

Rural Photography in Europe, 19th c. (Paris, 13–15 Nov 25)

Online - Paris, Nov 13–15, 2025

Deadline: Mar 30, 2025

Cosimo Chiarelli, University of Pisa

CFA - Rural Photography in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century.

'Rural Photography in Europe During the Long Nineteenth Century' will consist of several online meetings and will culminate in a conference planned for 13-15 November 2025 in Paris.

The project is coordinated by Lauren Pankin (University of Paris Cité), Cosimo Chiarelli (University of Pisa), Janis Nalbadidacis (Humboldt University of Berlin) and David Williams (King's College London).

Long neglected in favor of urban-centric narratives of photographic history, rural photography offers a rich field for interdisciplinary study. As part of the international research project PICTURE, funded by CircleU 2025 (<https://www.circle-u.eu/news/2024/circle-u-seed-funding-scheme-2024-its-a-wrap.html>), we invite scholars of all grades (early-career to senior) to participate with their own research and contributions in a series of online workshops (April to September 2025, remote via Zoom) leading up to an in-person symposium and exhibition at the University of Paris Cité (November 13-15, 2025).

This project focuses on the theme of rural photography and the environment. From the origins of the photographic medium in the mid-nineteenth century, when photography was conceived of as "sun writing," photography has been understood as working with, just as much as working on, the rural environment. From Anna Atkins' pioneering botanical cyanotypes to photographs of mines taken with flash, photography was used during the long nineteenth century not only to record changes in the natural, lived, and constructed rural environments, but also as a social and cultural tool to actively imagine and change these environments.

Participants will develop their research project through a scheduled program of online workshops. In these workshops, relevant literature, methodology, and sources will be discussed in view of a formal presentation of research at the symposium in Paris.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- The Politics of Landscape: Photography, Land Ownership, and Environmental Change

Examining how photography was used to represent and contest different land use practices in rural Europe, including debates over deforestation, the enclosure of common lands, and the impact of agricultural intensification on the environment.

- Photography and the Science of the Rural

Investigating the use of photography in scientific research related to agriculture, forestry, meteorology, and other fields relevant to understanding and managing rural environments. This could include examining how photography was used to document ecological changes, monitor environmental conditions, and inform conservation efforts.

- Photography and the Construction of Rural Idylls

Analyzing how photography contributed to the creation of idealized images of rural life, such as pastoral landscapes, picturesque villages, and idealized peasant life—sometimes at the expense of acknowledging environmental realities. This could include examining how photography romanticized pastoral landscapes while ignoring issues such as soil depletion, water pollution, and the impact of agricultural practices on biodiversity.

- Photography and the Industrial Revolution

Exploring the impact of industrialization on rural landscapes. This could include examining how photography documented the environmental consequences of industrial activities such as mining, deforestation, and the rise of factory farming, including pollution, soil erosion, and the displacement of rural communities.

- Photography, Tourism, and the Environmental Impact of Rural Recreation

Analyzing how photography contributed to the development of rural tourism and its environmental impacts. This could include examining how photography promoted the 'picturesque' landscape, leading to increased visitation, development, and environmental degradation.

- Photography's Environmental Ontologies: The "More-than-Human"

Examining how photography can represent and engage with non-human entities and their agency in the environment. This could include exploring the representation of animals, plants, and other living beings, as well as the concept of "more-than-human" agency in shaping ecological systems.

Please send a 500-word synopsis of your project idea along with a short biographical note to picture.workshop2025@gmail.com by March 30, 2025.

Reference:

CFP: Rural Photography in Europe, 19th c. (Paris, 13-15 Nov 25). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 23, 2025 (accessed Mar 30, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/44031>>.