

Martor 32/2027: Envisioning rurality in Central and Eastern European photography

Deadline: May 29, 2026

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Envisioning rurality in Central and Eastern European photography (1850-1950).

The Museum of the Romanian Peasant (Bucharest, Romania) is seeking contributions for its annual journal *Martor* 32/2027, on the topic of Envisioning rurality in Central and Eastern European photography (1850-1950). *Martor* is a peer-reviewed academic journal, established in 1996, indexed by EBSCO, Index Copernicus, CEEOL, DOAJ, AIO, ERIHPLUS, SCOPUS, Google Scholar, AskBisht, with a focus on cultural and visual anthropology, ethnology and museology.

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Photography is inextricably linked to urbanity: the history of photography cannot be understood without reference to the technological infrastructure that provided its equipment, the dissemination of printed information, the socio-professional groups that fostered its first practitioners, and the growth of its primary urban audiences. Engagement with geographic and cultural landscapes broadly definable as rural played an equally intrinsic role in photography's early claim to global relevance, but the dynamics of these interactions reveal an often-fractured and asymmetrical picture, underscoring distinct questions of social use, agency and representation. From the proximate European countryside to areas of colonial interest, photography became increasingly embedded over the course of the 19th century in formalised survey missions and research field trips, elite travelling and emerging tourism. Photographic representations of the rural and its inhabitants made their way into scholarly archives, state-funded exhibitions and popular visual culture at large. At the meeting point of popular Romantic taste, scientific naturalism and technical limitations, nineteenth-century photography proliferated highly selective representations of the rural, often focused on "picturesque" or exotic settings untouched by industrialisation and inhabited by anonymous human "types". After the turn of the century, mass amateur photography and photojournalism would undoubtedly broaden the scope and circulation of rural imagery; even so, the successive waves of democratisation of the medium continued to elude traditional rural communities throughout Europe and beyond well into the 20th century.

The reflexive turn in social sciences and the emergence of postcolonial studies have brought about broader questions concerning the epistemic status, discursive uses, and power relations implied by photographic practices beyond urban centres. For the past thirty years, these questions have specifically addressed colonial experiences and Orientalism, with a particular focus on corpora produced by Western European and American photographers in the context of anthropological expeditions or elite tourism. In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, a reflection along the same lines must consider a number of specific differences. In the wake of Romanticism, tradi-

tional peasant culture has often been placed at the core of emerging national identities, and instrumentalised as such by competing political contenders. Ethnographic and heritage surveys were emphatically aimed at recovering ethnic or national specificity in rural “heartlands”, yet such projects could accommodate contrasting views, from national projects and regionalist agendas to imperial or quasi-colonial perspectives on ethnic diversity. By the 1860s, photography was co-opted into the representation of rurality as a locus of identity for preeminently urban audiences throughout Central and Eastern Europe. The plurivalent uses of photography, its ultimately international vocabulary and, last but not least, the ethnic diversity of its early practitioners nevertheless outline a social field as entangled, as it remains understudied. The changing political and social fabric of Central and Eastern Europe has left its mark not only on the development of photography per se, but also on the historiography of photography. Language barriers and the subsequent inaccessibility of primary sources, contrasting historical frameworks and political divides have hindered comprehensive approaches to photography in Eastern Central Europe or the Balkans.

This thematic issue of *Martor* aims to contribute to a broader understanding of rural photography in Central and Eastern Europe, stimulating dialogue between the “national” historiographies of photography. We welcome case studies that open onto broader methodological frameworks, transregional or comparative approaches, as well as critical assessments on the current uses of photographic corpora.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- The representation of rural communities in ethnographic surveys and photographic campaigns: nineteenth and early twentieth-century (proto-)ethnographic and anthropological portraiture, rural “types”. Interwar photojournalism and its contacts with sociological and anthropological research. Framing social difference and ethnic minorities in rural photography;
- Self-representation and private portraiture in the rural; the accessibility and democratisation of photography in the countryside. Low-profile itinerant photographers and local contexts (feasts, fairs etc.) Landed gentry, amateur photography and the representation of rural estates; travel photography and rural tourism;
- Stagings of rurality in photographic studios; “national” costumes and rural imagery as photographic props and identity markers in urban contexts;
- Historical and vernacular architecture, lieux de mémoire and built landscapes in rural photography. Architectural surveys and the heritagisation of the countryside; the role of rural photography in illustrating and developing modern architectural heritage discourse;
- Traditional material culture and crafts in rural photography; field object photography and artefact biographies;
- Rurality in the Industrial Age; transformations and domestications of the countryside (roads, channels, railroads, industrial structures); industrial “colonies” and workers in the rural;
- Circulating rural photography in the 19th and early 20th century: official commissions and the politics of representation in exhibitions and “national” albums; uses of rural photography in scholarly literature, popular visual culture and entertainment; reproduction and publication histories;
- Archiving and curating historical photographic records of the rural (1950–present). Archival practices and uses of rural photography in museums and exhibitions; rurality and mainstream discourse on the two sides of the Iron Curtain; contemporary projects and critical perspectives on the photographic representation of the rural. Historical rural photography in the age of social media and the AI; vernacular memorial practices, from private photographic collectionism to living

history and rural reenactments.

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Main Guest editor:

Dr. Theodor E. Ulteriu-Rostás (researcher at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Ethnological Archive; archival researcher at the MuzA Museum of Architecture, Romania)

Guest co-editors:

Dr. Tudor Elian (assistant professor at the “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning in Bucharest; program curator at the MuzA Museum of Architecture, Romania)

Iris Șerban (curator at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, head of the Ethnological Archive Department)

Publication date: November 2027

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Submissions are accepted in either English or French. Please follow the guidelines for authors of the Martor journal: <http://martor.muzeultaranuluiroman.ro/for-authors/>.

MARTOR welcomes experimental and cross-disciplinary research supported by high-quality visual material; contributors are therefore encouraged to make ample use of images in their submissions.

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SUBMISSION TIMELINE

We invite prospective contributors to send an abstract (300 words) by 29 May 2026.

The results of the initial abstract review will be communicated to contributors by 30 June 2026.

Final texts will be submitted by 15 December 2026.

After this deadline, the editorial process will involve: peer review, revision of the texts (if suggested by the reviewers), proof reading, layout and publication on 15 November 2027 (online and printed version).

Proposals, manuscripts, and other editorial correspondence should be sent to the following e-mail: revistamartor@gmail.com.

Reference:

CFP: Martor 32/2027: Envisioning rurality in Central and Eastern European photography. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 15, 2026 (accessed Jun 17, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52229>>.