



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The field of art history has always been singularly dependent upon the information resources and information technologies associated with images, whether in the form of slides, photographs, or most recently, digital files. Thus changes in the way these essential images are managed, archived and accessed directly impacts art history more immediately and more profoundly than other fields in the humanities. And for that reason, we at the Samuel H. Kress Foundation seek to remain closely attuned to developments across this wide arena, which has been especially volatile in recent years.

In 2009, an important series of international symposia was launched, dedicated to “Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History.” Sponsored in part by the Kress Foundation, the purpose of the ongoing symposium series was—and remains—to highlight the unique and indispensable role traditional photographic archives have played—and will continue to play—in the history of art. Symposia have now been hosted by the Courtauld Institute of Art, London; the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence (twice); the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; and most recently by the Getty Research Institute and the Huntington Library. A 2017 symposium at Oxford University is in the early planning stages.

The organizers of these symposia are responding to a shared sense of urgency concerning the array of existential challenges confronting our major art history photo archives. A key challenge is that these archives are famously space-consuming, which can, of course, seem problematic from an administrative perspective. They take up space that could, in theory, be dedicated to other things, some of which might be perceived as more imperative at any given moment. At the same time, they may seem to have been rendered redundant if not antiquated with the ascendancy of digital images and digital photography. In the era of Google Images, one might well ask, why do we still need old-fashioned “analog” photo archives? Given this problematic situation, it comes as no surprise that, in connection with the 2011 symposium in Florence, the

Kunsthistorisches Institut issued a *cri de coeur* for the preservation of our great art historical photo archives, in the form of the *Florence Declaration* (<http://www.khi.fi.it/en/Declaration>). The *Declaration*, which has since been endorsed by a wide array of professional and scholarly organizations, affirms the essential, ongoing value of photo archives for the study and teaching of art history.

The challenges facing art history photo archives today have recently inspired the formation of an international consortium, PHAROS, focused on the *future* of these archives. In early 2013, representatives of fourteen art historical photo archives from North America and Europe met for a two-day colloquium hosted by the Frick Art Reference Library (and sponsored by Kress), with the goal of strategizing together about their common future. Participants included representatives from the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome; the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg; The Courtauld Institute of Art, London; the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Bologna; the Frick Art Reference Library, New York; the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Harvard University's Villa I Tatti, Florence; the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris; the Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; the Paul Mellon Centre, London; the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD), The Hague; the Warburg Institute, London; and the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

The PHAROS group forged a strategic plan for digitizing and linking their diverse collections, thus opening the prospect of a consolidated—and massive—new online resource for art historical documentation and research. An initial suite of pilot projects¹ was born from this convening, each focusing on a different corpus of photographic material and testifying to the great promise inherent in creating such an

¹ These pilot projects include: 1) the establishment of an online resource focused on 15th-century Italian anonymous artists, connecting digitized images to crucial documentation culled from the catalogs of these photo archives; 2) the sharing of metadata for photographs of old master drawings in the remarkable Gernsheim Corpus Photographicum of Drawings; 3) the use of digitized

aggregated digital resource. These projects are also being conceived to allow participating photo archives to create, together, an online “knowledge commons,” a resource that promises to stimulate inquiry across a broad spectrum of fields. Initially, the “knowledge commons” will provide access to more than 31 million images that record works of art in varying states at different moments of their history. Once digitized and shared globally, the aggregated collections of these photo archives promise to transform art historical research.

The Samuel H. Kress Foundation’s engagement with art history photo archives is longstanding, and has ranged from sponsoring the creation of key photo archives (such as that at the National Gallery of Art) to the cataloging and preservation of especially important archives (such as that at the American Academy in Rome). With the launch of our grant program “Digital Resources for the History of Art” in 2008, the Foundation dedicated itself to assisting with the strategic digitization and online dissemination—on an “open access” basis—of especially important art history photo archives, including those at the Fondazione Federico Zeri (Bologna), Harvard University’s Villa I Tatti (Florence), and the Warburg Institute (London).

This strong and abiding commitment to the digitization of our great photo archives should not imply that such digitization—however indispensable a step toward universal access it represents—renders the original archives superfluous. Kress is equally committed to preserving these archives in their original form, especially those which embody not merely “the photographic memory of art history” but also generations of scholarly knowledge and discourse as incarnated in the associated catalog records and scholarly annotations (including speculative attributions) typically registered on the front and verso of

images to illustrate Ellis Waterhouse’s classic reference tool, *Dictionary of British 18th-Century Painters in Oils*; and 4) an additional online resource showcasing photographs of historical importance, including especially pre-World War I photographs of canonical works of art that provide unique evidence of their former condition and installation prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

their photographic mounts. These embody essential “metadata” that needs to be preserved, and captured digitally. We need forums through which current and future generations of art historians can continue the dialogue about a given image or suite of images.

Nor is digitization per se more than a first step. One of the most promising attempts to sustain and encourage scholarly engagement with these key photo archives in digital form involves the application of “computer vision” to digitized versions of these photographic corpora. Here the work of John Resig and the Frick Art Reference Library—sponsored by two successive grants from Kress—has been pioneering. One component of this project will allow for cross-institutional analysis of images of art works. Through an automated visual analysis, discoveries can be made which would have been impossible using only the analog versions within a single archive. This project forms the foundation for the “knowledge commons,” a key initiative of the newly-formed PHAROS consortium.

The future of our great art history photo archives is inherently important. It is doubly important to us at Kress, due not least to the fact that so many of our greatest photo archives are especially rich in unique visual and textual documentation of the history of European art of the pre-modern era—which is, of course, at the heart of the Foundation’s mission. We share the sense of urgency expressed by the PHAROS consortium of photo archives and applaud the group’s strong commitment to ensuring the ongoing preservation of these remarkable archives as well as their placement in the service of art history in the twenty-first century. We fully intend to sustain our own philanthropic commitment to this important cause, and encourage others to join us in advancing it.



Max Marmor
President