

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

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Rembrandt.



Signed R.T. 1629 -

Formerly in Collection of Duke of Buckingham
Buckingham at Stowe House -

1 Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Catalogue MCM*, 1900, 44 × 32 × 7.5 cm, p. 69 with photograph showing Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait, Age 23*. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, inv. v.1.b.4.7

COMMERCE AND CONNOISSEURSHIP ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER'S *CATALOGUE MCM*

Casey Riley

The photographic records of notable museums have long provided critical documentary information to researchers interested in matters of provenance, conservation, and histories of display. Over the past decade, and thanks to a burgeoning field of scholarly inquiry regarding the material history of individual photographic objects, photographic archives have moved from the margins of museological practice and been recognized as primary drivers within the social and intellectual evolution of collections. Within this “mass of unassuming photographic assemblages”, as Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton describe such archives, one might discern patterns of behavior – as well as concurrent material priorities and processes – that illuminate the historical ethos and initial aims of any given museum.¹

Yet even as institutional photographic archives have been understood as artifacts unto themselves and as collections to be mined for epistemological insight, studies tracing the impact of a specific photographic archive upon the history of an institution remain scarce. The following case study seeks to address this oversight, providing a close reading of a small, but pointedly catalogued, collection of photographs relating to one museum – the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Massachusetts – to recover its relations with American and European art dealers. Few museums provide as rich a vein of insight into the constitutive dynamics of an embedded photographic archive as that of the Gardner Museum. Gardner herself scrupulously collected a wide range of photographic material for display within her museum and as evidence of her labor to create the

¹ Elizabeth Edwards/Christopher Morton, “Between Art and Information: Towards a Collecting History of Photographs”, in: *Photographs, Mu-*

seums, Collections: Between Art and Information, ed. by *eidem*, London *et. al.* 2015, pp. 3–23: 14.



2 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait, Age 23*, 1629, oil on oak panel, 89.7 × 73.5 cm. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

same. A number of the photographs she retained from a range of dealers proffering works for her collection were enshrined within an album of her own design, as a form of private publication touting her success. Understanding the formation of her photographic archive provides new and valuable insight into the character of her cultural leadership, and into her efforts to shape the

legacy of her collection and museum. Most importantly, such an examination suggests a way of reading other such back-of-house photographic records as catalytic forces for the growth of civic institutions.

Photographic enticements were integral to Isabella Stewart Gardner's correspondence with art dealers in Europe. In January of 1896, thirty-year-old Bernard Berenson wrote from his aerie in Fiesole to Gardner of Boston with a tantalizing offer:

Now I come to the special point of this letter. I am sending you a photograph of one of the most precious pictures in existence [Fig. 1], which if not sold by Feb. 18 goes to the National Gallery.² Owing to a number of fortunate accidents I am in a position to offer you the chance of buying it. The picture in question not only is one of Rembrandt's very earliest pictures but the earliest portrait of himself, executed as the date indicates in 1629, when Rembrandt was 22. On the back of the photograph you will find all the indications. It will be reproduced in Bode's great work on Rembrandt. The condition is perfect, and the colours light and delicate of that greyish green prevalent in all early Rembrandts. The touch is exquisitely pure and light. This masterpiece you can have for the comparatively small sum of 3000 pounds. I shall say no more to urge you but beg you to cable me directly you have made up your mind about it... "Yes Rembrandt" or "No Rembrandt" will do.³

Soon after, the collector replied in decisive, rapacious terms:

² The National Gallery, London.

³ Bernard Berenson to Isabella Stewart Gardner, 19 January 1896, AISGM. Berenson's role in the formation of Gardner's collection has been well established in the literature surrounding her museum; see David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*, Durham, N.C., 2006, pp. 110–125; Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930*, Chicago 1991, pp. 165–175. For a broader view of his professional pursuits and impact upon Fenway Court, see *Bernard Berenson: Formation and Heritage*, ed. by Joseph Connors/Louis A.

Waldman, Washington DC 2014, especially Robert Colby, "Palaces Eternal and Serene: The Vision of Altamura and Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court", pp. 69–100. Multiple examples of photographic exchange occur in letters between Gardner and Berenson. For a complete listing, see *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1887–1924*, ed. by Rollin Van N. Hadley, Boston, Mass., 1987. The tenor of these letters is analyzed by Gregory Dowling, "Paying Court: The Chivalrous Language of Art and Money in the Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner", in: *Before Peggy Guggenheim: American Women Art Collectors*,



3 Postcard of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1908. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum



4 Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Dutch Room

Dear Mr. Berenson: The photographs and the delightful letter came last night... I am *bitten* by the Rembrandt, and today being Sunday, I wait until tomorrow and then cable "Yes Rembrandt!"⁴

With this rapturous exchange, Berenson and Gardner secured a deal that would bring one of the earliest and finest self-portraits of the Dutch master (Fig. 2) from London to Boston. The story of Gardner's acquisitions between 1891 (when she inherited 1.75 million dollars from her father) and the completion of her

museum in 1901 is a remarkable one, and a testament to her visionary leadership at a time when few other women could accomplish the same. In a single decade, Gardner built a formidable collection of fine and decorative art, antiquities, rare books, and manuscripts for installation within a museum of her own design. Built to approximate a Venetian palazzo and filled with evocative assemblages that dissolve disciplinary boundaries and hierarchies, her museum remains unlike any other within the United States (Figs. 3, 4). When she died, Gardner left the museum and the galleries in which

conference proceedings Venice 1999, ed. by Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, Venice 2001, pp. 85–97.

⁴ Isabella Stewart Gardner to Bernard Berenson, 2 February 1896, AISGM.



5 Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Catalogue MCM* (as Fig. 1), frontispiece

she had organized her collection as a cohesive bequest, entrusted and preserved as she had designed it “for the education and enjoyment of the public forever”.⁵

Photographs were essential to the accumulation and disposition of that collection. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to state that without photography, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum as it stands today would not exist. Photography was integral to her art historical

education, her purchasing power, her curatorial strategies, and the preservation of her museum. Above all, Gardner’s photographic exchanges with Berenson and other dealers were essential to her timely acquisitions, not least because she lived across an ocean from nearly all of the works they proffered her. As her correspondence with Berenson around the Rembrandt self-portrait illustrates, photography also defined the terms of

⁵ Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Will and Codicil*, Section Three, Part One, 17 January 1924, AISGM.



6 Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Catalogue MCM* (as Fig. 1), pp. 2f. with photograph showing Fra Angelico's *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*

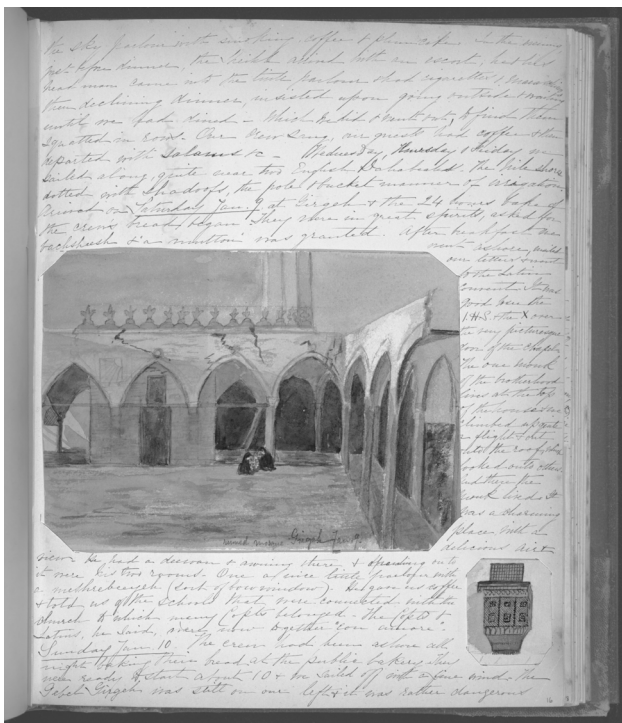
engagement between client and dealer, providing the collector with proof of the painting's condition and value and positioning the art advisor as a vital interpreter of the work's colors, texture, and material impact.

Gardner understood the importance of photography in the collection of her masterpieces. She retained photographs from Berenson and other dealers for her personal archive, the contents of which she exhibited

in her museum. Among these archival assemblages is a photograph album known as *Catalogue MCM: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the Fenway*, created a year before the completion of her museum and later stored within one of its galleries (Fig. 5).⁶ The photograph of her Rembrandt self-portrait went into that album, as did photographs of ninety-two other paintings and sculptures that she acquired. Within the pages

⁶ Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Catalogue MCM: The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the Fenway*, AISGM. The title page of this album bears the

Roman numerals "MCM" in reference to the year of its fabrication, 1900 AD.



7 Isabella Stewart Gardner, travel album, 1874/75, 30.2 × 24 × 4.5 cm, p. 29 with diary from Egypt. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, inv. v.1.a.4.2

⁷ The archives of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum hold at least fifty albums compiled by Gardner herself. In addition to the travel albums, the archives of the museum hold fifteen photographically illustrated guest books, five albums of views and installations of the museum during Gardner's lifetime, and two snapshot albums compiled by Gardner, as well as a broad range of photographic ephemera, which she displayed in custom-built cases throughout the museum.

⁸ Anne Higonnet, *A Museum of One's Own: Private Collection, Public Gift*, Pittsburgh, Pa., 2010, p. 194, suggests that Gardner's photographic travel albums "resemble art history textbooks". Gardner's activities in photographic album-making were constitutive to her eventual museum practices (see Casey Riley, "Self Assembled: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Photographic Albums and the Development of her Museum, 1902–1924", in: *Photographs, Museums, Collections* [note I], pp. 47–63). Nevertheless, numerous studies of women's photographic albums in the nineteenth century assert a vital relationship between album creation and the domestic

of *Catalogue MCM*, Gardner arranged crucial actors – works by Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Cellini, Mantegna, Rembrandt, Van Dyck, and many others – to stage a rational rehearsal for the organization of her museum (Fig. 6). As a material history of her connoisseurship, *Catalogue MCM* demonstrates her confidence in the scholarly and commercial value of her collection. At the same time, it illuminates the role of photographic objects in delineating her intentions for that collection – ambitions that were at least as notable as her accomplishments in building a renowned collection and museum for American audiences.

Isabella Stewart Gardner was an experienced viewer and collector of photographic representations of paintings, sculpture, and architecture when she began to acquire masterpieces for her museum in the 1890s. An avid traveler, Gardner had purchased hundreds of photographs by important commercial photographers working in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East and used them to create twenty-eight photographic travel albums between 1867 and 1896 (Figs. 7, 8).⁷ These self-assembled archives of her visits to national collections of art and cultural heritage sites did much more than ratify her viewing experiences: they became vital reference manuals in her ever-expanding library of works studied, evidence of her relentless autodidactic practices.⁸ At the same time, these albums were more

sphere. See Anne Higonnet, "Secluded Vision: Images of the Feminine Experience in Nineteenth Century Europe", in: *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. by Norma Broude/Mary D. Garrard, New York 1992, pp. 170–185. Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers, and Flirts*, Aldershot 2007, p. 23, suggests that the album is a "feminine space" in which women used photography "to give power to their fantasies and validate their experiences" within the confines of home and family. Similarly, Elizabeth Siegel, "Society Cut-ups", in *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage*, ed. by eadem, New Haven, Conn., 2009, pp. 13–36: 16, contends that women's "[album] art depicted activities within an accepted domestic sphere, representing a range – though a limited one – of women's experiences and important social and familial functions". For further reading on the history of American scrapbooks, see *The Scrapbook in American Life*, ed. by Susan Tucker/Katherine Ott/Patricia Buckler, Philadelphia, Pa., 2006; Jessica Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History*, New Haven, Conn., 2008; and Ellen Gruber

than records of aesthetic experiences or received knowledge: instead, they were sites for her recursive curatorial engagement with works of art, training her hand, eye, and mind for the imaginative rigors of organizing what would become her eponymous museum.

When she settled upon the task of building a world-class collection of art for the city of Boston, Gardner worked with a number of agents in the United States and in Europe, activating an extraordinary network of advisors whose friendships she had cultivated assiduously in the preceding decades. These advisors included Berenson, whose postgraduate studies abroad were financially supported by Gardner, as well as Richard Norton, the son of Harvard art historian Charles Eliot Norton, and a number of artists, including Ralph Curtis, Joseph Lindon Smith, and John Singer Sargent.⁹ While she acquired a few works of art in person – the story of her bidding for Vermeer’s *The Concert* at an auction in Paris is now legendary¹⁰ –, a great many more were introduced to her via correspondence with her advisors, who often served as intermediaries for her negotiations with established European dealers.

Photography was essential to these long-distance exchanges, providing a material solidity and visual impact to support her advisors’ written descriptions.¹¹ These photographs were her primary contact with some of the most important works in her collection, and as such became treasured relics within her expansive personal archive. Today they provide insight into

Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the American Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance*, Oxford 2013.

⁹ Berenson was Gardner’s principle agent in the formation of her collection between 1896 and 1900. Purchasing for the collection slowed after 1900, but Gardner continued to acquire works for the museum until her death. Some of these were purchases, but others were gifts from friends and family. The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s *Inventory and Notes* – a massive archive of information regarding the provenance of works within the collection – contains the particulars of these purchases and gifts, which are too many to list herein. See *Inventory and Notes to the Collection*, AISGM.

¹⁰ In 1892, Gardner worked with agent Fernand Robert to acquire Ver-



8 Isabella Stewart Gardner, travel album, 1883, 32 × 26 × 4.6 cm, p. 36 with photo from China. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, inv. v.1.a.4.8p

meer’s *The Concert* at auction. Gardner seated herself within Robert’s line of sight on the day of the auction at the Hôtel Drouot and instructed him to continue bidding so long as she held her handkerchief to her face. She got the painting for a reasonable price (29,000 francs) because the Louvre and the National Gallery each mistakenly believed that Robert was acting on the other’s behalf and were loath to bid against one another. See Morris Carter, *Isabella Stewart Gardner and Fenway Court*, Boston, Mass., 1925, p. 134.

¹¹ In 2005, the museum created a working inventory of the photographs sent to Gardner by various dealers, *Photographs Related to the Formation and Construction of the Museum, 1897–1924*, compiled by Jane A. Callahan, AISGM.



9 William Edward Gray, *Late Gothic Madonna and Child*, about 1903, gelatin silver print. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, inv. ARC.006927

¹² *Photographs Related to the Formation and Construction of the Museum* (note II) identifies the following dealers: Dino Barozzi, Bernard Berenson, Antonio Carrer, Emilio Costantini, Francesco Dorigo, Dowdeswell and Dowdeswell, A.S. Drey, Louis Dreyer, The Ehrich Galleries, Galerie Sangiorgi, Eugene Glaenzer, Antonio Grandi, Paul Manship, Moisè Dalla Torre, Richard Norton, Emile Pares, Attilio Simonetti, and Yamanaka and Company.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ The museum's finding aid is equivocal about the number of acquisitions represented in the dealer photograph collection; some of the architectural fragments and metalwork are in question. According to the inventory *Photographs Related to the Formation and Construction of the Museum*

her decision-making processes as she sorted the possibilities for growing her collection. According to a 2005 inventory, Gardner saved 138 photographs of paintings, statuary, and architectural fragments for potential purchase from a range of American and European dealers (Fig. 9).¹² In addition to these, she saved 139 photographs from unknown correspondents of paintings, drawings, sculpture, metalwork, fountains, tapestries, manuscripts and other objects as well as views of estates, buildings, and gardens around the world.¹³ While some of the photographs are of works that she acquired, others are of items she declined to purchase, and one of a painting she failed to obtain: Thomas Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* (Fig. 10).¹⁴ As a photographic archive, these 'dealer photographs' therefore document a small but significant portion of Gardner's extant collection as well as a sampling of what might have been included if fate, funding, and her own decision-making had led to different outcomes.

Gardner's correspondence with Berenson, who negotiated the acquisition of many of the most important works within her museum, contains numerous references to their photographic exchanges.¹⁵ Berenson was an avid collector of photographs of art and saw these reproductions as essential to his practices in art historical connoisseurship. In a critical essay originally published in *The Nation* in 1893, Berenson hails the efforts of two photographic firms, Fratelli Alinari of Florence and Domenico Anderson of Rome, to photograph "the most interesting pictures in Venice

(note II), Gardner acquired forty-two objects that appear in the dealer photograph file. For Gardner's failure to acquire Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*, see Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack: A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner*, Boston, Mass., 1965, pp. 190–193. A photograph of *Blue Boy* also appears on page 22 in the first volume of Gardner's 1879 travel album series regarding her journey throughout England.

¹⁵ Gardner displayed her correspondence with Berenson and many others in cases throughout the museum. For an analysis of these archival installations, see Casey Riley, "To Make a Case: Isabella Stewart Gardner's Archival Installations at Fenway Court", in: *Boston's Apollo: Thomas McKeller and John Singer Sargent*, ed. by Nathaniel Silver, New Haven, Conn., 2020.

and neighboring towns”.¹⁶ Berenson extolls the virtues of isochromatic photography in capturing paintings that were otherwise difficult to see, due to poor lighting or shoddy restoration work.¹⁷ Describing the impediments to the average tourist in discerning the works of Bellini, Carpaccio, Titian, and Tintoretto in situ, Berenson claims:

But if this state of things is hard upon the ordinary sightseer, it is harder still upon the photographer and upon the connoisseur. For the two go to a great extent hand in hand. Printing itself scarcely could have had a greater effect on the study of the classics than photography is beginning to have on the study of the Old Masters.¹⁸

Berenson asserts that connoisseurship is a “new science” that demands the accuracy of photography.¹⁹ Engravers and other printmakers could only produce copies that belied their own preferences through tell-tale embellishments, while the photographer could produce faithful reproductions of the works Berenson sought to study and authenticate within an ever-broadening hierarchy of Italian Renaissance painting, for both scholarly and commercial purposes.²⁰ Moreover, he esteemed the photographer as a skilled tradesman who could position his camera and time his exposures



10 “Blue Boy” by Thomas Gainsborough. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

¹⁶ Bernard Berenson, “Isochromatic Photography and Venetian Pictures”, in: *Art History Through the Camera’s Lens*, ed. by Helene E. Roberts, Langhorne, Pa., 1995, pp. 127–131: 127. Fratelli Alinari was founded in 1852 and is the oldest photographic firm in the world. It originally specialized in photographic portraiture as well as works of art and national monuments. The Alinari photographic archive, which was under threat of dispersal, has been recently acquired by the regional government of Tuscany. It will create a new foundation in Florence to preserve its more than five million items.

¹⁷ The refinement of isochromatic photography by the late 1880s – a technical advancement in photographic processing that allowed for a more accurate tonal representation of polychromatic materials within the monochromatic scheme of late nineteenth-century photographic prints – represented a revolutionary expansion of photography’s documentary or indexical specificity. By communicating the range of hues and their intensity with greater clarity and subtlety, the material specificity of each work of art was far more easily apprehended in these photographic prints.

¹⁸ Berenson (note I6), p. 128. A strand of studies that started in the 1990s and has been flourishing in the last decade focuses on the relationship between photography and the establishment of art history as an academic discipline and ‘science’: see among others *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, conference proceedings London/Florence 2009, ed. by Costanza Caraffa, Berlin 2011; *Photography and Sculpture: The Art Object in Reproduction*, ed. by Sarah Hamill/Megan R. Luke, Los Angeles 2017; and in general *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.

¹⁹ Berenson (note I6), p. 128.

²⁰ Berenson’s multifaceted usage of photographic documents mirrored his overlapping practices as an historian, collector, and dealer of fine art. For further reading regarding Berenson’s uses of photographic materials in the authentication of works of art, see: Machtelt Israëls, “The Berensons, Photography, and the Discovery of Sassetta”, in: *Photo Archives* (note I8),

to “render the values to perfection, keep the tone, and [be] scrupulously faithful to the line”.²¹ In short, Berenson was a photographic patron with a discriminating eye for quality, and he relied upon the very best photographic reproductions in promoting works for sale with clients like Gardner.

Berenson would regularly send Gardner photographs of works for her consideration, and the quality of these prints had an influence upon her decision to acquire the objects they depicted.²² As an equally ardent collector and viewer of reproductions of works of art, Gardner was blunt in her assessment of the photographs he sent to her, even after she had agreed to acquire the works in question. In one revealing instance, she writes to Berenson in October 1899 of her displeasure upon receiving lesser-quality images of Botticelli’s *Virgin and Child with an angel*, a painting that she had recently purchased with Berenson’s assistance from the firm Colnaghi and Co., London:

Colnaghi sent me three photographs of the Botticelli, but they are not at all the kind I want. The one that was sent to me in America, and those I bought in Rome just now were very good and quite different. They are quite thick and have a soft dull surface, not shiny and thin like the ones Colnaghi sent. *It almost seems as if I might have the right kind!* I am sorry to bother

you, but will you please ask him to send them to me here.²³

Gardner’s pique at the dealers’ decision to send cheap prints to a major client is more than evident in her demand for the “right kind”, as she clearly felt that her level of patronage warranted the very best photographic documents. These photographs were evidently scrutinized by her as vital, material evidence of her triumphs and as tokens of her discernment as a collector. In the absence of the work of art itself – which could take months or years to arrive in Boston, given the vagaries of import duties and international law regarding the exportation of cultural heritage at the turn of the twentieth century – these photographs were often the nearest equivalent to having the actual work in her presence. As an avid album-maker and photographic collector in other periods of her life, she was particularly attuned to the durability, legibility, and quality of photographic prints and used that expertise in negotiating for the best materials from her dealers. Gardner’s assertive tone throughout her correspondence conveys her self-assurance in evaluating the photographs sent to her: like Berenson, she sought to inspect these photographs closely, paying scrupulous attention to details within the print so as to gain an informed understanding of the work’s

pp. 157–168; Benedetta Cestelli Guidi, “Bernard Berenson e Domenico Anderson, Venezia 1893: fotografia di documentazione e storia dell’arte veneta”, in: *Iconologie: studi in onore di Claudia Cieri Via*, ed. by Ilaria Miarelli Mariani/Stefano Pierguidi/Marco Ruffini, Rome 2016, pp. 255–263. Berenson’s photographic collection grew into a major archive between the 1890s and the late 1950s. In 1907, he acquired the Villa I Tatti outside of Florence partly to house what was then a collection of 15,000 photographs; by the time of his death in 1959, the collection (known as the Fototeca Berenson) had grown to 150,000 images. For further reading on the organization of Berenson’s photographic collection, see Fiorella Gioffredi Superbi, “The Photograph and Bernard Berenson: The Story of a Collection”, in: *Visual Resources*, XXVI (2010), pp. 289–303, and Giovanni Pagliarulo, “Photographs to Read: Berensonian Annotations”, in *Photo Archives* (note 18), pp. 181–191.

²¹ Berenson (note 16), p. 130.

²² This dynamic is also discussed by Douglass Shand-Tucci, *The Art*

of the Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner, New York 1998, p. 178. In particular, Shand-Tucci describes the conflict between Gardner and her husband over the prospective purchase of Raphael’s *Portrait of Tommaso Inghirami*, whose “cross-eyed glance” did not translate well into black and white photography. Eventually, Berenson was able to get a lower price for the painting, and Gardner acquired “America’s first Raphael” in 1898.

²³ Isabella Stewart Gardner to Bernard Berenson, 23 October 1899, AISGM. The firm Colnaghi & Co. of London worked in partnership with Berenson to procure works for Gardner’s collection. A history of the firm was published in conjunction with the 250th anniversary of its founding and contains a helpful essay by Alan Chong on the relationship between Gardner, Berenson, and Colnaghi partner Otto Gutekunst; see Alan Chong, “Isabella Stewart Gardner, Bernard Berenson, and Otto Gutekunst”, in: *Colnaghi: The History*, ed. by Jeremy Howard, London 2010, pp. 26–31.

condition prior to its transatlantic shipment. At the same time, her rejection of the original photograph from Colnaghi becomes a proxy demonstration of her connoisseurship and a warning to both Colnaghi and Berenson should they underestimate her own powers of observation.

Like the photograph of her Rembrandt self-portrait, a marvelously clear photograph of Botticelli's *Virgin and Child with an angel*, replete with the tones prized by both Gardner and Berenson in their respective writings, also found its way into her album *Catalogue MCM* (Fig. 11).²⁴ On the left-hand side of the page opening, she pasted a small reproduction of the work that was apparently clipped from a contemporary publication; to the right of that, she pasted in another snippet from an Italian newspaper that noted the “disappearance” of the painting and the efforts of Italian customs officials to prevent its removal from the country. Beneath this revelatory text, Gardner herself has inscribed the page with the words “Sandro Botticelli / Madonna / from Prince Chigi”. On the right-hand side of the album, the photograph of the painting covers the entire page. The admixture of text and image conveys an undeniably cocky attitude on Gardner's behalf: reading from left to right, the drama of her purchase emerges as a story of implied subterfuge, international scandal, and aristocratic intrigue, capped by the triumph of her enviable and priceless acquisition.²⁵

In many respects, *Catalogue MCM* largely proceeds as a sort of private trophy cabinet, arranged to exhibit a series of triumphs ordered neither by date of acquisition nor creation, but by artists' names in alphabetical order. The artist is paramount to Gardner's organization of these masterpieces, arranged to un-

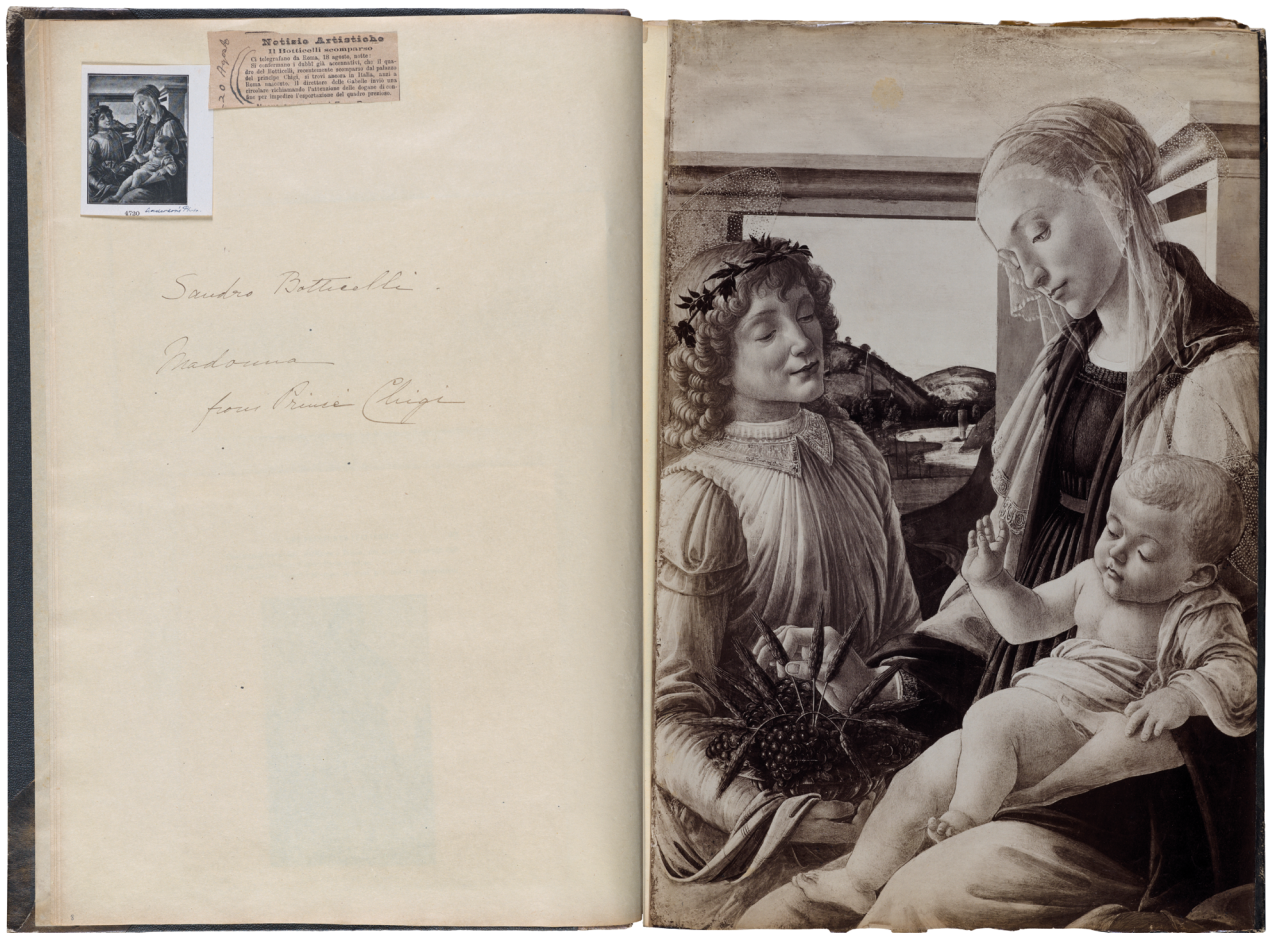
derscore their presence within her collection and the victories these names embody. As in the case of the Botticelli painting, she often included notes regarding the aristocratic provenance of the masterpieces she acquired. On the page preceding the photograph of Fra Angelico's *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*, Gardner notes that the painting was “from Collection of Lord Methuen” (Fig. 6). Of her Mantegna, *The Virgin and Child with infant Saint John the Baptist and six female saints*, she writes “this picture belonged to Spain; it was given by Queen Christina [...] to her daughter who married the Prince del Drago in Rome, from whom it came to me” (Fig. 12). And beneath the admittedly poor photographic print of her *Woman with a Rose* by Van Dyck, Gardner states that it “belonged to Duque d'Ossuna”. Gardner appears to revel in her association with these various royal figures throughout these mentions, positioning herself as an equally indomitable aggregator of masterpieces, a ruler whose state is defined not by national boundaries or subjects but by her intentional acquisition of cultural capital.

Unlike her travel albums, *Catalogue MCM* does not contain carefully constructed photographic assemblages that demonstrate the creator's keen sense of design. Judged on purely aesthetic terms, *Catalogue MCM* is a decidedly ad hoc affair: some photographs are taped in at their corners (Fig. 12) while others are pasted or thrown into the pages loosely and without explanatory text. The haphazardly taped corners of the photographs that she fought to obtain would seem to belie their original value to her. Yet it is precisely this informality that makes it such a fascinating object of study for those seeking to understand Gardner's motivations as a collector and museum founder. It is not a direct template for the installation of her

²⁴ Gardner (note 6).

²⁵ While hardly unique among Gilded Age collectors in her activities, Gardner could resort to legally questionable tactics in the exportation of works of art; for a discussion of one trenchant example, in which she was accused of disguising a work of art within a packing crate, see Nathaniel

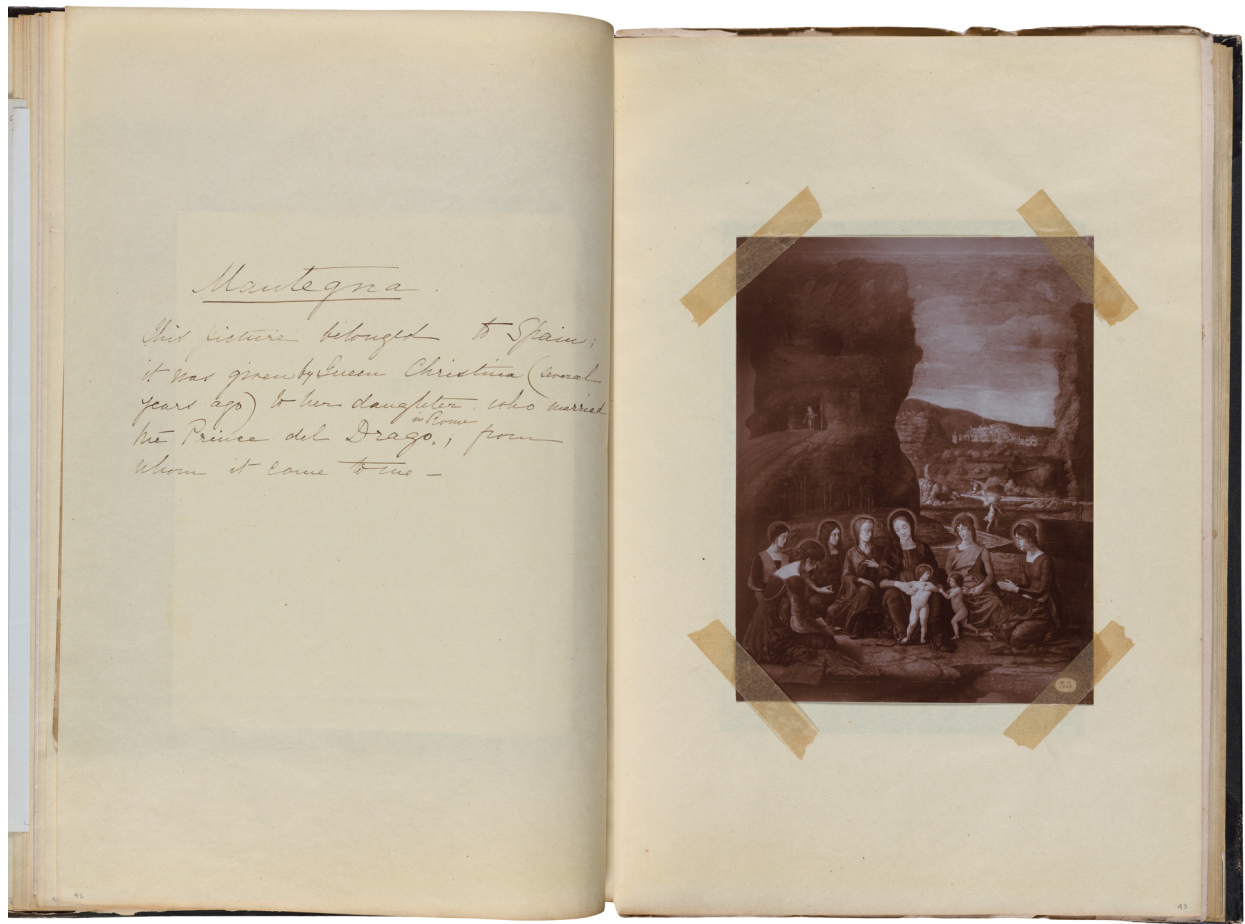
Silver, *Close Up: Piermatteo d'Amelia's Annunciation*, exh. cat. Boston 2017, Carlisle, Mass., 2017, pp. 18–22. The exportation of Italian cultural heritage to the United States is a complex matter; for a recent study, see Joanna Smalcerz, *Smuggling the Renaissance: The Illicit Export of Artworks out of Italy, 1861–1909*, Boston 2020.



11 Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Catalogue MCM* (as Fig. 1), pp. 8f. with photograph showing Botticelli's *Virgin and Child with an angel*

museum. Instead, *Catalogue MCM* is the document of a process, of back-of-house thinking and plotting as Gardner enumerated her trophies and considered their position within the art historical canon that was being written at that same moment in history and bolstered by ever-growing photographic archives. If her travel albums were gorgeously produced exemplars of her design capacities, *Catalogue MCM* is an effort to take stock, to consider the landscape of her achievement in terms that were familiar to the professional dealers, art advisors, and scholars with whom she collaborated.

At the same time, *Catalogue MCM* is a declaration of intent. The title page alone signals the seriousness with which she approached the task of building her collection (Fig. 5). With lettering hand-cut from brightly colored, lithographed stationery reminiscent of the illuminated manuscripts she also prized, the title page presents the destination of her collection in the clearest terms possible: it was *The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the Fenway* – an institution that was being built even as she assembled the album. By 1901, the construction of her eponymous museum was



12 Isabella Stewart Gardner, *Catalogue MCM* (as Fig. 1), pp. 42f. with photograph showing Andrea Mantegna's *The Virgin and Child with infant Saint John the Baptist and six female saints*

complete and she could begin to arrange the works of art within it – just as she had assembled the photographs within her album.

All of Gardner's photographic albums were of unquestionable value to her, and she took care to place them within the galleries of her museum. Her aforementioned travel albums were installed in a bookshelf within a gallery that she called the Vaticino, or "little Vatican", on the first floor of her museum. In this same gallery, she stored the files containing her correspondence and photographs with various

art dealers, with the exception of Berenson's letters – those would go into an adjacent and larger gallery for more prominent display. *Catalogue MCM* joined these albums and other collection-related documents in the Vaticino. While visitors were not invited to pull these books from the shelves, Gardner often entertained her friends and family within the museum and would have had ongoing access to her albums until her death in 1924. These important institutional records, grounded in photographic exchange, were therefore integrated into her curatorial plan, literal-

ly nestled into the ground floor galleries as points of germination for the museum that rose above them.

Catalogue MCM records Gardner's collection at a pivotal moment in the history of her project and represents a new, more public phase to her acquisitive activities. As her first biographer states, "After 1900, masterpieces were added one by one, but the record of the previous four years was never equaled."²⁶ Since Fenway Court would be completed in 1901, *Catalogue MCM* – which already in the title underlines the beginning of a new century – displays Gardner's collection at a time when she was actively contemplating

the impact of her collection upon her adoptive city of Boston and the important civic functions it could serve in the twentieth century. *Catalogue MCM* is a declaration of her achievements, a summative document assembled at the peak of her collecting energies and attainments. Yet it is also a story of one woman's building of a public legacy – acquired from royalty, with the help of her art-dealer friends and professional art historians, distributed in a museum so that scholars, elementary school students and teachers, and ordinary families of every description could benefit from her work – forever.

²⁶ Carter (note 10), p. 181.

Abbreviations

AISGM Archives of the Isabella Stewart Gardner
Museum, Boston, Mass.

Abstract

This case study examines an album created by the American art collector Isabella Stewart Gardner to understand the impact of photographic objects and exchanges upon the formation of her eponymous museum in Boston, Massachusetts. Gardner collected a wide range of photographic material for display within her museum and as evidence of her labor to create the same. As she received photographs of works of art from Bernard Berenson and other transatlantic art dealers, she enshrined a number within an album of her own design – titled *Catalogue MCM* – as a sort of private trophy cabinet, replete with annotations in her own hand. Analyzing the creation of this album provides new and valuable insight into the ambitions underpinning her collecting practices and concurrent efforts to shape her cultural legacy. Most importantly, this study provides new grounds for understanding photographic albums and archives as catalytic forces for the growth of civic institutions.

Photo Credits

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston: Figs. 1–3, 5–12. — Sean Dungan: Fig. 4.

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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
del Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut
(Detail aus Abb. I, S. 42 | dettaglio da fig. I, p. 42)

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