronic, and released with a liberal open-source hardware license. It’s also the least-expensive camera lucida ever manufactured. Their first batch of “NeoLucidas” will also be their only batch. They’re doing this as a fun intervention, not to start a business. Once they’ve finished distributing the NeoLucidas, they will publish their designs, CAD files, and all of their supplier data with a liberal CC and/or Open-Source Hardware (OSHW) license, so that anyone who wishes can continue the project (including, potentially, commercially).

This is your chance to own a piece of “disruption” history. Just as many “new technologies” today will be in years from now, Camera Lucida is a piece of media archaeology.

Please help make this project happen by supporting it on Kickstarter.