

# MITTEILUNGEN DES KUNSTHISTORISCHEN INSTITUTES IN FLORENZ



LXII. BAND — 2020  
HEFT I

*Photography and the Art Market around 1900*



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Photography and the Art Market around 1900

*edited by Costanza Caraffa and Julia Bärnighausen*

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1 Plate of auction lots, in:  
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# FROM AUCTION CATALOGUE TO MUSEUM ARCHIVE THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST FORGERIES IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

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*Lukas Fuchsgruber*

The status of photo archives in art history and museum history has – for many years now – captured the attention of interdisciplinary researchers resulting, for example, in the re-evaluation of photographs as material objects and working tools.<sup>1</sup> The scope of this paper is to connect this approach to the question of the use of photographs in the art market, in particular the auction market. At the turn of the twentieth century, photographs of art objects had gained an important role for both art history and the art market. By building a visual corpus for comparisons, art historians and especially museum officials used them to study and evaluate artworks. At the same time, art

dealers and auction houses published photographic reproductions of artworks to advertise their offers.

In recent years, a growing number of studies have started to analyze how the evaluation of art is based on archival practice.<sup>2</sup> The use of photographs in museum archives is embedded both in the larger context of photography's status in the discipline of art history and of the visual and material aspects of museum history, such as the history of display and the history of museum technology.<sup>3</sup> In the discipline of art history, images were produced and deposited in an ordered manner and reproductions circulated and were multiplied with a general urge to organize the “dis-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Osborne, “The Ordinarity of the Archive”, in: *History of the Human Sciences*, XII (1999), 2, pp. 51–64; Ulfert Tschirner, *Museum, Fotografie und Reproduktion: Mediale Konstellationen im Untergrund des Germanischen Nationalmuseums*, Bielefeld 2011; *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, conference proceedings London/Florence 2009, ed. by Costanza Caraffa, Berlin/Munich 2011; Costanza Caraffa, “Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space: Photographs as Material Objects”, in: *The Handbook of Photography Studies*, ed. by Gil Pasternak, London et al. 2020, pp. 79–96.

<sup>2</sup> Osborne (note 1), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Hubert Locher, “Kunsthistorische Bildsammlungen: Archivierte Fotopositive im Blick der kunsthistorischen Forschung”, in: *Rundbrief Fotografie*, XVIII (2011), pp. 5–7; Katharina Krause, “Argument oder Beleg: Das Bild im Text der Kunstgeschichte”, in: *Bilderlust und Lesefrüchte: Das Illustrierte Kunstbuch von 1750 bis 1920*, exh. cat. Mainz 2005, ed. by eadem/Klaus Niehr/Eva-Maria Hanebutt-Benz, Leipzig 2005, pp. 27–42; Anthony Hamber, *‘A Higher Branch of the Art’: Photographing the Fine Arts in England*,

parate”.<sup>4</sup> In a museum photo repertory, be it the photographic documentation of the collection or one of the countless other “accumulations and assemblages of images” that are generated in museums,<sup>5</sup> the photographs are subject to an archival logic – i.e. they are sorted, indexed, annotated. This quality of classifying information closely resembles the way objects and their reproductions are described in a sales catalogue, where they are also accompanied by a description. In both cases, conventions predefine common practices, for example how to describe a school of painting, a workshop of an artist, or a specific style. Authenticity is just one aspect here, but it particularly highlights how important the interplay of a photo-object and its context is: through changing contexts, a photograph can transmute from a medium that supports authenticity to one that is deconstructing it. Photographs in such contexts have to be considered “objects of value” themselves.<sup>6</sup> As this paper will show, the practices of how these photo-objects are procured and processed are fundamentally connected to the question of what might be called visual value – i.e. how visual documentation forms part of the valuation of an object. The authority over artworks, for example to make claims about their authenticity, is connected to handling a corpus of visual representations, such as photo-objects that exist materially in an archive. The way museum officials harvested illustrations from auction catalogues will show this in a very practical way. Photographic reproductions in these varying contexts are to be understood as media of value, foundational for the worth of cultural objects and therefore valuable objects themselves.

This text will analyze the use of such photographs through a case study on an association of museum directors who utilized photographs from auction catalogues to fight against forged artworks. The association was called “Verband von Museums-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebaren” (Association of Museum Officials for Defence against Fakes and Improper Business Practices) and was active between 1898 and 1939. Its interaction with the leading Berlin auction house at that time, Lepke, will serve as the focal point here. Several major auctions at Lepke were critically monitored by museum directors, who afterwards reported numerous fakes contained in the auctioned collections and warned their colleagues by providing the photographs from the auction catalogues. These cases were documented in written reports, which also noted the specific wording in the catalogues or the announcements during the sales. The analysis of these reports suggests that the museum directors still considered these auctions a respectable business – in their view the fraud had taken place before the auction. A reconstruction of the use and re-use of photographs of forgeries must take this context of written and spoken word into account.

### The Berlin Auction House Lepke and Its Use of Photographs

Around 1900, the firm Rudolph Lepke’s Kunst-Auctions-Haus dominated the auction market in Berlin. This position as market leader had been obtained throughout a long company history, which

1839–1880, Amsterdam *et al.* 1996; *Images of the Art Museum: Connecting Gaze and Discourse in the History of Museology*, ed. by Eva-Maria Troelenberg/Melania Savino, Berlin/Boston 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst van Alphen, “Archival Obsessions and Obsessive Archives”, in: *What Is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession, Archive, Encounter*, conference proceedings Williamstown, Mass., 2007, ed. by Michael Ann Holly/Marquard Smith, Williamston, Mass., 2008, pp. 65–84: 66.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Edwards/Sigrid Lien, “Museums and the Work of Photo-

graphs”, in: *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Photographs*, ed. by *eadem*, Farnham/Burlington 2014, pp. 3–17: 3.

<sup>6</sup> Costanza Caraffa, “Objects of Value: Challenging Conventional Hierarchies in the Photo Archive”, in: *Photo-Objects: On the Materiality of Photographs and Photo Archives in the Humanities and Sciences*, conference proceedings Florence 2017, ed. by Julia Bärnighausen *et al.*, Berlin 2019, pp. 11–32: 21. See <https://www.mprl-series.mpg.de/studies/12/index.html>.

started with an art dealership founded by Nathan Levi Lepke (1779–1864) in 1839 and which was continued by his sons Louis Eduard (1818–1886) and Julius Lepke (d. 1885). The son of Louis Eduard, Rudolph (1845–1904), realized the potential of the growing auction business and opened an auction house in 1869. In nineteenth-century Berlin, the auction market was overseen by official auctioneers, just as in France.<sup>7</sup> The Lepkes had collaborated with royal auctioneers before the opening of their own house. Lepke's only real competitor Louis Alfred Sachse (1834–1897), son of the art dealer and art reproduction pioneer Louis Friedrich Sachse (1798–1877), closed his business in 1875, which gave the Lepke auction house its dominating position until Paul Cassirer (1871–1926) and Hugo Helbing (1863–1938) entered the market in Berlin around 1916. Rudolph Lepke sold the company in 1900 and died in 1904. The auction house kept its name until it was closed during the Nazi regime.

Just like in the major art market cities of London and Paris, auctions had gained large importance in Berlin. Initially a protected way to sell property, which in France and Prussia and later in the German Empire was controlled by public (royal or municipal) auctioneers, auctions became a means of selling art that was popular among both dealers and collectors. Their rising importance was also due to a growth in art collecting linked to industrial capitalism and colonialism.

Both Lepke and Sachse had strong business ties to Paris.<sup>8</sup> In the French capital, the recent publication of the daguerrotype process in 1839 and other pho-

tographic techniques, which were quickly optimized and refined, had gained great importance for art dealers such as, most prominently, Goupil & Cie, and the Berlin dealers adopted this medium for reproducing art in order to advertise it. Lepke's auction catalogues often were richly illustrated. Georg Malkowsky's history of the company from 1912 mentions some steps of this technological development, and several introductions to sales catalogues refer to it. According to Malkowsky, already in 1870, the second business year of the auction house, an illustration – an etching – was included in a catalogue for the first time.<sup>9</sup> With the introduction of the collotype in 1878,<sup>10</sup> Lepke had taken the step towards using photographic reproductions in auction catalogues. In addition to the collotype process, the faster but lower-quality half-tone printing method of autotypes was used. Lepke's terminology was "Reproduction" for autotypes, and "Lichtdruck" for collotype.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, due to time pressure, they had to limit themselves to autotypes.<sup>12</sup>

A well-organized stock of photographs became a core capital of art dealerships at that time.<sup>13</sup> In the fast auction market sales catalogues had to be produced in a short timeframe; even around 1900, the introductions to catalogues mention the challenge of providing reproductions in due time.<sup>14</sup> In general, from the 1870s on, richly illustrated catalogues became the norm with Lepke. A typical example is the catalogue accompanying the sale of the collection Hermann Jungk, where we find several artworks montaged together on one page (Fig. I).<sup>15</sup> I will return to this particular auction later. With

<sup>7</sup> Lukas Fuchsgruber, "Berlin – Paris: Transnational Aspects of French Art Auctions in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century", in: *Art Crossing Borders: The Internationalisation of the Art Market in the Age of Nation States, 1750–1914*, ed. by Jan Dirk Baetens/Dries Lyna, Leiden/Boston 2019, pp. 193–219: 196.

<sup>8</sup> Anna Ahrens, *Der Pionier: Wie Louis Sachse in Berlin den Kunstmarkt erfand*, Cologne et al. 2017, p. 431.

<sup>9</sup> Georg Malkowsky, *Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Berliner Kunsthandels*, Berlin 1912, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> *Katalog der Galerie Martin Hecksher, Wien: Oelgemälde [...]*, auction cat. Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus, Berlin, 9 June 1896, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Ahrens (note 8), p. 272.

<sup>14</sup> *Antiquitäten aus einer bekannten Berliner Privatsammlung*, auction cat. Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus, Berlin, 26–28 November 1901, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Malkowsky (note 9), p. 50.

their high-quality photographic reproductions, the catalogues did not only provide a wealth of visual documentation for art-historical research but were a valuable piece of scholarship long after the auction itself. This was due to the detailed introductions, which after 1900, when the art historian and dealer Hans Carl Krüger (1870–1949) had joined the company, rose to the extent of monographic essays.<sup>16</sup> Next to its commercial activity, the good reputation of the auction house was rooted in high-quality reproductions and the level of scientific scholarship. This is testified to by the cases of forgeries in Lepke sales and by the museums' reactions towards them. They did not attack the auction house but sought to identify the forgers and fraudsters. Here, the photographic reproductions in the catalogues played a major role, as they provided a good documentation of the fake objects. While the photographs had been taken at a point when the works were still deemed authentic, they were later used to denounce the same works as forgeries.

### A Museum Photo Archive of Forgeries

Several of Lepke's photographs in auction catalogues show up in the archive of the museum associ-

ation (Verband) created in 1898.<sup>17</sup> First it was hosted by the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg and then transferred to the Schlossmuseum Berlin in 1934; after the war no further traces of it are documented.<sup>18</sup> In its final years, the photo archive amounted to almost 1800 numbers, some of them comprising multiple photographs.<sup>19</sup> Thanks to the reproductions in their internal publications (Fig. 2), which have been digitized by the Kunstbibliothek Berlin along with further materials, like a list of members and registers of the photographic material, it is possible to gain an overview of parts of the lost archive.<sup>20</sup>

The initiative for the creation of the Verband came from the founding directors of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, Justus Brinckmann (1843–1915), and of the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Heinrich von Angst (1847–1922). Brinckmann, who had been developing the plan for the Verband since the beginning of the 1890s, met Angst in 1894, and together they decided to establish it after the opening of the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum.<sup>21</sup> These two well-connected authorities were predestined to initiate the organized fight by museums against fakes. They considered it a pressing new issue, since in the age of museums, for-

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 50 and 70.

<sup>17</sup> So far only few studies have been published on the Verband: Lukas Fuchsgruber, "Museum Photo Archives and the History of the Art Market: A Digital Approach", in: *Arts*, VIII (2019), 3, pp. 59–69, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8030121>; Otakar Kirsch, "Association of Museum Workers in Defence against Counterfeiting and Unfair Trade Practices: Comments on the Origins of Organised Meetings of Museum Workers on an International Basis", in: *Museologica Brunensia*, IV (2015), 2, pp. 48–55; Timothy Wilson, "La contraffazione delle maioliche all'inizio del Novecento: la testimonianza del Museen-Verband", in: *1909: tra collezionismo e tutela. Connoisseur, antiquari e la ceramica medievale orvietana*, exh. cat. Perugia/Orvieto 2009/10, ed. by Lucio Riccetti, Florence 2010, pp. 267–280.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Mundt, *Museumsalltag vom Kaiserreich bis zur Demokratie: Chronik des Berliner Kunstgewerbemuseums*, ed. by Petra Winter/Manuela Krüger, Berlin et al. 2018, p. 305.

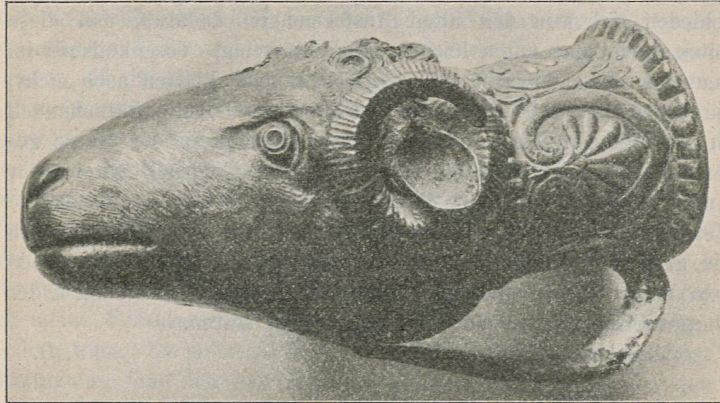
<sup>19</sup> The last case discussed in the reports has the no. 1779 (*Mitteilungen des Museen-Verbandes*, August 1939, p. 47; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mitmusverb1939>).

<sup>20</sup> Some of these have been further processed with text recognition by the University Library of Heidelberg. Overview of the available materials (last access on 19 May 2020): <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mitmusverb> (case documentation, titled *Mitteilungen des Museen-Verbandes*); <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verhversverbmb> (meeting protocols, titled *Verhandlungen der [...] Versammlung des Verbandes von Museums-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebahren*); [https://www.digishelf.de/objekt/mittnrLu103/1/LOG\\_0003](https://www.digishelf.de/objekt/mittnrLu103/1/LOG_0003) (overview on the statutes and meetings of the Verband from 1898 to 1910, containing also an index to the cases, with lists of forgers and dealers mentioned); <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/regmusverb> (index to the cases from 1929); <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verzmusverb> (member list from 1936); <http://digiview.gbv.de/viewer/toc/PPN616613466/0> (illustrated volumes); <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verzmusverbabb1910> (register of the photo archive from 1910 to ca. 1931).

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich von Angst, "Der Verband von Museum-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen", in: *Das Hamburgische Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe: Dargestellt zur Feier des 25jährigen Bestehens von Freunden und Schülern Justus Brinckmanns*, Hamburg 1902, pp. 421–436: 425.

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**251.** Das Widderkopfrhyton von Gochmann (alias Hochmann oder Schapira), dessen Herr Dr. Robert Zahn in Nr. 245 dieser Mitteilungen gedachte, liegt mir in einer Photographie vor, die Herr Direktor Dr. Behncke in Hannover mir für das Archiv zu übergeben die Güte hatte. Danach hier die Abbildung.



Dies Rhyton besteht aus stark vergoldetem Silber und wird von Geo. J. Bruck, Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Gasteinerstraße 9, für 100 000 Mark ausgebaut unter dem Vorgeben, es sei in einer hessischen Privatsammlung aufgefunden. (S. Nr. 245.)

*J. B.*

**252.** Weiteres zur Sammlung Hommel (zu 247). Auf der Frankfurter Verbandstagung legte Herr Gaston Migeon die Nachbildung einer Figur von dem frühgotischen Reliquien-schrein in Nivelles (um 1290) aus vergoldetem Kupfer vor. Die im August zu Zürich versteigerte Sammlung Dr. Hommel besaß von den Figuren desselben Schreines von Nivelles nicht weniger als 11 Stück, alle aus Kupfer mit stark durchgeriebener Vergoldung, ganz evident in derselben Werkstatt gefertigt, welche die in Frankfurt vorgezeigte Figur hergestellt hat. Außerdem enthielt die Sammlung Hommel, die zum größten Teil aus Fälschungen bestand, noch andere frühgotische Figuren und Gruppen gleicher Ausführung nach guten Modellen, darunter eine Kupfernachbildung der Pariser Elfenbeinmadonna aus der Sainte Chapelle. Die Sachen

2 Page from the meeting protocols  
of the Verband von Museums-Beamten  
zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und  
unlauterem Geschäftsgebahren, in:  
*Mitteilungen des Museen-Verbandes*,  
July 1909, p. 16



geries strongly affected public institutions, as Angst recounted in 1902:

Solange bloß Privatleute diesen betrügerischen Manipulationen zum Opfer fielen, fehlte die Veranlassung zu öffentlichem Aufsehen; allein der gewaltige Aufschwung des Museumswesens in den letzten fünfzig Jahren hat zu einer so empfindlichen Vergeudung von Staatsgeldern durch den Ankauf wertloser Fälschungen geführt, dass ein Einschreiten von kompetenter Seite gegen den Fälscherunfug schließlich zur Notwendigkeit wurde.<sup>22</sup>

The nineteenth century is considered the golden age of art forgery.<sup>23</sup> The art market was booming due to the high demand from new circles of collectors, the newly rich of the European and North American industrial nations. Fakes were flourishing, a phenomenon receiving heightened attention towards the end of the century, for example in literature: the classic par excellence is Paul Eudel's *Le Truquage* from 1884, which was translated into German as *Die Fälscherkünste* as early as 1885.<sup>24</sup> The nineteenth century was also the time of the establishment of many museums in Europe; as mentioned above, the two initiators of the Verband were founding directors. This parallel development of art market, fraud, and public institutions explains why, by the end of the century, the time had come for an organized effort by the museums.

This endeavour is of course connected to the general influence of new-rich collectors on the market, resulting for example in an increasing number of European art exports to the USA,<sup>25</sup> and also to the heightened international exchange of museums, such as in the journal *Museumskunde*, which was created around the same time.<sup>26</sup> The establishment of the Verband with its internal publication was complementary to both: on the one hand it was a reaction to fraud in times of a museum and market boom, on the other hand it provided a more private forum alongside the public medium of networking of *Museumskunde*.

A short recapitulation of the beginnings of the Verband will show the first organized steps by which museums reacted against the growing problem of forgeries. Brinckmann and Angst initially invited “leitende Beamte öffentlicher Sammlungen” (“senior officials of public collections”) only from their own network.<sup>27</sup> Twenty-five colleagues joined immediately, fourteen of which met for a first conference in Hamburg in October 1898.<sup>28</sup> Several representatives of applied arts museums, which were particularly prone to forgeries, were present,<sup>29</sup> as well as some big names like Julius Lessing, Georg Treu, Alfred Lichtwark, Adolf Furtwängler and participants from Prague and Copenhagen. In the beginning, the initiators limited participation to “Länder germanischer Rasse”,<sup>30</sup> but this restriction was quickly overcome and after 1900 the Verband

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 42If. (“As long as only private individuals fell victim to these fraudulent manipulations there was no reason for public attention; yet the enormous upswing in the museum sector in the last fifty years has led to such a severe waste of state funds through the purchase of worthless forgeries that intervention by competent parties against the counterfeiting nuisance has finally become a necessity”).

<sup>23</sup> Mark Jones, “Do Fakes Matter?”, in: *Why Fakes Matter: Essays on Problems of Authenticity*, ed. by *idem*, London 1992, pp. 7–14.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Eudel, *Le Truquage: les contrefaçons dévoilées*, Paris 1884; *idem*, *Die Fälscherkünste*, Leipzig 1885.

<sup>25</sup> Xavier-Pol Tilliette, “Between Museumsinsel and Manhattan: Wil-

helm R. Valentiner, Ambassador and Agent of Wilhelm von Bode at the Metropolitan Museum, 1908–1914”, in: *The Museum is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums 1750–1940*, conference proceedings Berlin 2012, ed. by Andrea Meyer/Bénédicte Savoy, Berlin/Boston 2014, pp. 191–204: 201.

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Meyer, “The Journal *Museumskunde* – ‘Another Link between the Museums of the World’”, *ibidem*, pp. 179–190.

<sup>27</sup> Angst (note 21), p. 426.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 427.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 434.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 427.

went international. Especially English and French members regularly reported of fakes, and Mikhail Botkin from Saint Petersburg joined as well as the director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, Purdon Clarke. Overall, the organization counted 411 members from 22 countries by 1936.<sup>31</sup> Early on, the Verband even published about its activities.<sup>32</sup> After this initial period of transparency, though, secrecy was introduced, of which Julius Lessing and Justus Brinckmann explicitly reminded the members in 1905.<sup>33</sup>

Already during the founding conference, the discussed forgeries were photographed.<sup>34</sup> Several members brought fake objects to the meeting to present them to their colleagues. These pictures formed the first step to a fast-growing photographic repertory of forgeries. This was only possible thanks to the purchase of a camera by the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg in the same year. The camera cost 1000 marks and had been bought for a campaign of heritage inventory.<sup>35</sup> The museum's photographer was its former graphic artist Wilhelm Weimar (1857–1917), who had trained as a specialist in photography and was known for numerous publications on the subject of photographing monuments, cultural assets, and natural specimens.<sup>36</sup> Both the photographer and the new camera became central resources of the organized fight against fakes. As the photo archive was growing, the internal publications documenting the conferences and case studies

changed by including more and more illustrations. The photo archive thus became a central medium of the Verband.

Members sent their scripts and updates about fakes to the head office at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, often accompanied by photographs. At the same time, Wilhelm Weimar continued to produce photographs of forgeries. Individual reproductions were sent out upon request, while protocols of the meetings as well as reports of case studies circulated regularly among the members. Reproductions played an important role also in the internal publications, especially in six volumes containing thirty plates each that were published between 1907 and 1927 and in the fifty-nine issues of their case files entitled *Mitt[h]eilungen des Museen-Verbandes*. These documents were printed by the Hamburg based company Lütcke & Wulff,<sup>37</sup> the case studies in a small format, the volumes with the plates double the size.

Several registers were produced of these cases. Additionally, lists of the updates to the photo archive were printed; the most complete volume of these lists is preserved in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin and covers the period from 1898 to circa 1931.<sup>38</sup> The list often mentions bibliographic sources which allows us to trace the reuse of published photographs. As the analysis of the list shows, this was a multifaceted archive containing various types of photo-objects such as clippings from auction catalogues, photo-

<sup>31</sup> *Verzeichnis der Mitglieder des Internationalen Verbandes von Museumsbeamten*, Berlin 1936; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verzmusverb>.

<sup>32</sup> Angst (note 21).

<sup>33</sup> *Verhandlungen der [...] Versammlung des Verbandes von Museums-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebaren*, VIII (1905), p. 25; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verhversverbmb1905>.

<sup>34</sup> *Verhandlungen der [...] Versammlung des Verbandes von Museums-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebaren*, I (1898), p. 4; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verhversverbmb1898>.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Kreisler, "Between Re-Production and Re-Presentation: The Implementation of Photographic Art Reproduction in the Documentation of Museum Collections Online", in: *Open Library of Humanities*, IV (2018), 2, pp. 1–35.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *Mitteilungen des Museen-Verbandes*, August 1899, p. 7; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mitmusverb1899>.

<sup>38</sup> *Verzeichnis der im Archiv des Museen-Verbandes bewahrter Abbildungen falscher Altsachen*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum, inv. MUS 50; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/verzmusverbabb1910>.

graphs, and also photographs of photographs as well as various kinds of special prints and photographic techniques like x-ray photographs.

### Case Study: Lepke's Photographs in the Museum Archive of Forgeries

The following case study describes instances in which depictions stemming from auction catalogues were used as documentation of forgeries. In some cases related to auctions at Lepke, we can connect the histories of photographs in auction catalogues and of those in museum archives. With two examples, a majolica and a special centaur aquamanile, which both occupied the Verband several times, I build on earlier observations published in two recent texts.<sup>39</sup> There, I have argued that we should not only use this archive as a source for object or genre histories but invert the question and analyze the relation between museums and the art market through photo-objects. Through the following case study, I will analyze the photographs in close connection with their materiality and their publication context, in order to describe the processes of producing and reproducing photographs with regard to the market and museums.

The Verband was not only producing photographs during its meetings and in the collections of the individual museums, it was also using photographs *from* the art market. This included extracts from sales catalogues as well as images sent to its members by dealers. For example, Robert Zahn (1870–1945), vice-director of the Antiquarium in Berlin, was regularly providing the archive with documentation on artworks offered to the museum that he considered fakes.<sup>40</sup> He would even mention the dealers and the cities where these items were coming from, thereby giving an insight into the networks of the antiquities trade.

Apart from direct offers, auctions were an important point of reference. The members of the Verband would carefully monitor auctions and were keen on collecting illustrations as references. Sometimes they would juxtapose them with visual evidence from their own archives. In a case from Bremen they connected the image from an auction catalogue from 1912 with an image from around 1870 showing an earlier state of the same object, a part of a chest which had been reworked and given a fake inscription with the date 1588.<sup>41</sup> Of course, this method was not limited to the local context. Otto von Falke (1862–1942), director of the Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum, for example included pictures from sales in other German and European cities.

In their documentation, the members of the Verband would register forgers and fraudulent dealers, in this case dealers that made wrong statements about an item's authenticity. This double focus makes sense, because often it was not clear who the culprit was, the person having produced the work or the one that marketed it. Since the auction houses themselves were not in the focus, we can assume that they were mostly considered victims of the fakes themselves.

After the 1913 sale of Adolf von Beckerath's (1834–1915) majolica collection at Lepke's, Otto von Falke incorporated ten reproductions from the auction catalogue – probably cut out from the catalogue itself – into the archive. He grouped them into fake items (archive no. 748), suspicious items (nos. 749–751), and one partial fake (no. 752).<sup>42</sup> The numbering and grouping indicate how these cuttings from the catalogue were stored in the lost archive. Number 748 contained reproductions of four items, 749 three items, and 750 to 752 one item each. It can be assumed that von Falke used some kind of

<sup>39</sup> Fuchsgruber (note 17); *idem*, "Wissenswertes über Wertloses: Fotografien von Fälschungen im Archiv, in der Ausstellung und als Digitalisat", in: *kritische berichte*, XLVIII (2020), I, pp. 72–82.

<sup>40</sup> *Verzeichnis* (note 38), nos. 665 and 693–695.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 773.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, nos. 748–752.



3 Limestone relief with a portrait of a young man, in: *Antiquitäten-Sammlung H. Jungk*, catalogue of the auction at Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus, Berlin, 17-18 March 1903, pl. 12, no. 161



4 Limestone relief with a portrait of a young man, in: Justus Brinckmann, "Allerlei von Fälschungen", in: *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, n.s., XIV (1903), p. 230

cardboard support to group the reproductions under these numbers.

Von Falke himself had written the introduction to the von Beckerath catalogue, giving high praise to the collector and his taste as well as to the scholarly work of the catalogue's editor, Hans Carl Krüger. The later detection of some fakes among the objects of the auction did not overturn this positive verdict, as the auction consisted of 374 lots, of which von

Falke considered only four definitely as fakes and five rather as suspicious, while in one case he remarked that only the lower part of the piece was genuine.<sup>43</sup> Two of the presumed fakes were not dated in the catalogue, which made them stick out from the otherwise accurately described works.<sup>44</sup> In the art world, this could be understood as a signal that the work was considered problematic. The richly illustrated catalogue, which was based on thorough scholarly

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 751.

<sup>44</sup> *Die Majolika-Sammlung Adolf von Beckerath*, auction cat. Rudolph Lepke's

Kunst-Auctions-Haus, Berlin, 4-5 November 1913, p. 16, no. 6, p. 20, no. 44.

research, formed an important resource for the identification of those few problematic items.

With his investigation, von Falke contributed to an already large corpus of doubtful majolica in the archive as well as to the growing research around this topic. The Verband returned to the problem several times over the decades, recording new techniques of forgeries and stylistic peculiarities of individual forgers. To evaluate pieces, solid collections of reproductions were needed – reproductions of authentic and reproductions of forged objects. Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) also published major research on the topic at that time.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of the von Beckerath sale, we can assume that the reproductions were taken directly from the sales catalogue, but due to the loss of the archive there is no proof for this. The situation is different, however, in the second example, where we can distinguish between direct appropriation and the production of new images. After the sale of the collection of Hermann Jungk (1834–1902) at Lepke's in 1903, Justus Brinckmann republished an illustration from the auction catalogue (Fig. 3) in an article on forgeries in the *Kunstgewerbeblatt* (Fig. 4).<sup>46</sup> It shows a limestone relief with the half figure of a young man that had been sold by the dealer Josef Petrij, who is denounced as a fraudster in the article.<sup>47</sup> Since Brinckmann was one of the founders of the Verband and a core proponent of its photographic archive, it is most likely that the reproduction he used for his article is the same which later ended up in the archive. Direct comparison reveals

furthermore that the article reproduces the same photograph as the catalogue. Either Brinckmann closely cooperated with the Lepke auction house to obtain this image for reproduction or he had a photograph taken of the catalogue illustration. This method was also employed by him and Wilhelm Weimar in another case: in 1912, Robert Zahn sent photographs of a silver bowl from Berlin to Hamburg which he had received from a dealer in Zurich.<sup>48</sup> On glass negatives by Wilhelm Weimar in the museum archive in Hamburg we see these photographs mounted on cardboard, with the embossed name of the studio of Johannes Meiner in Zurich (Fig. 5).<sup>49</sup> These photographs of photographs were then published in the Verband's fifth internal volume of plates.<sup>50</sup> Even for its collections of plates, the Verband would not necessarily take new photographs but resort to existing ones if the fake object was not directly available for reproduction.

Another item from the same auction, an aquamanile in the form of a centaur,<sup>51</sup> however, has generated a whole trail of photographs. It was included in the register of forgeries and presented as such in Brinckmann's article mentioned above.<sup>52</sup> Just as in Lepke's auction catalogue of the Jungk sale (Fig. 1), in this article the centaur is depicted in full profile, yet facing to the left (Fig. 6). Brinckmann had the museum's photographer produce a new image, most probably because the lighting of the depiction in the auction catalogue was too strong and obfuscated some details. There are two negatives in the archive of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe:<sup>53</sup> one is the

<sup>45</sup> Wilhelm von Bode, *Die Anfänge der Majolikakunst in Toskana unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Florentiner Majoliken*, Berlin 1911.

<sup>46</sup> Justus Brinckmann, "Allerlei von Fälschungen", in: *Kunstgewerbeblatt*, n.s., XIV (1903), pp. 228–234: 230.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> *Mitteilungen des Museen-Verbandes*, August 1912, p. 9; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mitmusverb1912>.

<sup>49</sup> Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, inv. P2017.3.2631a, P2017.3.2631b.

<sup>50</sup> *Abbildungen aus dem Archiv des Verbandes von Museumsbeamten*, V (1912/13),

no. 21; for a digitized version see [https://www.digishelf.de/objekt/PPN616613466\\_1912/1/LOG\\_0003/](https://www.digishelf.de/objekt/PPN616613466_1912/1/LOG_0003/).

<sup>51</sup> *Antiquitäten-Sammlung H. Jungk, Bremen*, auction cat. Rudolph Lepke's Kunst-Auctions-Haus, Berlin, 17–18 March 1903, no. 69. Apparently, Jungk had acquired the object in the sale of Heinrich Wencke's collection in Cologne: *Katalog ausgewählter hervorragender Kunstsachen und Antiquitäten aus der Sammlung des Herrn Heinrich Wencke, Hamburg*, auction cat. J.M. Heberle (H. Lempertz' Söhne), Cologne, 27–28 October 1898, no. 162.

<sup>52</sup> Brinckmann (note 46), pp. 228f.

<sup>53</sup> Inv. P2017.3.417a and P2017.3.417b.



5 Wilhelm Weimar (from a photo by Johannes Meiner), *Silver bowl with a relief of Hercules and Bacchus* (inverted view), 1912, glass negative, 23,8 × 17,8 cm. Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, inv. P2017.3.2631a

picture that was used for the article, while the other one shows the object turned slightly towards the camera (Fig. 7).

In 1926, the dealer Carl Eugen Pongs, who had acquired the centaur in the meantime, sent it to Brinckmann for evaluation, although the latter had published it as a fake in 1903.<sup>54</sup> At this point, the Verband produced a new photograph (Fig. 8), which was included in its archive as number IIII0 and printed in its sixth volume of plates of 1927.<sup>55</sup> This time the lighting is much softer and reveals more details. The viewpoint lies between those chosen before, so

that the object appears almost in full profile but just slightly turned towards the camera.

The museum officials suspected that the fake was inspired by a thirteenth-century aquamanile that had entered the collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest in the 1860s, right after its excavation.<sup>56</sup> Plaster copies of this original allegedly circulated since the 1860s, and in the 1890s galvanoplastic copies were made.<sup>57</sup> This meant a high international visibility of the work. Two photographs of the original in Budapest were included in the archive.<sup>58</sup> Most likely, these were the photographs by

<sup>54</sup> *Mitteilungen des Museen-Verbandes*, August 1927, p. 55; for a digitized version see <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/mitmusverb1927>.

<sup>55</sup> *Abbildungen aus dem Archiv des Verbandes von Museumsbeamten*, VI (1927), no. 19; for a digitized version see [https://www.digishelf.de/objekt/PPN616613466\\_1927/1/LOG\\_0003/](https://www.digishelf.de/objekt/PPN616613466_1927/1/LOG_0003/).

<sup>56</sup> *Verzeichnis* (note 38), nos. 239f.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*. One reproduction of the Budapest aquamanile entered the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, inv. REPRO. 1887-27.

<sup>58</sup> *Verzeichnis* (note 38), nos. 239f.



6 *Centaur aquamanile*,  
in: Justus Brinckmann,  
"Allerlei von Fälschungen",  
in: *Kunstgewerbeblatt*,  
n.s., XIV (1903), p. 233

György Klösz (1844–1913) from 1896 (Fig. 9). This density of visual documentation in the archive reflects the fact that over the decades the members had encountered the object several times and assembled a number of photographs related to it. Their reaction was especially prompted by the two auctions around 1900.

Auctions, in particular those of large and famous collections with a respected provenance, were significant public events in the Berlin art world since the late nineteenth century. During previews, the collections could be visited by a broad public and a close inspection of single works was also usual. On these occasions, both the institutional experts inside the auction house and connoisseurs and scholars formed

their assumptions about the quality of the works. This very often implied an intensified discussion about the value of objects.

The spectacular visibility of art auctions – as commerce in front of an audience – meant that conflicts of the art market such as fraud and fakes became a pressing matter in this realm. In these public forums, where collections were publicly inspected before being split up and dispersed, the single objects would leave their public trace. With the rising importance that photographic documentation played in these sales, the discussion of items with a doubtful authenticity relied more and more strongly on this instrument. A photograph, which was part of establishing the item's authenticity during the sale, would become a means of deconstructing it.

### Conclusion

The Verband von Museums-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebaren not only produced photographs of forgeries directly accessible by their members but also repurposed existing photographs from sales catalogues or those sent to them by dealers. The Verband aimed at providing the most detailed documentation possible, taking several pictures of fake objects and sometimes of originals that had served as a reference for the forgery. Starting from the central archive, reproductions were then circulated internally in volumes of plates and case studies (the *Mitteilungen*). These prints render parts of the lost photo archive visible, as the examples of the majolica fakes in the Beckerath sale of 1913 and the limestone relief have shown. In the cases of the silver bowl and the centaur aquamanile we were even able to go beyond the prints from the archive included in the volume of plates of 1912/13 and get closer to the photo-objects from around 1900. The latter example allows us to reconstruct a whole group of photographs related to one counterfeit object. This included not only the published image that contrasts the one of the Lepke



7 Wilhelm Weimar, *Centaur aquamanile* (inverted view), ca. 1899, glass negative, 23,8 × 17,8 cm. Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, inv. P2017.3.417b



8 *Centaur aquamanile*, in: *Abbildungen aus dem Archiv des Verbandes von Museumsbeamten*, VI (1927), no. 19



9 György Klösz, *Centaur aquamanile* in the National Museum Budapest, 1896. Budapest City Archives, inv. HU.BFL.XV.19.d.1.02.106



catalogue, but also a photograph taken decades later as well as photographs of the original referenced by the forgery.

This archive was truly collaborative, and by tracing the patterns of photographs we can not only reconstruct parts of the archive itself but also the practices of the museum officials. With the help of their archive,

they very effectively monitored many fake objects on the market, both individual cases (as in the case of one specific aquamanile) and series of objects (as in the case of sets of majolica). The value of these photographs was retained long after the object depicted was dismissed or lost. In the archival logic they formed part of a networked corpus of visual knowledge.

Around 1900, the firm Lepke dominated the auction market in Berlin and published richly illustrated sales catalogues. Several of its major auctions were critically monitored by museum directors who afterwards reported forgeries contained in the auctioned collections and warned their colleagues by providing the photographs from the auction catalogues as well as by producing their own photographs of objects in the sales. This activity was part of an organized effort by museums in the *Verband von Museums-Beamten zur Abwehr von Fälschungen und unlauterem Geschäftsgebaren* since 1898. The archive of this organization was lost in World War II. This paper investigates the interaction of museums with the auction market in order to shed light on the various types of photo-objects used to fight forgeries. Taking as its starting point the use of illustrated sales catalogues by the auction house Lepke, the paper then reconstructs the archival practices of the museum officials through case studies on specific objects.

*Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg: Figs. 1, 3, 4, 6. – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Kunstbibliothek: Figs. 2, 8. – Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg: Figs. 5, 7. – Budapest City Archives: Fig. 9.*

Umschlagbild | Copertina:

Archivschachtel mit Sangiorgi-Fotos in der Photothek des Kunsthistorisches Instituts  
in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut | Scatola d'archivio con foto Sangiorgi nella Fototeca  
del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut  
(Detail aus Abb. I, S. 42 | dettaglio da fig. I, p. 42)

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