

The Photographer's Assistants (Leicester/online, 17-18 Jun 24)

Photographic History Research Centre, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK / online,
Jun 17-18, 2024

Registration deadline: Jun 13, 2024

Prof Gil Pasternak

There have always been unacknowledged or under-acknowledged forces that operate around photography. Some of them are human, like family members, camera assistants, darkroom personnel, curators, editors and the like. Others are non-human, like algorithms, chemicals, equipment of various sorts and transportation. The explosion of AI has pushed the field of photography studies to once again consider the practices surrounding photographs, but has at the same time neglected existing assistants like the skills force, the editors, image technicians, programmers, curators, and historians that enable and narrate photographic making. In the face of so many assistants, the primacy of the photographer as a central person through whom we understand photography recedes.

Organised by the Photographic History Research Centre (PHRC) at De Montfort University in Leicester, UK, in this 2024 conference, speakers will consider the role and agency of human and non-human assistants in the making, collecting and dissemination of photographs. The papers to be delivered will employ diverse methodological perspectives that not only enlarge the notion of the photographic assistant, but also consider the role of those assistants (or that assistance) in the formation of photographic practices, images, archives and histories. While doing so, papers will consider topics related to themes like:

- Technological, physical or chemical photographic assistants
- Catalysts like War and Conflict, the Environment, and Race as assistants to photographic practices
- Non-human assistants
- Senses as photographic assistants
- History of assistants and their changing roles
- Agency of the Assistant
- Issues of authorship
- Practice as a collaborative endeavour
- Supply lines and transportation

Provisional Conference Programme

MONDAY 17 June 2024

9.15-9.45 Registration and coffee

9.45-10.00 Welcome

10.00–10.45 Keynote Lecture – TBA

10.45–11.15 Discussion

Panel 1. Authorship and the Assistant

11:15–11:30 Elena Cooper (University of Glasgow) – The Photographer’s Assistants through a Legal Historical Lens: Copyright, Photography and Industrial Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century

11:30–11:45 Zsuzsanna Szegedy-Maszák (Hungarian National Museum) – Creators of Halftones: A Moment in the Spotlight

11.45–12.00 Fiona Kinsey (Victoria Museums / La Trobe University) – Sensing in the Dark: The Role of Kodak Australasia Factory Workers in The Making of a Photograph

12.00–12.30 Discussion

12.30–14.00 LUNCH

Panel 2. Non-Human Assistants

14.00–14.15 Juliana de la Pava (Humboldt University) – Animal agencies and bones turned into photographic memories

14.15–14.30 Diana Kamin (Fordham University) – Prompt Engineer: The Index Card as Assistant

14.30–14.45 Nina Lager Vestberg (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) – Search and Self-Service: Assistance, Automation, and Agency in Post-Digitized Picture Research

14.45–15.15 Discussion

Panel 3. Women’s Work

15.15–15.30 Anja Hysvaer Langgaat (Norwegian Museum of Cultural History) – “The Housewife Shift”

15.30–15.45 Katerina Korola (University of Minnesota) – “My Life was the Darkroom”: Women’s Work and its Environment at the Filmfabrik Wolfen.

15.45–16.00 Pippa Oldfield (Teesside University) – Assistants in Cellophane Skirts: ‘Hula Girl’ Photo Concessions and Female Agency in Wartime Hawai’i

16.00–16.30 Discussion

16.30–18.00 Reception (For online guests, 16.30 - 18.00 we welcome you to meet one another on Teams)

18.30 Conference dinner

TUESDAY 18 June 2024

9.00 Registration and coffee

9.15–10.00 Keynote Lecture:

Michael Pritchard (The Royal Photographic Society) – Educating the Photographer’s Assistant

10.00–10.30 Discussion

10.30–10.45 Comfort Break

Panel 4. Point of Sale

10.45–11.00 Kris Belden-Adams (University of Mississippi) – Recovering the Decisions of ‘Invisible’ Authors of Commercial Composite Class Portraits with Artificial Intelligence

11.00–11.15 Jen Grasso (University of Brighton) The Photobooth Technicians Project

11.15–11.30 Michelle Henning (University of Liverpool) – Push the Kodak!

11.30–12.00 Discussion

12:00–13.30 LUNCH

Panel 5. Political Environments

13.30–13.45 Elizabeth Edwards (PHRC/Oxford) – The Photographers' Architectural Assistant: Rev. Thomas Perkins' Handbook of Gothic Architecture (1897)

13.45–14.00 Idil Cetin (University of Oslo) – Photographic Manuals and Photographic Communities. The Case of Yesayi Garabedian

14.00–14:20 Discussion

14.20–14.30 Comfort break

Panel 6. The Assistant Pool

14.30–14.45 Ella Ravilious (PHRC/Victoria and Albert Museum) – From Sèvres Vases to Solar Flares: Photography and the Royal Engineers, 1851-1900

14.45–15.00 Sam Hawksford White (University of Hull) – 'Records on the Land': Agency, Evidence and Erosion in 1930s America

15.00–15.15 Damian Sutton (Coventry University) – 'At work with the Baillie': Reconfiguring assistantship and creative authorship in the Scots migrant community around Alexander Gardner

15.15–15.45 Discussion

15.45 Close of Conference

As in recent previous years, we offer a hybrid conference, allowing speakers and delegates to participate remotely or on site.

For registration and more information about the programme, please visit the conference webpage: <https://photographichistory.wordpress.com/annual-conference-2024/>

Reference:

CONF: The Photographer's Assistants (Leicester/online, 17-18 Jun 24). In: ArtHist.net, Apr 11, 2024

(accessed Apr 3, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41627>>.