

UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN, CLUJ-NAPOCA

PhD Thesis

Old Photography, a Partner for Contemporary Visual Art

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Resume

Old photography has a series of traits that make it relevant in present times. First of all it benefits from its history and the fact that it has already installed itself in the conscious and subconscious of its viewers and communicators. Second it is the nostalgia it brings up that is one of the sources of emotional and energetic infusions into the visual present.

In this context, activating the partnership between old photography and contemporary visual arts is crystallizing itself in one of the projects of the Transylvanian Virtual Museum of Old Photography.

The doctoral thesis entitled *Old photography, a partner for contemporary art* is conceived in such a way as to go beyond its theoretical motivation and to practically attempt to reintegrate old photography into contemporary art events.

We have chosen to structure this construction into two parts. The first part talks about the pioneering efforts of early photographers and its relationships with visual arts over time.

The second part is dedicated to the investigation of the relationship between old photography and contemporary arts through real and possible artistic projects that span most contemporary visual arts.

These two parts are sequenced into chapters, subchapters and paragraphs, a sequencing that enables the assessment of its influence coming from contemporary visual arts.

The introduction identifies three motivations for this doctoral thesis. We quote: "... Why have we chosen to research the relation between old photography and contemporary visual arts?"

We have three motivations: The existence of a relation between the sequences of passive and active signs, meanings and symbols coming from the nostalgia of a time long gone, a time when the social and cultural were under a different esthetics governed by harmony, balance, order and clarity; The elements of emotional shock ensured by this is inserted into various facets of contemporary art; Our personal passion about old photography, spanning from collecting artifacts, researching, investigating, documenting, initiating the Transylvanian Virtual Museum of Old Photography, as well as creating a series of projects and workshops that have allowed us to insert elements of old photography into contemporary visual arts."

A more general motivation for this thesis is the purpose and meaning of photography for the human civilization. We quote: "Photography meant a crucial point for the representation, understanding, translating the autonomous social human being.

From photography and through photography the world is something else, for better or for worse. The shock of this discovery had profoundly changed the human world.”

Old photography is still fresh in the minds of people because of the place it occupies in our modern contemporary society, in contemporary photography, and because of the need to relate to a candid, warm, family-oriented past that tries to validate the present. We quote: “In this context the most important paradox is that photography still influences countless aspects of human individual, social and cultural behaviour.”

The first chapter entitled “The phenomenology of pioneering photography” focuses on the paradigm changes photography brought to the social-cultural landscape and highlights Arago’s activism that enabled photography to be brought to the attention of both experts and the public. The subchapter “Nadar and evidence of the pioneering of photography and old photography” calls to attention an important character from photographic history, Nadar, always at the forefront of technological and scientific activism, always interested in what’s new, a trait frequently found in the nineteenth century. The extensive quoting from his book “When I was a photographer” brings to light a language that epitomizes the thinking of the era, a powerful element of authenticity regarding the connection of photography with contemporary society.

The second chapter is entitled “Photographs, studios, styles of photography in nineteenth and beginning of twentieth century Transylvania” and talks about photography inside Transylvania, a place situated between Eastern and Western Europe, between territories that have given photography distinct social-cultural characteristics.

The subchapters “The pioneering photography and old photography in Transylvania” and “Beginnings of photography, the photo studios of Transylvania” are the results of bibliographic research from many sources but also from unique and authentic elements coming from the collections of photos belonging to the Transylvanian Virtual Museum of Photography.

The third chapter entitled “The painter and photographer Carol Popp de Szathmáry” talks about the biography of an exemplary leader from the beginning of photography in nineteenth century Romania, following his life as a painter, photographer and focusing on his presence at decisive moments for the Romanian history.

His activity is being detailed and given as an early example for the partnership between photography and visual arts, as well as his role as a cultural and social ambassador for the Romanian reality. A subchapter is dedicated to other photographers from that era and their photographic studios.

The fourth chapter entitled “Mutual influences between nineteenth and twentieth century photography and visual arts” talks about the mutual influences between photography and other visual arts, focusing on their presence inside the European space. The subchapter “Photography and visual arts in the context between local and global” talks about the globalization of photography and its role as an effective bridge spanning the huge gap that has separated the local from the global. The subchapter “Old photography, contemporary photography and contemporary visual arts” presents the relationship between photography and visual arts from a modernist and postmodernist viewpoint. The subchapter “Old photography and contemporary visual arts, case studies” identifies and illustrates the sequences, directions and presence of the relation between photography affiliated or unaffiliated with the demands of contemporary visual arts.

The fifth chapter entitled “Old photography, a partner for contemporary visual arts, personal contribution” presents the actions and personal projects dedicated to the partnership between photography and contemporary visual arts.

The doctoral thesis ends with Conclusions, Bibliography and its Resume.