

Bringing Down the “Archive Fever”



Ana Isabel Cruz
Yábar

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Towards the end of 2020, a consortium of five European partners — Spéos International Photographic Institute and Magnum Photos in Paris, the Office for Photography and the Institute of Art History in Zagreb, and the University of Deusto in Bilbao — embarked on an ambitious two-year project entitled *The Cycle: European Training in Photographic Legacy Management*. This initiative was motivated by a common concern about the state of preservation of and access to photographic archives. This publication gathers ten essays that were submitted to the international conference *Bringing Down the “Archive Fever” — opening and collaborating on photography archives and collections*, including a special contribution by keynote speaker Costanza Caraffa. The conference was organized within the framework of *The Cycle* project by the Institute of Art History in Zagreb, and it took place in Zagreb and online between October 20 and 22, 2021. As the coordinator of *The Cycle* project, I would like to thank all the authors whose contribution to the conference has been collected in this volume, as well as the European Commission and the Croatian Ministry of Culture, whose generous financial support have made this publication possible.

The management of photographic archives and collections is a difficult endeavor: While archival institutions face significant processing backlogs that reflect negatively on them in the eyes of researchers, donors and resource allocators, many photographic archives are held in private hands, frequently by the photographers’ own families, who, more often than not, lack the specific competences and knowledge on how to open them to the public. In both cases, these research treasures remain largely unavailable to potential users. This triggers the question of how to best preserve and valorize photographic archives. To answer this question, the partners of *The Cycle* decided to engage in a transnational process of exchange of knowledge and skills in photographic legacy management (PLM) to assess and identify best practices in this realm.

To accomplish the project's objectives, the partners organized an international conference that would open the dialogue around this topic and showcase photography's testimonial and cultural power, helping to answer key questions such as: What innovative practices can best ensure efficient access to photography collections? How can collection managers foster new interactions with potential communities of interest beyond academia? What are the lessons learned from success stories of forgotten archives whose rediscovery has helped strengthen the inclusion of underrepresented groups in the historical discourse? What strategies can be implemented to activate the epistemological, societal, and aesthetic potential of these archives?

Photographic archives constitute a valuable cultural testimony, a catalyst for promoting awareness and reconsideration of shared history and values. To facilitate the understanding of this phenomenon, we called upon specialists who could enlighten the audience on such issues to participate in the *Bringing Down the "Archive Fever"* conference. The number of submissions was higher than anticipated, and our board of reviewers worked hard to narrow them down while making all necessary arrangements to extend it from the initially planned one-day gathering to a three-day conference.

When two devastating earthquakes hit Croatia in March and again in December 2020, it looked as if the conference project would have to be abandoned. However, thanks to our committed Croatian partners, who were determined to accomplish this task, the conference took place as planned.

Despite the difficulties encountered, the project was a great success thanks to the excellent team spirit and camaraderie of my colleagues at *The Cycle* and the friendly atmosphere created by the dedicated group of participants, who contributed to make this experience a success. It was with great satisfaction that we received and examined over fifty highly interesting abstracts by art professionals and scholars

from nineteen different European countries, as well as from Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the United States of America. The eventually selected submissions are now compiled in the present publication, which aims to increase awareness and engagement with photographic archives from key players and the wider public, thereby contributing to a better preservation of photographic legacies in Europe.

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