Art within Reach (Prague/online, 5-6 Dec 23)

Prague/online, Dec 5–06, 2023

Camilla Balbi

International conference Art within Reach: Photomechanical Reproductions of Works of Art from Print to Digital, organised by the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague.

With the development of photomechanical printing techniques around 1900, the dissemination of visual information about art objects expanded on an unprecedented scale. For the first time, editors, publishers, gallerists, auctioneers, artists, art historians, and associations had access to a seemingly unlimited supply of images. Together with photographers, studios, and photo agencies, these figures became key actors in a distribution model in which photomechanically reproduced artworks played a central role. As a consequence, those who worked in the fields of art and art history now had to deal with entirely new visual objects: from illustrated books and periodicals to facsimiles, postcards, calendar pages, and clipping collections. All these items were kept on shelves and in boxes, included in scrapbooks, or pinned to walls, as part of personal or institutional archives. They served both as research documents and as evidence of personal visual obsessions or new collective ideas.

The diversity of these novel photomechanical sources, the system that produced and surrounded them, and their distribution and cultural impact are still an open field for investigation, one that seems all the more important to address as this visual information – made widely accessible by the digitization campaigns of recent years – can form the basis for material and medial counter-history of twentieth-century art. In order to reflect on the specific nature of photomechanical reproductions of art (with regard to their materiality, distribution, and uses), the conference will navigate between the fields of the history of art and photography, periodical studies, visual and media studies, and the digital humanities.

Which actors and techniques were involved in making photomechanical reproductions of works of art? What were the socio-economic and aesthetic drivers of the activities of photo agencies and publishers? Which subjects whose identity has so far remained in the background – such as women or minorities – can be reclaimed by analyzing reproductions from a material and systemic perspective? What role did pictures of works of art play in the editorial and cultural policies of their time? What do we know about their reception? How did the photomechanical reproduction of artworks affect art historiography, teaching, criticism, and the canon? Which narratives that have fallen out of the canon can be restored through digital methods?

These questions take on a new urgency with the increasing importance of the digital processing of image data, as it has opened new horizons for studying reproductions on a large scale,

removed some of the limitations of accessibility, and paved the way for larger comparative studies. At the same time, these new tools raise critical questions that have not been fully explored, and require greater awareness of the objects, techniques, processes, and contexts under consideration. We welcome speakers from across the methodology spectrum: from close to distant reading, from traditional to digital-based approaches. The goal is to open a discussion between scholars conducting qualitative research and the growing number of digital experts working in interdisciplinary teams.

Program

Tuesday 5 December 2023

9:00 Registration

9:30 Introduction

9:45–10:45 KEYNOTE LECTURE 1
Sculpture's Artificial Intelligence
Megan R. Luke (Universität Tübingen)

10:45–11:00 Coffee Break

11:00–12:15 PANEL 1: Behind the Production of Images

Rubens' Oeuvre "d'après les estampes": Hybrid Images in the Transformation of the Late-Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Art Book
Griet Bonne (Ghent University)

The Production of Photomechanical Reproductions of Art: Consensual Exchange, Stolen Glances and Embellished Reality
Hana Buddeus (Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences)

Behind the Photographs: Copyright and Photomechanical Reproductions of Art. A Burning Issues around Europe at the turn of the 20th century
Marta Binazzi (Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences)

12:15–13:15 Lunch Break

13:15–14:30 PANEL 2: Art Markets

Pictorial Commodities
Anna Näslund-Dahlgren (Stockholm University)

The Afterlife of Photo Campaigns. On the Sustainable Use of Reproductions
Franziska Lampe (Bildarchiv Bruckmann, Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, Munich)

Selling Art Through Images. Photomechanical Reproductions in German Gallery Publications (1912–1949)
Julia Bärnighausen (Berlinische Galerie - Museum of Modern Art, Photography and Architecture)

14:30–14:45 COFFEE

14:45–16:00 PANEL 3: Art Historical Narratives

High Culture and “Low Art”: Reproductive Prints and the New Art History in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris
Elisabeth Narkin* and Ellen Prokop (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.)

Rachel Wischnitzer and the Photomechanical Foundations of Jewish Art History
Camilla Balbi (Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences)

The Role of the Reproductions of Wit Stwosz's St. Mary's Altarpiece in Building the Cultural and Social Status of the Work of Art After 1945
Dorota Łuczak (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

17:00–18:30 ROUNDTABLE ON DIGITAL ART HISTORY (CEFRES)

Moderator: Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Université de Genève)
Speakers: Sanja Sekelj (Institute of Art History, Zagreb)
Thomas Smits (University of Antwerp)
Petr Žabička (Moravian Library, Brno)

Wednesday December 6

9:30–10:30 KEYNOTE LECTURE 2
Exploring Visual Culture in the Mechanical Age: Bridging Dreams, Methods, and Realities
Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Université de Genève)

10:30–10:45 COFFEE

10:45–12:00 PANEL 4: Artistic Circulations

Goethe's Faust I from Outline Etchings to Photomechanical and Digital Reproductions in European and World Circulation
Evanghelia Stead (Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin)

The Soviet Plato’s Cave: Przegląd Artystyczny and Sztuka as the Windows onto the World
Wiktor Komorowski (Independent Scholar)

Fashion Discourses at the Turn of the 20th Century: Unraveling Paris and New York’s Perception through the Distant Reading of Texts and Images in Magazines
Marie Barras (Université de Genève)

12:00–13:00 LUNCH

13:00–14:00 KEYNOTE LECTURE 3
Plates and Illustrations. Historical Observations on Image-Word Relations in Photographic Art Reproductions
Jens Ruchatz (Philipps-Universität Marburg)

14:00–14:15 COFFEE

14:15–15:30 PANEL 5: Dissemination, Popularization

Presenting the Popular – Popularization of Art Reproductions in (Para)Texts around 1900
Joseph Imorde* and Mirja Beck (Weissensee Kunsthochschule Berlin)

Reproducing Artworks in the Context of Photojournalism and Printed Mass-Market Culture. The Case of Germaine Van Parys as Seen through the Artpresse Corpus
Morgane Ott (Université de Liège)

Artists as Influencers? Emil Filla and Josef Wagner, Prominent Figures of Czech Modernism, as Editors of the Art Magazine Volné Směry
Katarína Mašterová and Viktorie Vítů (Institute of Art History, Czech Academy of Sciences)

15:30–15:45 Coffee Break

15:45–17:00 PANEL 6: Politics and Identity Building

A Nation in its Own Images: Art Reproduction in Early Twentieth-Century Norway
Nina Lager Vestberg (Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

Nothing will Remain but Photographs. Photomechanical Reproductions of the Italian South's Heritage in Napoli Nobilissima Magazine (1892-1907)
Viviana Costagliola (Biblioteca Hertziana, Rome)

"Heaven's Gates": Politics of Photomechanically Illustrated Publications Documenting Jewish Monuments in Poland (1903-1957)
Marta Ziętkiewicz (Institute of Fine Art, Polish Academy of Sciences)

17:00–17:15 Coffee Break
17:15–18:00 Closing Remarks by Petra Trnková, Closing discussion

Location: Akademic Conference Center (AKC), Husova 4a, Prague 1
Roundtable: CEFRES, Na Florenci 3, Prague 1. The admission is free.
Link to attend online: https://photomatrix.cz/conference#access

This conference is part of the project The Matrix of Photomechanical Reproductions: Histories of Remote Access to Art, which is being implemented at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, supported by the Lumina Quaeruntur fellowship.

Reference:
CONF: Art within Reach (Prague/online, 5-6 Dec 23). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 25, 2023 (accessed Nov 27, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/40686>.