Photography's Tacit Knowledge (Leicester/online, 15–16 Jun 26)

Online / De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, Jun 15–16, 2026
Deadline: Jan 9, 2026

Prof Gil Pasternak

Since its inception, photography has relied upon diverse forms of knowledge (ranging from chemistry, physics, and mechanics to the arts) and in turn has produced knowledge across a wide array of fields. Yet, much of this knowledge remains tacit. Researchers attempting to recreate early photographic techniques know all too well that faithfully following historical manuals or recipes does not always yield successful results. These instructions often depend on implicit knowledge, unspoken assumptions, or experiential skills acquired only through practice and repetition.

Similarly, photography's epistemological contributions to areas such as medicine and industry, where cameras and photographs have functioned as instrumental tools, are frequently overlooked or under-acknowledged. Even in efforts to recover these unspoken practices, scholars and historians may inadvertently reinforce their invisibility. While historiographical approaches may attempt to bridge these gaps, the absence of explicit methodological reflection often perpetuates reliance on assumed, unspoken knowledge.

It is within this context that the Photographic History Research Centre (PHRC) invites contributions to its 2026 Annual Conference, which will focus on photography's tacit knowledge - broadly understood as the unspoken, embodied, and often invisible forms of expertise that shape photographic practice, history, and theory.

Given this persistent invisibility of such expertise, it seems timely to examine the political, social, and cultural implications of photography's tacit knowledge. In other words, as photography studies grow increasingly interdisciplinary, and as generative AI reshapes research and creative practices, it appears to be more important than ever to clearly articulate methods and theoretical frameworks.

We invite papers that investigate the many ways in which photography has relied upon, generated, challenged, or perpetuated tacit knowledge. We are particularly interested in contributions that interrogate the politics of this knowledge and offer methodological or theoretical insight.

In the spirit of the call – proposals should clearly articulate the contemporary relevance and significance of the topic under discussion.

The PHRC's 2026 conference takes its inspiration from the work and legacy of Professor Kelley Wilder, who recently left De Montfort University and PHRC after nearly two decades. In recognition of her major contributions to photographic history and the epistemologies of visual culture, the

conference will draw on some of the key themes Professor Wilder has explored throughout her time at PHRC.

We especially welcome proposals for 15-minute presentations that engage with, respond to, or build upon current debates in the following areas:

- Tacit knowledge in photographic labour and industry;
- Archives as sites of embodied and unspoken knowledge;
- The silent epistemologies of scientific imaging;
- Methodologies for making tacit knowledge visible;
- Power, access, and the politics of photographic expertise;
- Material knowledge, performative practice, and re-enactment;
- Photographic practice beyond words;
- Tacit knowledge and emerging post/photographic technologies (e.g., AI, automation).

Submission Guidelines:

Please submit a proposal of no more than 300 words (in .doc or .pdf format) to phrc@dmu.ac.uk by Friday, 9 January 2026.

Your proposal should include your name, contact details, institutional affiliation (if applicable), a publishable biographical note of 80-120 words, and up to five keywords.

Kindly name the file with your full name (e.g. Smith_Jane_PHRC26.pdf; Smith_John_PHRC2026.-doc).

For additional information and updates, please visit the conference webpage at https://photographichistory.wordpress.com/annual-conference-2026/

Reference:

CFP: Photography's Tacit Knowledge (Leicester/online, 15-16 Jun 26). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 24, 2025 (accessed Nov 1, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/50984>.