

PRESS RELEASE
February 23, 2009

Cimelia Photographica – An Online Exhibition by the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz

<http://expo.khi.fi.it>: With “Cimelia Photographica”, the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz presents a selection from its historical holdings for the first time.

In the middle of the 19th century, photography was established as a new reproduction medium – and at almost the same time art history was established as an academic discipline. Photography was an important tool for this discipline right from the start.

The photo library holdings prototypically reflect these parallel developments, due to the early foundation of the Institute in 1897. Even then, the photo library's aim was “gathering as complete a collection of photographic material of Italian paintings, sculpture, and buildings as possible”. The holdings include historical bequests with sometimes significantly older photographs, such as part of Jacob Burckhardt's photograph collection (containing photographs that can be dated as far back as the 1850s). Also worthy of mention are very rare carbon prints from the museum workshops of Adolphe Braun's photographic institute (from the 1870s onwards) and prints from the 19th century. The negatives of some prints have now been lost, for example those by Alinari, Anderson, Bernoud, Brogi and Lombardi.

With “Cimelia Photographica”, the photo library inaugurates a focus of research devoted to both photo-historical questions and questions on the history of science. Its aim is to encourage research of photography as both a tool of art history and an object of artistic, cultural and academic interest. The online exhibition presents some of the material that has been recorded and digitalised for this purpose.

The exhibition begins with a brief outline of the early history of photography, as the use of photography for documenting works of art is also connected with the development of the photographic process in the 19th century. The photo library possesses numerous albumin prints and carbon prints, among other items, from this period. Other sections are devoted to photographic views of cities. For example, these sections highlight the rivalry between the older graphical reproduction (such as copper engraving and lithography) and the new reproduction medium of photography. Photo-technical aspects regarding the photography of streets and squares are also illustrated: long exposure times caused moving people to blur into ghostly apparitions, which is why human activity is often completely missing in early photographic views of cities.

For art history, photography first of all represents a tool “of inimitable fidelity”. It allowed visual comparisons and the ‘virtual’ gathering of physically separated works of art, for example altar structures composed of several parts. Not only photographers but also art historians now had to concern themselves with technical and aesthetic issues, such as the representation of colour or the choice of the ‘correct’ angle. From the 1850s onwards, photographers devoted their efforts to the photographic reproduction of (monochrome) hand drawings and copper engravings, alongside the portrayal of architecture and sculpture. Only when the Berlin photo chemist Hermann Wilhelm Vogel developed a process in 1873, which significantly improved the colour-sensitivity of the negative plate,



was it possible to dispense with the production of monochrome lithographs as photographic templates for works of art in colour.

The development outlined here changed the focus of art history: academics increasingly wrote about photographs when they actually meant the original works of art. We could therefore describe historical photographs as the "actual originals". We see this online exhibition, despite its digital form, as an invitation to study these "secret originals" in their original format as well.

The photographs in the exhibition can also be viewed in the digital photo library at www.khi.fotothek.org.

**Cimelia Photographica - An online exhibition by the Photo Library of the
Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut**

Head of the photo library: Costanza Caraffa

Concept and Coordination: Almut Goldhahn

Online as of 23 February 2009 at <http://expo.khi.fi.it>

The next online exhibition opens on 22 June 2009 and is devoted to the Romanesque capitals in the cloister of the Cathedral of Monreale in Sicily.

For further information:

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MAX-PLANCK-GESellschaft

Immagini

Fotografo non identificato,
Fondaco dei Turchi a Venezia,
stampa all'albumina, ante 1861,
supporto: 6,2 x 10,8 cm.
Fototeca del Kunsthistorisches
Institut in Florenz



Luigi Brillet-Buyet, *Tito Lessi: I
bibliofili*, stampa all'albumina,
1883 (con dedica autografa di
Tito Lessi ad Elia Volpi),
supporto: 22,3 x 27,2 cm.
Fototeca del Kunsthistorisches
Institut in Florenz



Alphonse Bernoud, Piazza della
Signoria con Loggia dei Lanzi a
Firenze, stampa all'albumina,
1860-62, supporto: 23,6 x 31,8
cm. Fototeca del
Kunsthistorisches Institut in
Florenz



Adolphe Braun & Cie., *Leonardo da Vinci: Sant'Anna (dettaglio da Sant'Anna, la Vergine e il Bambino con l'agnello)*, dipinto a olio del Louvre di Parigi, stampa al carbone, 1904, supporto: 70 x 53,8 cm. Fototeca del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz



Antonio Perini (?), *Ponte degli Spiriti a Venezia*, stampa all'albumina, ca. 1860, foto: 24 x 18,4 cm. Fototeca del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz



Adolphe Braun & Cie., *Michelangelo Buonarroti: Spoglie di Cristo*, disegno dell'Albertina di Vienna, stampa a carbone, ante 1887, supporto: 34 x 48,5 cm. Fototeca del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz



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Una mostra online del
Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz- Max-Plank-Institut



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