

## PHOTOGRAPHY — MUSEUM NARRATIVES

**On 14-15 October 2013 the National Museum in Warsaw is going to host the international seminar Photography – Museum Narratives. The seminar is organized by the Archaeology of Photography Foundation, in collaboration with the National Museum in Warsaw and National Institute of Museology and Collections Protection. The aim of the conference is to investigate the position of photography within contemporary museum institutions and to determine the function and premises of photography museums. This event will bring forth an opportunity to become acquainted with histories of photographic collections and acquiring strategies of institutions such as: Museum of Modern Art (NYC), Getty Museum (LA), Art Institute of Chicago, Musée Nicéphore Niépce (Chalon-sur-Saône), Musée de l'Élysée (Lausanne), and Rosphoto (St. Petersburg).**

Photography has been present in museums ever since its invention, however, the ways it was collected and its status within the museum collections changed drastically over the course of the last 170 years. The museum institutions and curators played an important role in shaping the history of photography and are responsible for the fact that it is still very often seen from the perspective of the medium. Nonetheless, both collecting — that is acquisition strategies — and making available to the public — that is temporary and permanent displays — have defined photography as either closer to a technique, art, or to a document. These different statuses are still at play, though various museums adopt diverse methods of dealing with such pluralism. In some cases, photographs from all departments — library, iconography, art, and prints — are to be found in a single department of photography, which is responsible for the strategy of acquisitions and all photography-related projects. Another model involves keeping the photographs in their original locations in the collection; yet another focuses on challenging the media-based division and including the photographs in the general collection. In the context of plans for the establishment of the first museum of photography in Warsaw, as the department of the National Museum in Warsaw, the questions about the identity and significance of such an institution today, as well as the strategies for developing the collection, generating knowledge, and approach to the past and present, are of great relevance. Posing these questions to experienced curators of photographic collections from international museums, directors of museums of photography, as well as historians who critically examine these phenomena, can certainly create an interesting framework for the Warsaw undertaking.

The status of photography in museum collections is among the topical issues of the session; others include photographic museums — their history, strategies of collecting, development and shaping the history of photography. The questions addressed during the debate will concern, among others, the issue of defining photography as a technique, and later as an image, and the imbalanced relationship between these two perspectives; the approach to the estates and archives of photographers; conservation and preventive conservation. Equally important is the establishment of a methodological framework and considering the impact on conceptualizing the history of photography and on the shape of institutions devoted to it, at a time when the traditional media-based categories have been practically abolished.

The session aims to map the history of collections, exhibitions, and museums of photography which had a significant impact on the current shape of the world history of photography, the way it is defined, collected, as well as excluded, the divisions that exist in its field, and the dynamics of change in the aforementioned areas, dependent on place, time, and (quite often local) histories and individuals.

Participating speakers:

Jaroslav Anděl (artistic director at the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague)

Quentin Bajac (chief curator of Photography Department, Museum of Modern Art, NY)

Tamara Berghmans (curator and researcher at FotoMuseum Antwerp)

Martijn van den Broek (head of the Collections Department at the Netherlands FotoMuseum in Rotterdam)

François Cheval (curator-at-large at Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône)

Antonella Fresa (technical coordinator at Europeana Photography, Leuven)

Virginia Heckert (curator of Photography Department at the Getty Museum, LA)

Danuta Jackiewicz (curator of the Collection of Iconography and Photography at the National Museum in Warsaw)

Adam Mazur (independent curator and researcher; paper on the photo collections at Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź and National Museum in Breslau)

Wojciech Nowicki (freelance photographer, curator, and journalist; paper on Photography Museum in Cracow)

Ulrich Pohlmann (head of the Photography Department at the Stadtmuseum, Munich)

Mark Robbins (executive director at the International Center of Photography, New York)

Viktoria Tolpegina (international project manager, RosPhoto, Sankt Petersburg)

Matthew Witkovsky (head of the Department of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago)

Preliminary list of topics to be addressed:

- Museum of Photography and its History — different models of developing photography museums.
- Museum of Photography Today — does the museum of photography today have its *raison d'être* if so, what should be its shape, and if not, what consequences does this fact have for existing collections.
- Photography on Permanent Display — past and current ways of constructing the narratives of permanent exhibitions of photography, as well as the ways in which photography is included in the permanent displays.
- Historical Narratives of Temporary Exhibitions — analysis of select landmark exhibitions and their impact on the history of photography and acquisition strategies, such as *The Family of Man*.
- Photography in the Collection of a Museum of Art — historical and contemporary perspectives on and strategies of collecting photography.

- Photography as the Object of a Legal Transaction — copyrights, making the collections available to the public, official records, digitization, etc.; including photographing in museums: the rights of the visitors in the face of the duty to protect the heritage.

The topics of the panel discussions are preliminary and are subject to change according to the submitted texts and proposals on the part of the participants.

Executive Organizer: Archaeology of Photography Foundation, Warsaw

Concept: Karolina Ziębińska-Lewandowska

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Media partnership:



Information for press: Anna Micińska  
[anna.micinska@gmail.com](mailto:anna.micinska@gmail.com)  
Tel. +48 605 937 627