

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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– 3 – *Costanza Caraffa - Julia Bärnighausen*

Introduction: Photography, Art, Market, and the Production of Value

– 11 – *Francesca Mambelli*

“À reproduire”. Production, Reproduction, and the Art Market in the Sangiorgi Materials of the Federico Zeri Foundation

– 43 – *Julia Bärnighausen*

Bureaucratic Hybrids: Photographs from the Galleria Sangiorgi in Rome at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz

– 69 – *Lynn Catterson*

From Visual Inventory to Trophy Clippings: Bardini & Co. and the Use of Photographs in the Late Nineteenth-Century Art Market

– 93 – *Casey Riley*

Commerce and Connoisseurship: Isabella Stewart Gardner's *Catalogue MCM*

– 109 – *Lukas Fuchsgruber*

From Auction Catalogue to Museum Archive. The Role of Photographs in the Fight against Forgeries in the Early Twentieth Century



Two Vases, after 1890, silver gelatin print,
23.5 × 17.6 cm. Florence, Kunsthistorisches
Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut,
Photothek, inv. 612091

INTRODUCTION

PHOTOGRAPHY, ART, MARKET, AND THE PRODUCTION OF VALUE

Costanza Caraffa and Julia Bärnighausen

Photography and market have always been inseparable.¹ The procurement of raw materials and the development of an artisanal, later industrial production of chemical components, glass plates, negative films, paper, and cameras are constituents of the “photography complex”² from the first hour. Karl Marx already acknowledged photography as one of the then emerging forms of production.³ Starting with the dispute between Daguerre and Talbot about the paternity of photography, the need to commercialize the images and processes experimented by the pioneers gave immediately rise to patents and copyright issues. Photographers became entrepreneurs too, and from one-man-shops real indus-

tries developed, with Alinari as a well-known example.⁴ With the introduction of its cheap and easy-to-use technologies, Kodak produced a large-scale market for amateur photographers parallel to the professional market.⁵ The commercial exploitation of photographs led to the development of sophisticated archiving systems that allowed the right images to be retrieved for the right client: the “business of photography”⁶ is a form of collective labor in which different professional roles – among them archivists – are involved. The various business models had to be adapted over time, as in the case of the Bettmann/Corbis archive.⁷ New (digital) technologies impose new forms of image commodification.

¹ See on these aspects the volume *Photography in the Marketplace*, ed. by Kelley Wilder/Ulla Fischer-Westhauser/Uwe Schögl (= *PhotoResearcher*, 25 [2016]).

² James L. Hevia, “The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer-Era China (1900–1901), Making Civilization”, in: *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. by Rosalind C. Morris, Durham 2009, pp. 79–119.

³ Steve Edwards, *The Making of English Photography: Allegories*, University Park, Pa., 2006, p. 1.

⁴ *Fratelli Alinari: fotografi in Firenze. 150 anni che illustrarono il mondo, 1852–2002*, ed. by Arturo Carlo Quintavalle/Monica Maffioli, Florence 2003.

⁵ Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, Charlottesville 2000.

⁶ To quote the title of a fundamental conference held in Leicester in 2019: <https://photographichistory.wordpress.com/annual-conference-2019/> (accessed on 30 June 2020).

⁷ Estelle Blaschke, *Banking on Images: The Bettmann Archive and Corbis*, Leipzig 2016.

Analyzing photography as a “cultural industry”, Paul Frosh insists on the economic and symbolic organization of photographic labor as well as on the significance of standardization and innovation, up to the processes of remediation and datafication in digital cultural production.⁸ Focusing on Egypt, Lucie Ryzova shows that the digital circulation of vintage photographs both on the platforms of heritage institutions and on the social media risks fueling market phenomena such as the appreciation of ‘old photographs’ that end up producing monetary value on the photographic market rather than memory value within communities.⁹ A market-related phenomenon too is the ‘discovery’ of photographic storage materials that were until then ‘anonymous’, with the subsequent canonization of individual personalities as artists (Vivian Maier or Seydou Keïta). The creation of value through photography occurs also in non-monetary terms. The wide adoption of photographs, already in the second half of the nineteenth century, for documentation and as evidence in the humanities and sciences was grounded on the presumed truth value of the chemical-mechanical process.¹⁰ Photographs functioned as “currency” and “exchange objects” between scholars.¹¹

The stories of Alinari and Kodak demonstrate how difficult it has become to translate images into capital, to paraphrase the title of Estelle Blaschke’s and Armin Linke’s art research project *Image Capital*.¹² With their broad approach to the topic of value in photography,

Blaschke and Linke help us to get closer to the terms that form the title of this thematic issue, photography, art, market. One of the possible paths – not taken by Blaschke and Linke and not even in this volume – is to turn to fine art photography and the question of “how an art photograph will perform as an investment”.¹³ The fine art photography market can be seen as a branch of the art market and is based on the economic and symbolic value of art photographs as collectors’ items, progressively and laboriously acquired over a century and a half. To be considered fine art, a photograph must have a recognized author. Here, the art market shares the value system of museums, which is strongly conditioned by the art-historical concepts of authorship and uniqueness.¹⁴ This also corresponds to the labor organization in the cultural industry of photography, dominated by the freelance photographer (rather than by photographers integrated in corporations): his individual imprint is seen as the true “source of cultural value”.¹⁵ The disappearance of the “labor of photography” has indeed been furthered by exhibitions in art museums as well as art-historical publications that tend to select photographs as pure images attributable to an author/artist without providing any information on the technique, dimensions, their (often commercial) production context or the many professionals involved.¹⁶

This “tension between ‘romantic’ aesthetic and ‘industrial’ commercial values, [...] between quantity and singularity” is a central issue.¹⁷ Now, photographs

⁸ Paul Frosh, “Photography as a Cultural Industry: A Historical-Theoretical Overview”, in: *The Handbook of Photography Studies*, ed. by Gil Pasternak, London et al. 2020, pp. 255–272.

⁹ Lucie Ryzova, “Mourning the Archive: Middle Eastern Photographic Heritage between Neoliberalism and Digital Reproduction”, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, LVI (2014), pp. 1027–1061.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography: 1860–1920*, New Haven, Conn., et al. 1992; *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, conference proceedings London/Florence 2009, ed. by Costanza Caraffa, Berlin/Munich 2011; *Documenting the World: Film, Photography, and the Scientific Record*, ed. by Gregg Mitmann/Kelley Wilder, Chicago/London 2016; *Photo-Objects: On the Materiality of Photographs and Photo Archives in the Humanities and Sciences*, ed. by Julia Bärnighausen et al., Berlin

2019, www.mprl-series.mpg.de/studies/12/index.html (accessed on 23 March 2020).

¹¹ Elizabeth Edwards, “Exchanging Photographs: Preliminary Thoughts on the Currency of Photography in Collecting Anthropology”, in: *Journal des anthropologues*, LXXX–LXXXI (2000), pp. 21–46.

¹² www.image-capital.com.

¹³ Juliet Hacking, *Photography and the Art Market*, London 2018, p. 212.

¹⁴ *Photographs, Museums, Collections: Between Art and Information*, ed. by Elizabeth Edwards/Christopher Morton, London 2015.

¹⁵ Frosh (note 8), pp. 258–260.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Batchen, “The Labor of Photography”, in: *Victorian Literature and Culture*, XXXVII (2009), pp. 292–296.

¹⁷ Frosh (note 8), pp. 263f.

circulating and producing value in the “visual economy”¹⁸ of art history are often masses of anonymous, apparently insipid, dusty multiple copies. We are speaking about so-called documentary photographs, which, since the middle of the nineteenth century, are being used to classify, preserve, compare, and study works of art and monuments (we are focusing on European and North-American art-historical practices – a more global dimension is highly desirable although out of the scope of this issue). This use of photographs fueled the growth of commercial studios and mass production by firms such as Alinari. The number of photographs in private and institutional collections soon became the unit of measure of their importance. The photographic archives that started to arise in the last third of the nineteenth century – nowadays complemented by digital image collections – are among the places where the canon of art history is constantly formed and transformed. Just as photographs are shaped by collective labor and meaning-making, so are archives and collections, where economic decisions meet monetary, logistic, political, and epistemic questions.¹⁹ In those archives, photographs create value in the sense that they sanction the inclusion of a given work in the canon. The hierarchies of art history are implicit in photo-archival classification systems: moving within an archive, from one box to another, for a photograph often means an upgrade – e.g. the inclusion in a special collection – or a downgrade – e.g. from the box “Leonardo” to the box “School of Leonardo”.

Yet, among the current users of art-historical photo archives – such as the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – are also art dealers; the photographic archive is the ultimate place where art historians and art dealers meet. On the art market too, photographs do a work: they serve as communi-

cation tools between dealers and customers, as well as visual inventories in the internal archives of auction houses and galleries. But they have also been used as a vehicle to lend credibility to forgeries. The photographic documentations of the art objects on trade functioned as indexical representation of the artworks themselves, but also as “operative images”²⁰ that were integral in art market transactions.

The aim of the papers in this volume is precisely to analyze the photographic and archival practices of art dealers and collectors, with a (although not exclusive) focus on Italy around 1900. As a theoretical and methodological framework, the present survey can draw on current developments in the field of art market studies as well as on the material approach in photography and archive studies, as detailed below. Moreover, it embraces Terry Cook’s intellectual paradigm for archives, which shifts the emphasis “from information to knowledge”,²¹ arguing that the images, inscriptions, stamps, codes, and all the traces of the usage and consumption of photographs over time are not just a combination of textual and visual information; rather they give us an insight into the knowledge system of the art trade, art history, and photography themselves.

Art Market Studies

In the last years, international research on art markets has gained in intensity, inspiring a series of inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations while successfully defining a new academic field. The dynamics of the art and antiques market have been explored at the intersections of art history, design, provenance research, museology, material culture studies, economics, and corporate history. This includes both the investigation

¹⁸ Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World*, Princeton, NJ, 1997.

¹⁹ *Sammlungswirtschaften*, ed. by Nils Güttler/Ina Heumann, Berlin 2016.

²⁰ Aud Sissel Hoel, “Operative Images: Inroads to a New Paradigm of Media Theory”, in: *Image – Action – Space: Situating the Screen in Visual Practice*,

ed. by Luisa Feiersinger/Kathrin Friedrich/Moritz Queisner, Berlin *et al.* 2018, pp. II–28. We use the term in a broader sense, which is not only limited to machine-made images.

²¹ Terry Cook, “From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives”, in: *Archivaria*, 19 (1984–1985), pp. 28–49.

of historic art markets and the globalization of contemporary art markets in the twenty-first century.

In response to this growing body of research, several institutions have been founded in the academic and professional world, among them associations, research centers, and – especially – archives. In fact, the institutionalization of art market studies is very much centered around the establishment of dealers' archives, which are being made increasingly accessible, and their connection to universities striving for inter- and transdisciplinary dialogues. In Cologne for example, the Bundesverband Deutscher Galerien in 1992 established the Zentralarchiv des deutschen und internationalen Kunsthandels to provide galleries and art dealers with a contact point for the preservation of their archives.²² In 2014 the institution was redefined as a scholarly archive and renamed Zentralarchiv für deutsche und internationale Kunstmarktforschung (ZADIK). It has recently been declared an institute of the University of Cologne, which established in 2015 a specialized study module for “art history and the art market”.²³ In the light of what has been described as a “neglect of the art trade on the part of art history”, ZADIK's objective is “centered around the two poles of ideational and commercial art education”²⁴ – thereby meeting the growing desire for a transdisciplinary intertwining of art market professionals and academia, which tradi-

tionally have perceived each other with some reservations.²⁵ In 2016, the International Art Market Studies Association was founded with a mindset similar to that of ZADIK.²⁶ The opportunities and restrictions of transdisciplinary collaboration in art market studies were also discussed at the workshop *Objects on the Art Market* organized by the Forum Kunst und Markt at the Technische Universität Berlin in November 2019.²⁷ In the United Kingdom, the Centre for the Study of the Art and Antiques Market at the University of Leeds launched the *Antique Dealers Project*, which established among others the Antique Dealers' Archives on the basis of donations from British dealers.²⁸ For its Special Collections, the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles has acquired a number of art dealer's archives and provides a list of such archives around the world.²⁹ As part of the *Project for the Study of Collecting and Provenance*, the institute also launched the *Getty Provenance Research Index*.³⁰ This institutional interest in art dealers and collectors is often the other side of projects on looted art.³¹ Like in Cologne, numerous universities and auction houses have initiated master's courses in the study of historic and contemporary art markets.³²

Many of these initiatives put a strong focus on their online presence and the open access to the resources. A fast data exchange is especially required for qualitative research projects covering price trends or the develop-

²² <http://www.zadik.info/> (accessed on 23 March 2020). See also Günter Herzog, “Das Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels e.V. ZADIK”, in: *Archivar*, LXIX (2016), pp. 114–117.

²³ <https://amskoeln.hypotheses.org/> (accessed on 23 March 2020); <http://khi.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/fachgebiete/kunstmarkt> (accessed on 27 March 2020).

²⁴ Herzog (note 22), p. 114.

²⁵ The issue was met head-on at the 2017 conference *State of the Art Archives* which brought together international scholars from all over the world: <http://www.stateoftheartarchives.com/en/> (accessed on 26 March 2020).

²⁶ <https://www.artmarketstudies.org/> (accessed on 23 March 2020).

²⁷ See <https://www.fokum.org/en/konferenz-2019/> (accessed on 27 March 2019). The Forum Kunst und Markt, founded in 2012, in 2017 started the open access *Journal for Art Market Studies*; see <https://www.fokum.org/journal-for-art-market-studies/> (accessed on 27 March 2020).

²⁸ <https://csaam.leeds.ac.uk/>; <https://antiquedealers.leeds.ac.uk/>; <https://antiquedealers.leeds.ac.uk/research/archives/> (accessed on 26 March 2020).

²⁹ https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/guides_bibliographies/provenance/dealer_archives.html (accessed on 26 March 2020).

³⁰ <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/index.html>; <https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/search.html> (accessed on 26 March 2020).

³¹ For example, at the Getty Research Institute: https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/guides_bibliographies/holocaust_provenance.html (accessed on 28 June 2020).

³² For example at the University of Zurich: <https://www.emams.uzh.ch/en.html> (accessed on 28 June 2020), at Kingston University in London: <https://www.kingston.ac.uk/postgraduate/courses/art-market-appraisal-ma/> (accessed on 28 June 2020), or at the Sotheby's Institute

ment of supply and demand. The discipline of art market studies is still in the process of consolidation, constantly reevaluating its purpose, methods, tools, and standard readings. The *Art Market Dictionary* is planned to be the first comprehensive reference work on art dealers, agents, galleries, and auction houses including both a digital database and printed volumes.³³ These are only some of many actors in this fast-growing community of scholars and professionals.

When it comes to the consultation of art dealers' documents beyond these specialized archives and databases, users are usually faced with a challenging situation: very often, materials relevant to art dealing are preserved in institutions that are not necessarily related to this research field. Still, the foundation of dealer's archives such as those in Cologne and Leeds meets the growing need for accessibility in this area, and many museums are now advertising more prominently their collectors' and dealers' files.³⁴

On the Status of Photographs and Photo Archives

The interest in (photo) archives as dynamic spaces has in itself resulted from the 'archival' and 'material' turns of the last decades of which many art market scholars are fully aware.³⁵ However, there is still ample need for the acknowledgment of photographs as material objects. In many publications and online databases reproductions of single photographs are often cropped and viewed merely indexically as a ref-

erence to their visual content: the art objects whose location, provenance, or state of conservation may be in question. What usually disappears are the photographs' material qualities and institutional histories. These are, however, essential to the very same research objectives: versos are usually annotated with information on artworks, expert evaluations, price estimations, and addresses of clients. The mounting, e.g. on cardboard, as well as the choice of photographic technique (economical albumen prints or aesthetically pleasing but pricey silver gelatin prints) reflect the bureaucratic workflows of art dealing businesses. Numbers, stamps, and cross-references provide information on the photographs' itineraries within a dealer's archive, and also on their archival histories as part of institutionalization processes. It is at the intertwining of images and data, which is at the core of Blaschke's and Linke's project *Image Capital* too, that value is created.

The material approach in photography studies, developed since the end of the last century at the intersection between visual anthropology and material culture studies, aims at overcoming the traditional reduction of photographs to their visual content.³⁶ Photographs as material objects exist, circulate, mutate, and are active in space and time, in changing social and cultural contexts. Archives are no longer just seen as places of discipline and power but also as vital and dynamic conglomerates: "ecosystems"³⁷ founded on the balance and interaction between various species – the photographs themselves, card mounts, stamps, boxes, inven-

of Art: <https://www.sothebysinstitute.com/london/masters-programs/ma-art-business> (accessed on 28 June 2020). The international Art Markets Summer School will open this year in Antwerp and Brussels: <https://artmarkets.sciencesconf.org/resource/page/id/4> (accessed on 26 March 2020).

³³ <https://www.artmarketdictionary.com/> (accessed on 10 July 2020); <https://www.degruyter.com/view/db/amd> (accessed on 10 July 2020).

³⁴ For instance the National Gallery of Art, Washington (<https://www.nga.gov/research/library/imagecollections/dealer-archives.html>; accessed on 26 March 2020) or The Frick Collection (https://www.frick.org/research/archives/browse/art_collectors_and_collecting; accessed on 26 March 2020).

³⁵ Günter Herzog, "ZADIK – Central Archive for German and International Art Market Studies", in: *State of the Art Archives: Internationale Konferenz für Archive zur Dokumentation von moderner und zeitgenössischer Kunst*, Heidelberg 2019, pp. 60–65: 60.

³⁶ For an overview, see Costanza Caraffa, "Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space: Photographs as Material Objects", in: *Handbook of Photography Studies*, ed. by Gil Pasternak, London 2020, pp. 79–96.

³⁷ Elizabeth Edwards, "Thoughts on the 'Non-Collections' of the Archival Ecosystem", in: *Photo-Objects* (note 10), pp. 67–82.

tory books, catalogues, the structures and practices of the photographic archive, and the people involved in its activities, from archivists to scholars. The material approach enables us to go beyond the usual hierarchies of photographic values, based on authorship and uniqueness. It has shifted attention to the masses of often anonymous photographs preserved in documentary archives and allows them to be regarded as parts of networks connected to the selling of art. This is exactly the point of departure of this special issue. Indeed, networks of international art trade are not only formed by people such as antiquarians, collectors, and photographers. Photographs themselves need also to be recognized as essential to these networks, to the formation of the art historical canon as well as to the transactions that lead to the creation of (monetary and cultural) value in the art market.

Actors, Archives, Photographs

This volume assembles some of the papers presented at the study days *The Art Market in Italy around 1900 – Actors, Archives, Photographs*, at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz and the Federico Zeri Foundation in Bologna in November 2017.³⁸ The first study day held in Florence, dedicated to “Photographic and Antiquarian Practices”, grew out from the material reality of the holdings of the Kunsthistorisches Institut’s Photothek and of the Zeri Foundation as well as from the general acknowledgment that there is a considerable amount of – partly unpublished – original research material related to this topic. The essays focus on the period around the turn of the nineteenth century, when photographs were already established mass media shaping not only everyday life, but also academia, business, and commerce. They combine a shared understanding of photographs as material objects and working tools with specific methodological sets and perspectives.

Francesca Mambelli’s paper analyzes the extensive holdings from the Galleria Sangiorgi in Rome kept at the Zeri Foundation, shedding light on the reproduction of artworks at the auction house’s studio through photographs and drawings while critically examining the blurry lines between original and copy. Turning to material from the very same gallery at the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Julia Bärnighausen explores image patterns and object economies of photographs as bureaucratic hybrids, proposing a *Wissensgeschichte* of art dealing. In her paper on the Florentine art dealer Stefano Bardini, Lynn Catterson presents a wide and thickly woven network of ever-circulating photo-objects, pointing out that Bardini was one of the first art dealers to fully embrace the possibilities offered by the new medium as early as the 1860s. Casey Riley’s article takes the perspective of one of the world’s most famous female collectors, Isabella Stewart Gardner, who gathered a wide range of photographs illustrating her ambition, labor, and success in creating her famous Boston art museum. The photographs representing her most triumphant acquisitions were assembled in the album *Catalogue MCM*, which is at the heart of Riley’s paper. Finally, Lukas Fuchsgruber’s contribution deals with an association of museum officials active in Germany between 1898 and 1939, whose aim was to fight the marketing of forgeries. Its lost photo archive can be partly reconstructed with the help of publications and surviving image collections of other institutions. While photographs are usually employed by museum professionals and art dealers to prove the authenticity of artworks, here they were used to uncover forgeries – a peculiar variant of the paradigm of photographic indexicality.

The essays all revolve around a series of research questions that provide food for thought not only for art historians but also for scholars of photography

³⁸ <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/2017/11/art-market-italy-1900.php> (accessed on 26 June 2020).

studies, archivists, art market professionals, and scholars of art market studies; facing the often difficult task of defining and differentiating various types of artistic reproduction (copies vs. variations vs. forgeries) and considering the growing appreciation of and discourse about those forms of reproduction, the question arises: where does the 'original' artwork stand today? On the art market but also in provenance research and restitution debates, the questions of the authenticity and originality of artworks matter more than ever, while from the material perspective of photography studies there is a tendency to view documentary photographs as 'multiple originals' and thereby stress their non-monetary, epistemological value. Which role do photographs as inherently reproductive, hybrid, and circulating media play in this? How have concepts of value shaped the assessment of artworks and photographs and how have these concepts changed over time? Which role did and do institutions play in this process? How did scholars and experts use photographs and how did they, if so at all, master the constant balancing act between publicity and secrecy, collaboration and competition? To answer such questions, scholars need to be able to consult dealers' archives that are often 'hidden in plain sight' in larger institutions. They are therefore faced with gaps, in the form of absent or even inaccessible archives, and the challenge to respectfully and critically evaluate oral sources.

Ce n'est qu'un début: there is still a lot of basic research to be done, and we hope that more inquiries will arise in the near future. The essays collected here prove the potentialities of examining photographs and archival practices in art market studies, especially if these are considered in their material and social dimensions, and not only as mere 'sources'. However, a contribution to art market studies is not the only *raison d'être* of this publication. The investigation

of the photographic modes of profit creation on the art market is meant to impact on a wider discussion about the hierarchies of photographic and archival values. In the end, a general reassessment of the value of photographs and photographic archives in research and society, able to overcome "the residual power of literary-artistic models of authorship",³⁹ is only possible if we understand the (economic and symbolic) mechanisms of photographic value formation and transformation.

Research is always a collaborative effort. The editors would like to express their warmest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the study days and the publication – neither would have been possible without their help. The collaboration with the Federico Zeri Foundation and especially Andrea Bacchi and Francesca Mambelli as well as with Giovanna Capitelli of the Università della Calabria goes much further than this joint initiative. Estelle Blaschke's and Armin Linke's presentation of the project *Image Capital* in Florence in September 2018 led to a cooperation with the Photothek that is far from having exhausted its intellectual effects, resonating throughout this text and the entire volume. Conversations with Hannah Baader, Elizabeth Edwards, Joan M. Schwartz, Tiziana Serena, and Kelley Wilder over the years have been merged into many of our reflections. Many thanks are due to the anonymous peer reviewers who enhanced the quality of the articles with their critique and suggestions. We are grateful to Samuel Vitali and Ortensia Martinez Fucini for their extraordinary professionalism in editing and realizing this volume. Finally, our warmest thanks go to all the colleagues of the Florentine Photothek and of the project *Foto-Objekte*.⁴⁰ It was in the everyday collective handling of photographs in archives that our thoughts on photographic value could take shape.

³⁹ Frosh (note 8), p. 261.

⁴⁰ <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/forschung/photothek/foto-objekte/index.php> (accessed on 28 June 2020).

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

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