

Photographic Objecthood (Leeds, 21 Jan 26)

Leeds, Henry Moore Institute, Jan 21, 2026

Deadline: Oct 13, 2025

Kirstie Gregory, Henry Moore Institute

Photographic Objecthood: Construction, Presence, and the Sculptural Encounter.

This symposium sets out to provoke new approaches to the spatial, sensorial and sculptural potential of photography, exploring questions regarding the histories and futures of photographic objecthood.

In 1988, Jean-Francois Chevrier and James Lingwood curated *Another Objectivity* at the ICA in London. The exhibition showed the work of artists such as Hannah Collins, Cragie Horsfield, Suzanne Lafont and Thomas Struth alongside work by older, more established artists including Bernd and Hilla Becher, Robert Adams and John Coplans. Positioned against the dominant documentary photographic tradition, the exhibited work constituted what Chevrier described as “autonomous works, specific pictures which are irreducible to a formal or conceptual programme.” He argued that these artists were not merely observers but “constructors” of spatial, sculptural, and phenomenological experience.

This symposium will explore how photographic objecthood has developed from this pivotal critical juncture almost 40 years ago. It does not set out to examine the idea of ‘expanded’ photography where a hybridised ‘sculptural’ photograph is augmented through mixed media or in some way rendered three-dimensional, but focuses on artworks where conceptual, philosophical, or political meaning flows from a spatial or phenomenological encounter with the image itself, fixed in its scale and materiality. How might ideas of self-reflexivity – of photography engaging with its own material and conceptual conditions as a way of reflecting on the world – be important in this respect? How does the agency of the viewer build meaning or ‘complete’ the work in the act of encounter?

Beyond the legacy of *Another Objectivity*, this event will engage with Chevrier’s distinctive idea of the tableau which stood in opposition to the photographic convention of the document. He suggests the tableau becomes “the model for a mode of visual thought which repudiates representation-imitation in favour of a sculptural or constructive realism. The tableau presents more than it represents.” In other words, where documentary photography gestures to an absent referent, the tableau or the sculptural photograph is fully present on its own terms; it demands embodied engagement independent of its representational role.

At a time when AI technologies are radically altering our relationship with de-materialised images and their circulation in digital space, does such specificity of scale and the physical encounter of photographic objecthood constitute a distinct ontology? What role do Michael Fried’s historically

influential ideas on theatricality, presence and absorption (1967/2008) continue to play in our critical understanding of spectatorship? And how have contemporary re-evaluations, such as Claire Bishop's recent book *Disordered Attention* (2024), challenged Fried's legacy, calling for a model of spectatorship that accounts for ubiquitous media, post-colonial and global perspectives, neurodiversity and new socio-political forms of looking?

We are looking to reopen the speculative zone of enquiry that asks how 'being with' the photograph might affect our thinking about 'presence' in the post-Covid era of remote technology. Can a photograph have a sense of mass? Can we think about photographic objecthood as akin to sculptural presence and where might immersivity figure in these ontologies? What creative practices have emerged in recent years in response to these ideas, and how have they broken or expanded from models established in previous decades?

Submit a proposal

We welcome submissions from a broad spectrum of critical and creative practice. Applicants are kindly asked to submit:

- a brief abstract (no more than 250 words)
- a short biographical note (100 words)

The deadline to apply is Monday 13 October 2025, 17:00

Please email your proposals to: research@henry-moore.org

If you would like to apply in another format, such as video or audio, this is also welcomed. Please contact research@henry-moore.org if you would like to discuss this.

Speakers will receive an honorarium of £100, and travel and accommodation costs within the UK will be reimbursed.

This symposium is organised in collaboration with artist Fiona Crisp (Professor of Contemporary Art, Northumbria University).

Reference:

CFP: Photographic Objecthood (Leeds, 21 Jan 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 18, 2025 (accessed May 25, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50411>>.