



Article: Object: Photo - A Presentation of Deep Data from the Thomas Walther Collection Project at The Museum of Modern Art (Abstract)

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Object: Photo - A Presentation of Deep Data from the Thomas Walther Collection Project at The Museum of Modern Art

Lee Ann Daffner

Presented at the PMG session of the 2015 AIC Annual Meeting in Miami, Florida.

The Museum of Modern Art's 4-year Thomas Walther Collection project was completed in December, 2014 with a symposium, print publication, website and exhibition. Launching on December 9, 2014, the website MoMA.org/objectphoto is an innovative initiative in the digital presentation of a fine arts collection and of photographs in particular, presenting information and data in forms that take full advantage of digital humanities tools and resources. The centerpiece of the site is a suite of digital visualizations that allow visitors to explore the pictures and artists for themselves, generating their own queries, discovering connections and intersecting moments of historical significance, and fueling the next generation of scholarship. Additionally, the site will provide scholars with access to an unprecedented amount of research and information about individual photographs by bringing together deep archival research on each picture within the collection, including high-resolution images of the front, back, and surface details; extended provenance; related historical publications and exhibitions; and results of X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy of many photographs in the collection. The site presents the research protocols for each of these technical examinations so that they can be replicated on other photographs and within other collections, making future research fully commensurable to that of this project. The site also includes an anthology of over two dozen essays and case studies on works in the collection by leading photography scholars, many of whom specialize in the interwar avant-garde in Europe and America. Offering a host of diverse and sophisticated perspectives on the pictures, these studies place them in broader contexts—for example, within material parameters, historical events, period styles, the artists' oeuvres, and the Museum's collection. With this digital humanities initiative, MoMA enters a new era of collection publications. Accessible to the wide, online audience for the Museum, the site not only proffers original scholarship, deep, scientifically derived materials data, curatorial texts, and historical sources c research online, but also, with its four visualizations producing multivariate results, it encourages the online audience to continue building the discourse, generating the next generation of scholarship on this critical era of modern art history. This presentation will focus on the challenges and rewards in the integration of materials-based data on photographic materials with art historical content through visualizations, object reference pages and raw data.

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