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On the Presence and Absence of Images

A French Nineteenth-Century Painting in the Lantern Slide Collection of the Freer Gallery of Art

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Abstract

Starting from the presence of a painting by Aimé Morot among the slide collection of Charles Lang Freer, a collection otherwise devoted to modern American painters and Asian art, the essay traces back the origin of this slide to the collection of Ernest Fenollosa and untangles the documentation on how his slides found their home in the Freer Archives in Washington, D.C. Fenollosa's use of this slide to juxtapose ancient Japanese art and modern French painting is a starting point for reflecting on the role that the presence – or absence – of images played in printed texts as opposed to lectures, and how that in turn fueled the tendency towards stylistic comparisons. Lastly, the position of lantern slides as a tool that was once indispensable to art history, and now, in the digital era, becomes a historical and material object to be studied as such, allows us to reflect on one of the many epistemological shifts that we face as art historians.

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Introduction

[1] The presence of a misplaced slide in an archive can lead to several different questions, such as how and why that specific object ended up where it should not be. However, the slide as a historical object also prompts more general questions about the use of photographic reproductions in art history, especially at a time, towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the availability of images of artworks was still limited. How did different access to images influence art history and its major forms of divulgation, such as lectures and publications? What happens instead when we are faced with the absence of the image?

[2] This paper, starting from the specific case of two slides representing a piece of French art and found in the Asian glass slide collection of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., aims to offer a historical as well as epistemological perspective on the presence and absence of images in art history. The paper is divided in two parts: the first focuses on the slides of Aimé Morot's painting *La bataille de Reichshoffen, 6 août 1870* in the Freer Archives and retraces their provenience and significance; the second addresses the question of how the presence – or absence – of images, in particular in their material form of slides, has been influencing art history and how it has changed with the Digital Turn.

La bataille de Reichshoffen at the Freer Gallery of Art

[3] The collection of glass lantern slides in the archives of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery – National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C., consists of forty-two boxes containing images of paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and architecture, as well as landscape views and photographic portraits.[1] Most of the reproduced artworks originate from China and Japan, with a range of others from Egypt, Persia, India, and South-East Asia, but they also document the interest of the original owner, Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919), in early biblical manuscripts, overall providing a faithful reconstruction of the visual world Freer immersed himself into. The slides devoted to James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) and other contemporary American artists are at the other end of this very same aesthetizing world, for in paintings and drawings by his fellow Americans, Freer had notoriously found the same visual and evocative qualities that had sparked his passion for Chinese and Japanese scrolls.[2]

[4] Box 330, which is catalogued as "Japan painting", unexpectedly contains two slides (8,2 × 8,3 cm and 8,5 × 8,2 cm) of Aimé Morot's 1887 painting *La bataille de Reichshoffen, 6 août 1870*, also

[1] Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery – National Museum of Asian Art, Smithonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Archives, Charles Lang Freer Papers, FSA.A.01, Gift of the estate of Charles Lang Freer (hereafter cited as: Charles Lang Freer Papers), 12.14: lantern slides.

[2] Nichols Clark, "Charles Lang Freer: An American Aesthete in the Gilded Era", in: *The American Art Journal* 11 (1979), no. 4, 54-68; David Park Curry, "Charles Lang Freer and American Art", in: *Apollo* 118 (1983), no. 258, 168-179. Larry W. Hurtado, ed., *The Freer Biblical Manuscripts. Fresh Studies of an American Treasure Trove*, Leiden 2007.

known as *Le 3e Cuirassiers à Reichshoffen* (Fig. 1).[3] They are both marked with a red star, as are other works with problematic aspects in the slide collection. Since the two slides are almost identical and the scope of this paper is to discuss their epistemological significance in early Asian art historiography, I will focus on one of the slides in the following.

1 One of the two glass lantern slides depicting Aimé Morot's 1887 painting *La bataille de Reichshoffen, 6 août 1870* [Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris, inv. no. FNAC 1105]. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery – National Museum of Asian Art Archives, Washington, D.C., Charles Lang Freer Papers, 12.14: Lantern Slides, box 330 (photo: National Museum of Asian Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Charles Lang Freer Papers, FSA-2024-010208)

Morot (1850–1913) had been praised by his contemporaries for his battle scenes, which critics described as "spontaneous, dashing work[s]"[4] and some "of the greatest military pictures ever painted".[5] The popularity of his paintings was also due to the rehabilitation of a tragic event in the recent military history of France: The charges of the French cavalry during the first phase of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) were unable to prevent the victory of the Prussian enemy, but

[3] The original painting is in the possession of the Centre national des arts plastiques (Cnap), Paris, inv. no. FNAC 1105, and has been kept in the Musée du Château de Lunéville since 1999.

[4] Montezuma, "My Note Book", in: *The Art Amateur* 17 (1887), no. 5, 92-93: 93.

[5] Theodore Child, "The Paris Salon of 1887", in: *The Art Amateur* 17 (1887), no. 1, 4. For other reproductions of the time, which however do not seem to be the publication used to produce the slide, see François Bournand, *Paris-Salon. 1887, par les procédés phototypiques de E. Bernard & Cie.*, 2 vols., Paris: E. Bernard & Cie., 1887, vol. 2 (= *Paris-Salon*, no. 15), 28; Gustave Ollendorff, *Salon de 1887. Cent planches en photogravure par Goupil & Cie.*, Paris: Ludovic Baschet, 1887, 79.

were immortalized in the memory of the French people as a patriotic act of heroism, becoming the subject of songs and paintings.[6]

[5] The question that interests us here is: What are two slides of a work by a minor French painter doing in Charles Freer's slide collection? The origin of this collection is not outlined at a single point in Freer's biography. The Detroit-born railroad magnate had been purchasing artworks and prints since 1883, and after retiring in 1899, he completely devoted his life to his art collection. He eventually gifted it to the nation, which led to the funding of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.[7] His was a complex intellectual life, whose moments can sometimes be reconstructed from the various boxes of glass lantern slides. The slides devoted to ancient Egypt, for example, tell us about a late but significant time in Freer's aesthetic and collection interests, which started in 1902 and reached its peak with three trips to Egypt in 1906, 1908, and 1909.[8] The images from the Chinese province of Henan, in particular from Longmen, can be connected to the 1910 journey that Freer undertook in that region.[9] The slide collection was continued after the magnate's death and the institution of the gallery under the Smithsonian. This is the case, for instance, for the slides by Irene Vincent, an American woman who, in 1948, visited and documented the Chinese caves of Dunhuang.[10] Overall, the work of the French painter Morot does not seem to fit Freer's interests, even if one takes into consideration his early collection of Old Masters' prints,[11] and even if one tries to relate it to the contemporary Americans who painted landscapes, views and portraits. This slide, depicting a military event in Europe, almost seems to be there by mistake and calls upon another explanation.

[6] An answer can be found, however, if one keeps in mind that the Freer slide collection incorporates the slides owned by the Boston scholar Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908). The relationship between Fenollosa and Freer and the way the aesthetic values promoted by the renowned Japan expert impacted Freer's taste in collecting have been well investigated and documented in many publications,[12] while the story of how Fenollosa's slides entered the Freer collection has yet to be uncovered through the documentation preserved at the Smithsonian Institution. Mary Fenollosa's correspondence with Charles Freer following her husband's death provides information about the process that led to Freer's acquisition of the

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[6] François Robichon, "Representing the 1870–1871 War, or the Impossible Revanche", in: *Studies in the History of Art* 68 (2005), 82-99.

[7] For Freer's biography and journey into the art world, see Thomas Lawton and Linda Merrill, *Freer. A Legacy of Art*, Washington, D.C./New York 1993.

[8] Ann C. Gunter, *A Collector's Journey: Charles Lang Freer and Egypt*, Washington, D.C./London 2002.

[9] See Dong Wang, *Longmen's Stone Buddhas and Cultural Heritage: When Antiquity Met Modernity in China*, Lanham, MD 2020.

[10] See Irene Vongehr Vincent, *The Sacred Oasis: Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, Tun Huang*, London 1953.

[11] Lawton and Merrill (1993), 16-17.

[12] See Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: the Far East and American Culture*, New Haven, CT 1963; Kathleen Pyne, "Portrait of a Collector as an Agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and Connoisseurship", in: *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), no. 1, 75-97; Ingrid Larsen, "'Don't send Ming or later pictures': Charles Lang Freer and the First Major Collection of Chinese Painting in an American Museum", in: *Ars Orientalis* 40 (2011), 6-38.

lantern slides. On 28 October 1908, in his very first sympathetic letter to Mary, in which he offered the newly widowed woman both his advice and his personal support, he wrote:

> *Is not the collection of slides very valuable? Shall you some day care to realize on them? Should you care to have them kept permanently in my collection, to be used from time to time hereafter for the benefit of students and others, under my direction during my life, and that of the Smithsonian Institution thereafter, I will cheerfully cooperate and pay their full value. I feel that inasmuch as the dear Professor during his later years manifested such deep interest in my collection and had so much to do with its growth, selection, identification and cataloguing, that perhaps no more fitting permanent place could be found for the slides. The, too, some day after the collection is established in Washington, future curators may find the slides of much interest in illustrating facts to students and others*.[13]

On 21 April 1909, the slides were still in Mary's possession, who wrote that she planned on working on them during the upcoming summer, along with the "many notes" that Fenollosa had taken in Freer's collection.[14] The deal seems not to have been closed until three years later: The acknowledgment of receipt of a check for $548.50 was sent by Mary on 28 July 1912.[15]

[7] Based on the above, it can be concluded for sure that Freer acquired the Fenollosa slides. Moreover, there is evidence that they remained an independent collection until 1932: The twelfth annual *Report of the Smithsonian Institution on the Freer Gallery of art*, dated 30 June 1932, states that the Fenollosa slides (about 3000), "all without labels", had been processed, studied (with the necessary identification of subjects, where possible), labelled, and stored together with the Freer slides.[16] It is therefore probable that this was the last time the Fenollosa slides could be identified as such before they were incorporated into Freer's slide collection. Consequently, the possibility of detecting the slides with Fenollosa provenance is extremely low today. A few exceptions can be named; for example in box 340 there is a slide of "broken statues and interesting refuse", which Fenollosa took at Shodaiji in 1880 and which was published in his posthumous work *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912; Fig. 2).[17] Moreover, several pictures relating to *Ukiyo-e* art are labelled with a reference to Fenollosa's two-volume text.

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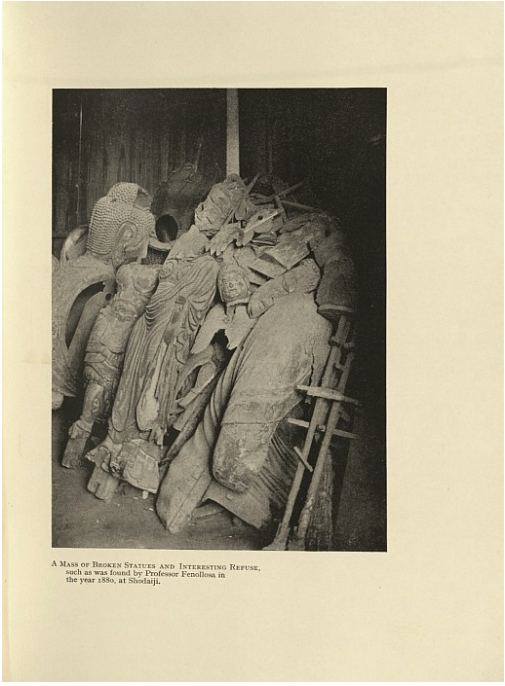
[13] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Mary McNeil Scott, 1908–1915, box 15, folder 36, #8:3.

[14] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Mary McNeil Scott, 1908–1915, box 15, folder 36, not numbered. At Freer's request, the notes also came into his possession and are preserved in the Freer Gallery Archives and digitally available at: https://transcription.si.edu/project/9927 (accessed 16 July 2024).

[15] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Mary McNeil Scott, 1908–1915, box 15, folder 36, #6:1.

[16] *Report of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, for the year ending June 30 1932*, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932.

[17] Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design*, 2 vols., London: William Heinemann, 1912, vol. 1, plate facing page 100.


A Mass of Broken Statues and Interesting Refuse, such as was found by Professor Fenollosa in the year 1880, at Shodaiji.

2 A page from Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design*, 2 vols., London 1912, vol. 1, plate facing page 100

[8] Returning to the two slides of Aimé Morot's painting, which come without a label, two elements help retrace their origin. From Mary's letters, the reader can gather that some slides had been declined by Freer[18] and that she was planning to offer them to Columbia University or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is unlikely, then, that the rejected slides consisted only of images of "children, flowers, Japanese scenery, etc",[19] which she mentioned in an earlier letter, already assuming that Freer would not be interested in these. Indeed, the Freer Archives also preserves the original receipt as well as notes on the material, and it is these that confirm that forty-two small boxes containing 408 slides of European artworks had been rejected.[20] However, the decisive confirmation of the origin of the Morot slides comes directly from Fenollosa's words in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art.*

[9] It is not possible to understand the work and legacy of this expert on Japan, and, more generally, the early developments of the study of Asian art, without understanding the role that

[18] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Mary McNeil Scott, 1908–1915, box 15, folder 36, #6:2.

[19] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Mary McNeil Scott, 1908–1915, box 15, folder 36, 5:3.

[20] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 6.5.2: Financial materials – Vouchers – Art vouchers, box 119, folder 1-12; also digitally available at: https://edan.si.edu/slideshow/viewer/?eadrefid=FSA.A.01_ref1752 (accessed 16 July 2024).

formalistic comparisons played in these.[21] While the comparative paradigm in art history has been recently explored in more than one occasion[22] and James Elkins addressed the epistemological implications of comparing using the case study of Chinese landscape painting,[23] the comparison between Western and Far Eastern art as a historically situated phenomenon in art historiography between the 19th and the 20th century still awaits proper investigation. Ernest Fenollosa and his narrative of East Asian art, filled with references to Greek art, the Italian Renaissance, and modern French painting, is a major protagonist in this story.

[10] Multiple factors need to be taken into consideration when examining the significance of comparisons in this context. The Western-centric framework and upbringing of Fenollosa as well as his public come to mind, of course: Fenollosa, who was educated at Harvard by the renowned Charles Eliot Norton on the visual culture of the European tradition and was aware that his readers also started from a similar ground, may have felt it essential to introduce the poorly known art of the Far East through images that would be easy to grasp for a Western audience. The focus on style and form rather than on iconography, which had yet to make its explosive debut in the discipline, allowed many, between the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, to navigate the whole world of art. All artistic creations were interpreted through the same categories such as line, composition, and colour, or, in the case of Fenollosa, the made-up Japanese term *notan*,[24] which he had coined to signify the harmonizing tension between dark and light. However, far from perceiving this approach – as we might – as a form of intellectual colonialism that projected foreign categories onto non-Western works to domesticate them, Fenollosa and his peers were driven by an optimistic universalism.[25] The idea of East and West finally meeting – artistically, spiritually, politically – to create a new Golden Age of humanity

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[21] Julia Orell, among others, discusses this topic in relation to Austrian art historiography. See Julia Orell, "Early East Asian Art History in Vienna and its Trajectories: Josef Strzygowski, Karl With, Alfred Salmony", in: *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 13 (December 2015), https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/orell.pdf. Useful insights into the American perspective were offered by Steven Conn in 2000: "Where Is the East?: Asian Objects in American Museums, from Nathan Dunn to Charles Freer", in: *Winterthur Portfolio* 35 (2000), no. 2/3, 157-173.

[22] See Lena Bader, Martin Gaier and Falk Wolf, eds., *Vergleichendes Sehen*, Paderborn 2010; Joachim Rees, "Vergleichende Verfahren – verfahrene Vergleiche. Kunstgeschichte als komparative Kunstwissenschaft. Eine Problemskizze", in: *kritische berichte* 40 (2012), no. 2, 32-47; Jaś Elsner, ed., *Comparativism in Art History*, London/New York 2017; Johannes Grave, Joris C. Heyder and Britta Hochkirchen, eds., *Sehen als Vergleichen. Praktiken des Vergleichens von Bildern, Kunstwerken und Artefakten*, Bielefeld 2020. The work of Felix Thürlemann on the 'hyperimage' is also relevant here. See (also for previous bibliography) Felix Thürlemann, *Mehr als ein Bild. Für eine Kunstgeschichte des hyperimage*, Munich 2013.

[23] James Elkins, *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, Hong Kong 2010.

[24] José María Cabeza Lainez and José Manuel Almodóvar Melendo, "Ernest Francisco Fenollosa and the Quest for Japan. Findings of a Life Devoted to the Science of Art", in: *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* no. 9 (2004), 75-99.

[25] Nevertheless, even this optimistic point of view stemmed from Western imperialistic frameworks – in Fenollosa's case, the Hegelian dialectic that had been so important during his early years. On Hegel and imperialism, see: Lucia Padrella, "Hegel, Imperialism, and Universal History", in: *Science & Society* 78 (2014), no. 4, 426-453.

pervaded Fenollosa's writings from beginning to end. He shared his thoughts on this in more than one occasion in personal letters, such as the one from 3 December 1905, in which he wrote to Freer to inquire about a suitable time for a visit to photograph and produce lantern slides of Freer's collection, and in which he lamented the lack of slides of works by Whistler in his own collection. On that occasion, he claimed that "the time seems ripe to enforce the broadest lessons to be learned from a comparison and a union of the arts of East and West".[26] Already thirteen years earlier, he had expressed his hopes to Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa society, condensed in a poem entitled precisely *East and West*. The extent of Fenollosa's acceptance of the Hegelian philosophy, mixed with a dose of spiritualism and universalism, can be fully appreciated on the very first page that introduces the poem, when he writes that

> *[t]he synthesis of two continental civilizations, matured apart through fifteen hundred years, will mark this close of our century as an unique dramatic epoch in human affairs. At the end of a great cycle the two halves of the world come together for the final creation of man*.[27]

[11] At the time, comparisons were a way to show that East and West, even when they were the most distant and separated both in time and space, had created works that could dialogue with one another; this was also seen as an anticipation of the present time, in which the two worlds would actively and willingly merge. Due to the scope of his text, *i.e.*, to show his Western audience that the arts of the Far East were also great and that 'our' art could learn from 'theirs', the comparisons Fenollosa conducted in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* tend to praise the Asian counterparts. Western examples are often presented as proof that only a few artworks in Europe could equal what the Chinese and Japanese created, sometimes centuries earlier. This is the case for Morot's *La bataille de Reichshoffen, 6 août 1870*. Fenollosa's passage referring to Morot's art is from the chapter devoted to "Feudal Japanese Art" and deserves to be quoted thoroughly. A Golden Age of *makimono* – the Japanese hanging scroll –, the Kamakura period (1185–1333) inaugurated, according to Fenollosa, a new kind of art, strongly characterized by dynamism and narration in contrast to the more static and reverential religious artworks of the past ages:

> *The swing of action is a primary requisite, then the sweeping of the lines of many actions into great general line-currents that give motion to the crowded compositions, so unlike European Renaissance battle pieces – Jules Romano's for instance, whose horses and men squirm in all directions, with no unified transference of masses. This the West finds only in Greek art (the Battle of Darius), and recent French cavalry charges (Aime Morot). But in Japan it forms the backbone of the picture. Colour, too, realistic but not too gorgeous, adds vividness, and its spotting of light and dark passages lends savour and accent even to the motion. It is an art not at all unlike primitive Greek painting, especially as shown in the figures of horses and men in simple colour and spotting upon Greek vases. […] In form, too, we might perhaps say that the rushing personages look as if*

[26] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Ernest Ferdinand, 1901–1907, box 15, folder 29-35, letter #17.

[27] Ernest Fenollosa, *East and West: The Discovery of American and Other Poems*, New York/Boston 1893, v.

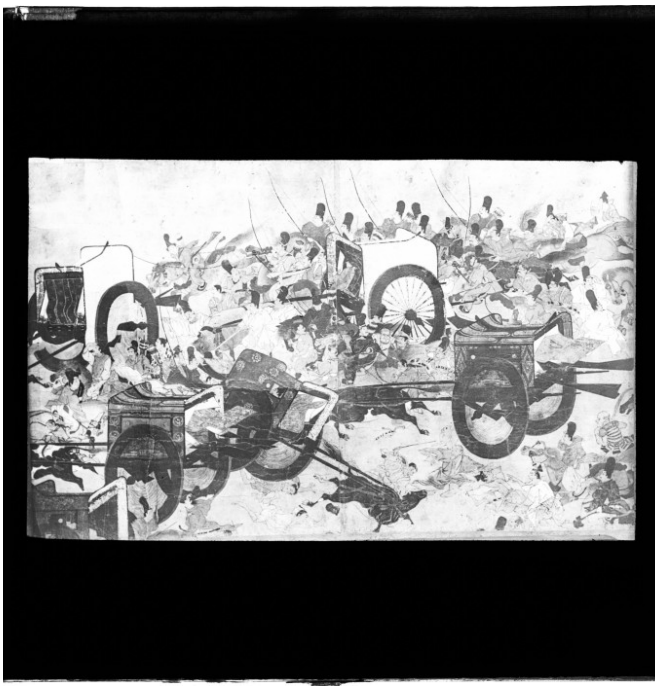
> *bombs had been exploded under the feet of figures on the Greek vases. Another analogue is the contemporary early Italian Gothic frescoing of the Giottoesque school. In those squares, crowded with mounted officers and spectators of crucifixions, which fill the plastered arches of Assisi and Padua, we see something like Tosa richness of grouping, even if without Tosa vividness of motion. If we could have an art that would combine modern French scientific drawing of motion with the picturesque crowds of* Cavalcatori*, we should strike somewhere near the battlepieces of Keion and the street scenes of Mitsunaga*.[28]

There is another quick reference to Morot later on, almost *en passant*, during the description of the hanging scroll *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, from the *Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era* (*Heiji monogatari emaki*), which Fenollosa attributed to the artist Keion and which a couple of decades later was referred to as "the greatest example of these so called 'battle pictures'".[29]

[12] The slide collection at the Freer Archives allows us to do something that *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* does not: to juxtapose *La bataille de Reichshoffen* (Fig. 1) to a scene from *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace* (Fig. 3), and, therefore, to really see what Fenollosa wanted us to visualize through his words. It is the ever-moving chaos of a battle that Fenollosa saw in both scenes: the impetus of the shouting people and the bellowing of the terrified animals, which, as they try to break out and escape, create a force that is opposite to the natural direction of the scene (from right to left in *La bataille*; from left to right in *Night Attack*) and impart a sense of chaos.

[28] Fenollosa (1912), vol. 1, 183.

[29] Kojiro Tomita, "*The Burning of the Sanjō Palace (Heiji Monogatari)*: A Japanese Scroll Painting of the Thirteenth Century", in: *Museum of Fine Arts [Boston] Bulletin* 23 (1925), no. 139, 49-55. For other accounts on *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, see Miyeko Murase, "Japanese Screen Paintings of the Hōgen and Heiji Insurrections", in: *Artibus Asiae* 29 (1967), no. 2/3, 193-228; Theodore K. Rabb, *The Artist and the Warrior: Military History through the Eyes of the Masters*, New Haven/London 2011, 49-56.



3 Lantern slide depicting a scene from *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, from the *Illustrated Scrolls of the Events of the Heiji Era* [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, acc. no. 11.4000, second half of the 13th century]. Charles Lang Freer Papers, 12.14: Lantern Slides, box 332 (photo: National Museum of Asian Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Charles Lang Freer Papers, FSA-2024-010213)

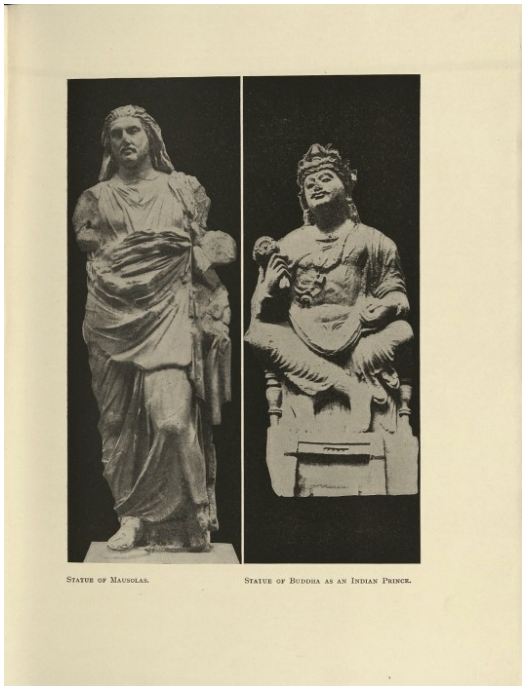
The juxtaposition of the two images makes it possible to follow Fenollosa as he points out the differences between them as much as their similarities. The statement that in Keion's scroll "there is no scenic display as in the Morot accessories at Versailles"[30] invites us to notice the empty space that frames the French cavalry above and below. Its position in the middle of a central, static point of view contributes to investing it with a kind of protagonist's aura, and gives the whole painting the appearance of a properly staged 'scene', despite the dynamism conveyed by the details (the expressions of the soldiers, the snouts of the horses and their movements, the dust, the line of trees in the background). The scroll, by its own nature, compels the viewer to move in order to observe the scene, just like the *Alexander Mosaic* in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples, to use another comparison offered by Fenollosa, while Morot's work lends itself to being grasped as a whole as we gaze at it.

[13] It can be argued, therefore, that Fenollosa's comparison is more than a simple equation: The Keion scroll and Morot's cavalry painting are not the same, but by looking at them one can, much like Arthur Wesley Dow in his study book *Composition*,[31] get to the most essential formal elements of a work. It is through these elements that one can gain access to the understanding and appreciation of art from all over the world. Thus, the question about the efficacy and legitimacy of

[30] Fenollosa (1912), vol. 1, 191.

[31] Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, New York 1899; Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: Understanding Line, Notan and Color*, Garden City 1920; see also Betty Lou Williams, "Japanese Aesthetic Influences on Early 20th-Century Art Education: Arthur Wesley Dow and Ernest Fenollosa", in: *Visual Arts Research* 39 (2013), no. 2, 104-115.

this comparison, as well as of all the comparisons that Fenollosa proposes to his readers, touches some essential aspects of the ethics and epistemology of art history. On both points, Fenollosa, Freer, and many others of the same generation would surely answer very differently from us. Certainly, cross-cultural stylistic comparisons do not play a significant role in modern scholarship on Asian art or other non-European art. However, understanding their role in the past could shed new light on the methodology, *Weltanschauung* and visual framework of those scholars who were active at a time when the discipline of art history was beginning to explore its possibilities and also take note of and engage with non-Western art.[32]



4 A page from Ernest Fenollosa's *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (1912), vol. 1, plate facing page 74, showing the use of a Western statue in a comparison

[14] The reproduction of Aimé Morot's *La bataille de Reichshoffen* did not make it into Fenollosa's volumes; indeed, only one non-Eastern artwork was included, the Classical Greek marble statue called *Maussollos* from the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos, in the British Museum since 1857 (Fig. 4).[33] If one considers how many European slides Fenollosa owned and how important they had been for his study and for his lectures, where "he projected slides of Michelangelo and Kiyonaga side by side to illustrate mastery of line",[34] one may conclude that only the printing costs prevented his heirs from including any European images and caused them to keep but a few Asian

[32] Studies on the origins of World Art have already paved the way toward the study of historical cross-cultural comparisons. See for example: Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme, eds., *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, Amsterdam 2008; Walter Grasskamp, *André Malraux und das imaginäre Museum. Die Weltkunst im Salon*, Munich 2014; Peter Probst and Joseph Imorde, eds., *Art History and Anthropology: Modern Encounters, 1870–1970*, Los Angeles 2023.

[33] Fenollosa (1912), vol. 1, 74.

[34] Chisolm (1963), 155.

images in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. Almost all of his comparisons were thus merely made in the text; in addition, two slides of one European artwork ended up in his collection of Japanese images and therefore found their way into Charles Freer's collection, unseen, mislabelled, and eventually forgotten.

Present and absent, images and slides

[15] Within the Fenollosa comparisons, Aimé Morot's painting has a double status: it is present as a slide and as a verbal reference, but it is absent as an image in the print. How should the presence or absence of an image in a comparison be interpreted from an epistemological point of view? How does this presence or absence, in turn, impact the author's use of comparisons and the reader's reception of them?

[16] In order to fully grasp the relevance of presence in comparisons, the objectifying power of the image must not be underestimated. As has been argued at least since Trevor Fawcet's 1983 work, the introduction of photographs into art history lectures has led to a multi-faceted revolution in the discipline as a whole, including viewing the image of the artwork as 'hard data'.[35] Fawcet argued that the impossibility of showing a piece of art during lectures, prior to the introduction of slides and other accessible means of reproduction, had a strong impact on the evolution of a discipline whose ideal foundations are based on the action of seeing. Before pictures were made available in art history lectures, the lecturers and their rhetorical skills played a decisive role. The audience, in turn, had to trust their words completely. Even the idea of the whole discipline was different, and art could not be seen independently from literature and history. The introduction of slides allowed artworks to speak for themselves and turned the lecturers into 'demonstrators' whose job was to present illustrations as 'positive facts', even though, of course, their rhetorical abilities continued to play a role in the success of a lecture.[36] Art could detach itself from other disciplines, the study of style and form could flourish, and with it comparisons.[37]

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[35] Trevor Fawcett, "Visual Facts and the Nineteenth-Century Art Lecture", in: *Art History* 6 (1983), no. 4, 442-460: 457; more recent scholarship on the scientificity of the photographic medium can be found in: Frederick N. Bohrer, "Photographic Perspectives. Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History", in: Elizabeth Mansfield, ed., *Art History and its Institutions. Foundations of a Discipline*, London/New York 2002, 246-259; Wiebke Ratzeburg, "Mediendiskussion im 19. Jahrhundert. Wie die Kunstgeschichte ihre wissenschaftliche Grundlage in der Fotografie fand", in: *kritische berichte* 30 (2002), no. 1, 22-39; Jennifer F. Eisenhauer, "Next Slide Please: The Magical, Scientific, and Corporate Discourses of Visual Projection Technologies", in: *Studies in Art Education* 47 (2006), no. 3, 198-214; Ingeborg Reichle, "Kunst – Bild – Wissenschaft: Überlegungen zu einer visuellen Epistemologie der Kunstgeschichte", in: Ingeborg Reichle, Steffen Siegel and Achim Spelten, eds., *Verwandte Bilder: Die Fragen der Bildwissenschaft*, Berlin 2008, 169-189.

[36] Fawcett (1983), 457.

[37] For a history of slides projection in art history and previous bibliography, see Maria Männig, "Bruno Meyer and the Invention of Art Historical Slide Projection", in: Julia Bärnighausen, Costanza Caraffa et al., eds., *Photo-Objects. On the Materiality of Photographs and Photo Archives in the Humanities and Sciences*, Berlin 2019.

[17] At the same time, the context of the lecture included, at least theoretically, the possibility to initiate a dialogue between the lecturer and the audience, who had the chance to question, discuss, accept, or dismiss a given comparison and thus contribute to what Eisenhauer described as the "construction of what appears to be objective".[38] Alongside the image as a hard fact, the lecture was a soft medium to balance the power dynamic. Much more than in written texts, comparisons therefore found their perfect fertile ground in lectures. So before considering *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* in terms of its written quality, it should be looked at as the product of a tradition of lecturing supported by the visual medium. Fenollosa's early and continued engagement with lectures throughout the United States,[39] in contrast to the late endeavour to bring all his material together in a publication, confirms the priority and precedence of the spoken and visual media over the written.

[18] With this in mind, it is now possible to reflect on the absence of the image. When Fenollosa set about organizing his material into a text, with the obvious limitation of the number of images that publication entails, it was clear that this could not mean a return to an art history limited to literary or historical interpretation. Art history was a history of style, and style could be understood through comparisons. However, the striking power of visual comparisons was lost in the pages of *Epochs*, and the reader could but follow Fenollosa's captivating words, visualize – when possible – the artists and artworks he listed, and trust his authority. The potential of comparison as a fact was lost.

[19] The Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, who was just a decade younger than Fenollosa, would later express concerns about bringing his own famous comparisons on the printed page: "[C]ontrasting pictures", he wrote to introduce the reader to what was in all respects a comparative analysis of Italian and German art, "may well render good service in a lecture, where it is possible to correct the one-sidedness of the single comparison by means of various other comparisons; but a well-grounded misgiving kept me from making too extensive a use of this means of elucidation in the rigid context of a book".[40] Fenollosa owned 408 slides of European

[38] Eisenhauer (2006), 211. Eisenhauer describes this as a historical shift in the epistemology of slide projection from scientific to business performance between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 21st century: from lecture to presentation, from objective to persuasive. However, I think that this dualism can be applied not only diachronically, but also synchronically: In this view, stylistic comparisons were facts that the lecturer perceived and presented as objective, but at the same time they benefited from the persuasive magical rethoric of the lecturer.

[39] The whole history and chronology of Fenollosa's lectures can be found in Chisolm (1963).

[40] Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Sense of Form in Art: A Comparative Psychological Study*, trans. Alice Muehsam and Norma A. Shatan, New York 1958 [first published as *Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl*, Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1931], 4. On Wölfflin in general, and on his role in the history of the discipline, see: Matteo Burioni, Burcu Dogramaci and Ulrich Pfisterer, eds., *Kunstgeschichten 1915. 100 Jahre Heinrich Wölfflin: Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Passau 2015; and Evonne Levy and Tristan Weddigen, eds., *The Global Reception of Heinrich Wölfflin's "Principles of Art History"*, New Haven/London 2015.

artworks and used two projectors for his lectures from at least 1905 onwards.[41] This allows us to grasp the extent of his use of comparisons during his lectures. While he regarded correspondences between Asian and European works of art as facts[42] and presented them as such to his audience, the references to Western art in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* are of a different nature. He must have been aware of the financial difficulty of including illustrations of European works in his text, and maybe, like Wölfflin, he was also aware of the risk of presenting comparisons in a book that, on the one hand, does not support them through the direct presence of the author and, on the other, fixes them forever as hard facts. This meant making the comparison simultaneously too weak and too strong, in contrast to the heuristic role that the juxtaposed images had in the lectures. Fenollosa's image-free, text-only comparisons thus become more 'casual'. More often than not, his allusions are vague, and the reader is faced with generic references, such as Greek statuary, Impressionist painting, or *a* painting by Raphael (which one is not revealed). In the case of Aimé Morot, too, he does not mention any specific piece of art, and only the presence of the corresponding lantern slides in the Freer Archives make an irrefutable match possible.

[20] The dynamic in Fenollosa's text is therefore inevitably different from that generated during a lecture: Firstly, the book as a medium lacks the dialogical potential of a lecture, and the authoritative voice of the author suppresses the concerns of the reader. Secondly, Fenollosa reduces the power of the comparison by not providing visual access to the compared image and not facilitating its easy 'recallability'. Returning to the passage relating to the *Night Attack on the Sanjô Palace*, there is one direct reference to a specific Western artwork (the *Battle of Darius* [the *Alexander Mosaic*] in Naples) and multiple references to more or less accessible contexts, dependent on the extent of the reader's mental visual archive: "Jules" [sic] Romano's battle piece, that is, *The Battle of the Milvian Bridge* in the Hall of Constantine in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican, Greek vases, and finally, Aimé Morot's cavalry charges. It is up to the reader to recall – or not – the artworks to which the author refers. But the absence of pictures, as well as the somehow *nonchalant* mode in which Fenollosa writes, make it acceptable to just pass over the

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[41] Charles Lang Freer Papers, Series 2: Correspondence: Fenollosa, Ernest Ferdinand, 1901–1907, box 15, folder 29-35, letter #17. The simultaneous, parallel projection of two images was far from a granted praxis in 1905. Heinrich Wölfflin was long regarded as its pioneer, in the years leading up to his *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* of 1915. New insights into the matter are provided by Heinrich Dilly, "Weder Grimm, noch Schmarsow, geschweige denn Wölfflin... Zur jüngsten Diskussion über die Diaprojektion um 1900", in: Costanza Caraffa, ed., *Fotografie als Instrument und Medium der Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin/Munich 2009, 91-116.

[42] Important insights into the subjectivity/objectivity of comparisons are offered by Stanley Abe and Jaś Elsner, "Introduction: Some Stakes of Comparison", in: Jaś Elsner, ed., *Comparativism in Art History*, London/New York 2017, 1-15. The question about the objectivity of photography was addressed in a symposium organized in 2016 by Anne Blecksmith, Costanza Caraffa, and Tracey Schuster: *Photo Archives V: The Paradigm of Objectivity* (25–26 February 2016, Los Angeles, Getty Center and The Huntington), videos available at https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/events/photo_archives_objectivity_videos.html (accessed 30 January 2024). Another seminal work is by Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision': Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control", in: *Archivaria. The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists* no. 50 (Fall 2000), 1-40.

comparison. In this way, Fenollosa solved the problem of the over-authoritativeness of the written medium: the image is not there, and so the comparison is there, but not really there.

[21] Up to this point, this essay has discussed Fenollosa's slides and their peculiar position between presence and absence. His slides are definitely present in Freer's collection, but since their 1932 incorporation into the Freer slide collection, they are so hard to identify that they are on the verge of absence: their presence as 'Fenollosa's slides' is indeed denied. There is then the absence of Fenollosa's slides of European artworks, as testified by Mary Fenollosa and Charles Freer's correspondence, which prevents us from going deeper into Fenollosa's comparative method. The documented presence of the 'European slides' in Fenollosa's lectures and their absence in his publication led us to discuss how the two media differ and create a different history of art. The presence and absence of the slides as a once-essential / today-abandoned tool can also be further addressed.

[22] Freer's reference in the letter to Mary Fenollosa to the importance of making the slides available to students and scholars should not be overlooked. It is not possible to enter into the epistemological dimension of the discipline of art history between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries without appreciating the role that slides played – a prosthesis of the art historian, as Heinrich Dilly phrased it.[43] In today's digital environment, it is easy to forget that art historians have long relied on personal collections of images, be they photographs or slides.[44] However, the scholars of Bernard Berenson's generation and the generations before and after knew very well that you can never have enough photographs: The famous Renaissance scholar is reported to have said that art history is a gamble in which whoever has the most photographs wins.[45]

[23] For Charles Freer, the possibility of providing researchers with an extensive collection of high quality images of artworks that were either in the Freer Gallery or held in other museums in the West, often with many slides of individual details, was one of the greatest incentives to build a slide collection. This incentive still resonates decades after his death in the annual reports of the Smithsonian Institution. From 1920, the first year after the Freer collection was acquired by the Smithsonian, to the mid-1960s, the reports allow us to follow the importance of slides for scholars and students; an importance that led the Freer Archives to continually acquire, label and restore, as well as produce more photographs and slides for sale. The latter were film slides, but

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[43] Heinrich Dilly, "Lichtbildprojektion – Prothese der Kunstbetrachtung", in: Irene Below, ed., *Kunstwissenschaft und Kunstvermittlung*, Gießen 1975, 153-172.

[44] See Helene E. Roberts, ed., *Art History Through the Camera's Lens*, Amsterdam 1995; Bohrer (2002); Costanza Caraffa, "From 'Photo Libraries' to 'Photo Archives'. On the Epistemological Potential of Art-Historical Photo Collections", in: Costanza Caraffa, ed., *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, Berlin/Munich 2011, 11-44.

[45] Federico Zeri recalls this *bon mot* as a 'first-degree witness' in: *Dietro l'immagine. Conversazioni sull'arte di leggere l'arte*, Milan 1987, 8. Interestingly, Krautheimer attributes the quote to Erwin Panofsky: Richard Krautheimer, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur europäischen Kunstgeschichte*, Cologne 1988, 29. I thank Ulrich Pfisterer for making me aware of it. See also Martha Mahard, "Berenson Was Right! Why We Maintain Large Collections of Historical Photographs", in: *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 22 (2003), no. 1, 9-12.

regardless of the exact form, we are concerned here with the availability of images in the Smithsonian, which includes the older glass lantern slides as well as the film slides and photographs in general.[46] The report from 1964 notes that with the introduction of several courses on Asian art at the local higher education institutions, the need for visual aids increased, and with it the importance of the slide collection.[47] After that, there are no more major references to the slides in the reports, but presumably they were utilized until the turn of the millennium, when the digital shift gradually took hold.

[24] This shift introduced a substantial – or rather, a desubstantialized – change: Just as the emergence of photography introduced an epistemological revolution in art history, transforming it from a rhetorical to a visual discipline, digitization brought about a new revolution insomuch as images were multiplied (similar to what photography had previously achieved) but lost their materiality. "Image supplanted object", as Robert Nelson put it:[48] We now work, most of the time, with images that solely function as images and no longer as objects. As a new generation of art historians takes over, a generation that has almost unlimited access to images via screens, it is vital not to lose awareness of the materiality that was once specific to the discipline.[49] Such call for awareness has resonated in the discipline for more than a decade. Writing about the ambivalence of our age (an ambivalence typical of epistemological shifts), Elizabeth Edwards noted that "it is perhaps significant that our awareness of the material power of the archive

[46] The 1964 report testifies to the acquisition of 1,069 photographs. *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution showing the operations, expenditures, and condition of the Institution for the year ended June 30 1964*, Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1965, 203; available online at https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/33488 - page/5/mode/1up (accessed 16 July 2024).

[47] *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (1965), 204.

[48] Robert S. Nelson, "Technologies of Art History: Slides, PowerPoint, and Virtual Reality", in: Hubert Locher and Maria Männing, eds., *Lehrmedien der Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin 2022, 336-353: 342. See also Joanna Sassoon, *Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction*, in: Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, London 2004, 186-202.

[49] The discourse on materiality, which started in the 1990s through the imput of Canadian postmodern archive studies and British anthropology, and discussed under the name of Material Turn, emerged later in art history and is still being developed, as testified by the 36th CIHA Congress "Matter Materiality" in 2024. Valid insights, documenting the development of the Material Turn in art history in the last years, are also offered by Michael Yonan, "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies", in: *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18 (2011), no. 2, 232-248; Charlotta Krispinsson, "Temptation, Resistance, and Art Objects: On the Lack of Material Theory within Art History before the Material Turn", in: *Artium Quaestiones* 29 (2018), 5-23. Regarding the materiality of photography, see: Edwards and Hart (2004); Elizabeth Edwards, "Photography and the Material Performance of the Past", in: *History and Theory. Studies in the Philosophy of History* 48 (2009), no. 4, 130-150; Bärnighausen, Caraffa et al. (2019); Costanza Caraffa, "Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space. Photographs as Material Objects", in: Gil Pasternak, ed., *The Handbook of Photography Studies*, London/New York 2020, 79-96.

emerges at precisely the moment it is under threat".[50] In this context, the metaphor of archives as 'ecosystems' proposed on several occasions by Costanza Caraffa and Elizabeth Edwards, is also relevant to illustrate the danger associated with the loss of the analogue archive.[51]

[25] The change in epistemological paradigm is evident in regard to slides, too: While they were previously preserved to allow scholars to study the images they contained and thus served as a medium for works of art, they may now be of interest for their own value as historically situated objects. Ironically, therefore, their status has changed from a purely visual aid to a material value at the very time when we are witnessing the dematerialization of the art historical medium.

[26] So far, we have examined the shift between materiality and immateriality in diachronic terms. Finally, following Sibylle Peters and Julica Hiller-Norouzi,[52] we also want to take a look at the shift between materiality and immateriality that occurs with each use of a slide, i.e. in synchronous terms. In doing so, we must distinguish between the experience of the lecturer handling the slide and that of the audience. By inserting a slide into the projector, the tactile relationship to the glass object and its frame is simultaneously transformed into a dematerialized visual experience of an image on the wall. This means that epistemological and ontological shifts can take place not only through history, as shown above, but also in a single moment when considering the different subjects involved in a hermeneutic event (in this case, a glass slide lecture) and their different positions. Still, the way we perceive the materiality of the slides is likely to differ from the way the lecturer might have perceived them. Through his physical relationship with the slides (buying, carrying, holding, inserting, removing) he aimed to perform an aesthetic experience. The materiality was at the service of an intellectual and visual purpose. Conversely, today an intellectual activity – the scholarship on archives and photography – is at the service of rediscovering the materiality of things and the discipline that relies on these things.

[27] The glass nature of the lantern slides invites yet another metaphor: Whereas lantern slides were once treasured for their physical and symbolic transparency (*i.e.*, the possibility of seeing artworks that we could not otherwise see), now the goal is no longer to see *through* them, but

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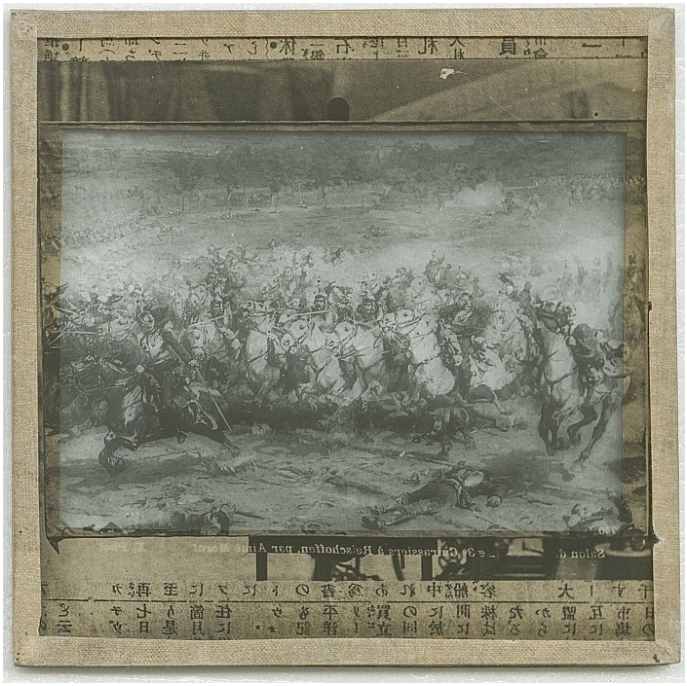
[50] Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs: Material Form and the Dynamic Archive", in: Costanza Caraffa, ed., *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, Berlin/Munich 2011, 47-56: 48. The Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (KHI) addressed the same issue in 2009 with the *Florence Declaration – Recommendations for the Preservation of Analogue Photo Archives*, available at https://www.khi.fi.it/en/photothek/florence-declaration.php (accessed 25 January 2024).

[51] The metaphor is credited to Caraffa in Edwards (2011), 49. For further exploration of the concept, see Costanza Caraffa, "Manzoni in the Photothek. Photographic Archives as Ecosystems", in: Hana Buddeus, Vojtěch Lahoda and Katarína Mašterová, eds., *Instant Presence: Representing Art in Photography. In Honor of Josef Sudek (1896–1976)*, Prague 2017, 122-137; Costanza Caraffa, "The Photo Archive as Laboratory. Art History, Photography, and Materiality", in: *Art Libraries Journal* 44 (2019), 37-46; Elizabeth Edwards, "Thoughts on the 'Non-Collections' of the Archival Ecosystem", in: Bärnighausen, Caraffa et al. (2019), 67-82.

[52] Sibylle Peters, "Projizierte Erkenntnis. Lichtbilder im Szenario des wissenschaftlichen Vortrags", in: Gottfried Boehm et al., eds., *Figur und Figuration. Studien zu Wahrnehmung und Wissen*, Munich 2007, 307-320; Julica Hiller-Norouzi, "Logos versus Aisthesis. Die kunsthistorische Diaprojektion als codierendes Instrument", in: Philipp Freytag et al., eds., *Raum – Perspektive – Medium: Panofsky und die visuellen Kulturen*, Tübingen 2009, n.p.

rather to see them.[53] By turning one of the Morot slides over, one can notice that the cardboard mount was made from a Japanese newspaper page,[54] suggesting that Fenollosa, who had lived in Japan for many years and brought objects of all sorts back to the U.S., had mounted the slide himself (Fig. 5).



5 Back of the slide of Morot's painting with inverted Japanese characters on the cardboard frame. Charles Lang Freer Papers, 12.14: Lantern Slides, box 330 (photo: National Museum of Asian Art Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Charles Lang Freer Papers, FSA-2024-010209)

As Edwards wrote, the materiality of the photograph, far from being "a neutral support to images", is rather "integral to the construction of meaning",[55] and, of course, to the (re)construction of the story hiding behind an image/object. Keeping that in mind, the Japanese cardboard mount is yet another reminder that we are not just beholding an image of Aimé Morot's *La Bataille de Reichshoffen, 6 août 1870*, but that we are also dealing with a glass lantern slide, an object[56] that can be touched, observed from more than one side, that can be broken,

[53] See, for example, Roland Barthes, who employed both the concept of transparency and that of invisibility; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, New York 1982, 5-6.

[54] While the limited amount of characters and the cut of the page make it impossible to understand with certainty the content of the page, it is likely that it is the cut-out of an article on Japan's maritime policy. I thank Liu Qianlin, Liu Xinxuan, and Mao Mitsui for having provided their help and expertise on the matter.

[55] Elizabeth Edwards, "Material Beings: Objecthood and Ethnographic Photographs", in: *Visual Studies* 17 (2002), no. 1, 67-75: 67.

[56] For a case study on the photograph as historical object, see Costanza Caraffa, "Documentary Photographs as Objects and Originals", in: Georg Ulrich Großmann and Petra Krutisch, eds., *The Challenge of the Object / Die Herausforderung des Objekts. 33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art, Nuremberg, Germany, 2012, Congress Proceedings*, 4 vols., Nuremberg 2013, vol. 3, 824-827.

sold and, sometimes, placed in the wrong box. We are therefore facing a case in which materiality and art historiography intertwine, since it is not Morot's *Bataille* as such, but rather the presence of the two glass slides representing Morot's *Bataille* in the Freer Archives that testifies to a moment in early East Asian art historiography.

[28] To summarise, the significance of the Morot slides is threefold: Firstly, they are perhaps the only clear proof of the presence of Fenollosa's slide collection within the larger whole that is the lantern slide collection of the Freer Gallery. Secondly, they allow a unique glimpse into the complex and possibly lost world of Fenollosa's visual comparisons, which otherwise survive only in the written word of *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, but without images. Thirdly, and more subtly, they remind us that art history, as well as the history of art history, has the duty, more often than might be expected, of making sense not only of the presence of images and objects, but of their absence, too.

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