

## The Material and the Virtual in Photographic Histories (online, 8–9 Oct 21)

online / Photography Network, Oct 8–09, 2021

Deadline: Jun 15, 2021

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The First Symposium of the Photography Network, based in the US and an affiliated society of the College Art Association (CAA), will be held next October online and is jointly hosted by the Photography Network and Folkwang University of the Arts. The symposium is dedicated to »The Material and the Virtual in Photographic Histories«.

Over the last twenty years, the study of photography's history has been characterized by, among other things, two major strands: a concentration on the photograph's status as an object and a concern with the decidedly virtual quality of its images and practices. The 2019 conference »Material Immaterial: Photographs in the 21st Century« considered these two directions in photographic conservation by asking if the physical photograph still matters today as a source of teaching, learning, and scholarship when the intangibles of code now direct the production and archiving of images. Now from a methodological direction, this symposium seeks to inquire further into the longer historical implications of the distance increasingly perceived between photography's status as an object and its life as what could be called the intangible »photographic.«

On one side of the ledger in historical studies, Elizabeth Edwards has long proposed that we consider photography's object history, Geoffrey Batchen emphasized the haptic qualities of long-neglected vernacular photographs, the Museum of Modern Art engaged a years-long conservation and curatorial project named »Photo: Object,« while the »Silver Atlantic« initiative in Paris explores the mineral histories that the medium arose from and transformed. But at the same time, Tina Campt has asked us to listen to photography, Fred Ritchin has admonished that we study photography's virtual lives in social media, and Ariella Azoulay proposes that we consider the larger sphere of habits, customs, and civic contracts that surround photographic activity and its images. The same division has emerged with ever-greater strength in the production and curating of images. Many photographers, for example, have returned to alternative processes or emphasized the material contexts of their work's production, while others use online virtual worlds as a source for appropriation, manipulation, and posting, or they emphasize the social practices and performances of identity that give rise to new work. Curators, too, (especially during the pandemic) grapple with presenting the physicality of photographic objects in online contexts, even as they puzzle over how to collect purely virtual works and otherwise signal the larger social contexts in which the photographic intervenes.

Given this consistent breakdown, the symposium asks where the object-based and the virtual of photography's histories meet? How can the two strands in photo studies be brought together and

harnessed to reconsider existing problems or be put to use for new investigations?

Proposals drawing on both spheres of concern could consider subjects such as:

- The social practices stimulated by the haptic engagement with photo albums,
- The networks of circulation shaped by the material limits of illustrated magazines, their papers, and their presses,
- The clipping, altering, and collecting of photography delivered through magazines, baseball cards, and posters,
- Social formations around collecting and archiving photographs in the realms of crime, journalism, and institutional memory making,
- Practices of extraction and trade generated by photography's mineral, paper, and water demands,
- Evolutions in scientific and technical knowledge necessitated by the industrialization of photographic materials such as silver, ether, cellulose, and paper,
- Developments in clothing stimulated by the mass-circulation of glossy fashion photographs in the press,
- The relationship between perfume samples and photographic advertising in journals,
- Synchronicity in oral story-telling and the handling of snapshots by friends and family,
- Ceremony and custom in the classic vacation slide show,
- The use of internet tools to foreground and map photography's material histories,
- Other cases that can be best understood by drawing on methodologies associated with the object-based and virtual identities of photography.

The Photography Network invites proposals for presentations that broach such a methodological melding. In so doing, we seek the most innovative and rigorous scholarship shaping the photography field and its future. We welcome proposals across disciplines and encourage a broad range of subjects that reflect a diversity of geographies. Practitioners and scholars at any stage of their career are welcome to submit their research. We also welcome international scholars but note that the conference will be in English.

The Photography Network Symposium organizers are interested in attracting a diversity of presentational styles. In addition to proposals for individual, 20-minute papers, we also seek alternative-format presentations (e.g., workshops and roundtables). To encourage variety, applicants may submit up to 2 proposals, provided that one is in an alternative format. We will also host a Pecha Kucha for new research on any topic from students, curators, academics, and practitioners. If you would like to be considered for the Pecha Kucha, please note so in your email submission. You are welcome to apply only to the Pecha Kucha. Conference sessions on networking will be organized around accepted submissions, rather than prescribed themes.

☒ Please send until June 15, 2021: (1) a 250-word abstract, (2) a clear indication of format, and (3) a three-page resume or CV by July 1 to the Photography Network Symposium organizing committee: Andrés Mario Zervigón, Caroline Riley, and Steffen Siegel at [photographynetworksymposium@gmail.com](mailto:photographynetworksymposium@gmail.com). To be considered only for the Pecha Kucha, please email us a 100 word abstract and short three-page resume or CV. The symposium will be held on October 8 and 9, 2021. The schedule will be announced by August 1 and will be determined after reviewing the abstracts and finalizing the conference format.

Note: All are welcome to apply. Accepted presenters must be Photography Network members in good standing at the time of the symposium. Annual membership is \$20 (student/unaffiliated), \$40 (Affiliated), or \$100 (Sustaining Member). Please visit the Photography Network's website for more information on how to join.

Reference:

CFP: The Material and the Virtual in Photographic Histories (online, 8-9 Oct 21). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 11, 2021 (accessed Jun 1, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/33812>>.