



De collectie Joseph

Detail afb. 8

Het afgelopen jaar verwierf het Rijksmuseum de collectie Steven Joseph, een verzameling 19de-eeuwse fotoboeken. Deze verzameling van ruim 1800 boeken uit verschillende landen is de grootste en meest complete in zijn soort die door een particulier bijeen is gebracht. In totaal bevat de collectie circa 40.000 foto's in hun oorspronkelijke context. Ze geeft daarmee een fraai beeld van het gebruik van fotografie als illustratie in boeken.

De variatie in onderwerpen is opmerkelijk; de verzameling omvat bijvoorbeeld boeken over reizen, antropologie, medische onderwerpen, techniek, kunst en architectuur. Hierdoor vormt de verzameling Joseph voor de internationale geschiedenis van de fotografie een onmisbare documentatie. Bovendien geeft ze een prachtig beeld van de ontwikkeling van de 19de-eeuwse wetenschap en kennis.

Toen Steven Joseph – geboren in 1955 in Engeland en in het dagelijks leven 'Euro-ambtenaar' in Brussel – omstreeks 1980 met verzamelen begon, was het historische fotoboek nog vrijwel onontdekt. Slechts een klein groepje fotoverzamelaars en -historici was bekend met het fenomeen. Joseph heeft, al verzamelend, veel kennis over het 19de-eeuwse foto-

boek verworven en zich tot een autoriteit op dit terrein ontwikkeld. In het onderstaande artikel geeft hij op persoonlijke wijze een indruk van zijn pionierswerk en van de motieven achter het ontstaan van zijn collectie.

Kijkjes achter de schermen bij verzamelaars zijn helaas zeldzaam, maar vormen een authentieke en onmisbare bron voor de geschiedenis van het verzamelen. Voor de redactie was dit een extra reden om Josephs verhaal te publiceren, ofschoon het qua inhoud afwijkt van de meer reguliere artikelen in het *Bulletin*. Om de verzamelaar in zijn meest authentieke vorm aan het woord te laten is er voor gekozen dit artikel niet te vertalen.



MADE OF WOOD
GROWN
ON THE LANDS OF
ABBOTSFORD



The persistence of vision

• STEVEN F. JOSEPH •

Fig. 1
Upper board of: Sir Walter Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*, Edinburgh 1871. Varnished wood with albumen print cartouche of author's portrait. The Caledonian Box Works, founded in the Scottish town of Lanark in 1866, supplied the tourist trade with decorative wooden goods, known as Mauchline ware. The popularity of wooden-bound souvenir editions of Walter Scott and Robert Burns reached its peak around 1870.

Perhaps what is needed is a greater number of collections that are formed with more original parameters, with less dependence on the established order of history and more willingness toward enjoying the singular excitement and delight in the unknown, the unsung, and the un-indexed. It has customarily been the case that carefully and sensitively built collections have not reflected an already discoursed history but have instead imaged a richer and variant history.¹

When the museum curator and photography historian Robert A. Sobieszek made these trenchant observations on collecting photography in the late 1970s, he was responding to an extraordinary situation. In that decade, the art market in photography had expanded vertiginously in the United States from a standing start, a collecting fervour underpinned by the major auction houses and the establishment of a network of specialist commercial galleries on both the East and West coasts. The upsurge in interest, repeated in Europe with a time-lapse of several years, had the major effect of attracting onto the market much early material, which only a few years before might have been consigned to the rubbish tip. However, the historiography of photography had failed to keep pace with

the commercial world, with the result that the budding collector had little documentation of value except the great standard surveys in the domain,² and was thus dependent to a large extent on personal judgement, self-generated taste or connoisseurship and sheer gut instinct. There reigned a climate of excitement and the ever-present whiff of pioneering spirit. In short, it was a great time to start a collection.

In fact, I had acquired my first photographic item back in 1967, as a precocious twelve-year old bibliophile. At a junk shop near my home outside Manchester, England, I spotted a copy of Sir Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* dated 1871. No ordinary edition, it was bound in varnished boards 'made from wood grown on the lands of Abbotsford'- Scott's estate, and decorated with photographic cartouches and a set of mother-of-pearl studs on the lower board (Fig. 1). This *livre-objet*, so striking in appearance, also contained six small sepia-toned mounted photographic prints, views associated with the poem. I was enchanted, and paid one whole pound for the work, nearly a month's pocket money. It was to remain a singularity in my collection, and would not be joined by other photographically illustrated book for over a decade.

I am a *dix-neuvièmiste* at heart. Fascinated by the history and artefacts of the reign of Queen Victoria at school, I collected literary first editions and bound volumes of 1890s periodicals. At Oxford I took my degree in modern languages, and was naturally drawn to the great realistic novels of Balzac and Flaubert, and the comic plays of Johann Nestroy, master of the Wiener Volkstheater. Not an abstract thinker, I was attracted not by ideas or philosophies, but to objects and artefacts. I haunted bookshops, and picked up the occasional photographic print.

It was in the spring of 1981 that my intellectual epiphany took place. In a late night moment of inspiration, I grasped how best to combine my two collecting interests – books and photography – and my favourite historical period. From now on I would concentrate on the photograph in print before 1900. Luck played its inevitable part in the timing. The market was in cyclical depression after the glory days of the 1970s, due partly to an overall slowdown in the world economy, and in part following an over-supply of early 20th-century vintage prints (a major segment of the market then as now), the authenticity of which could not always be guaranteed. There was a large amount of material being funnelled through the leading auction houses in London, allowing me to handle and savour original 19th-century items, and develop my eye and knowledge, thereby placing me in a wide open field with few competitors. Location also played its role. In 1981 I moved to Brussels to begin a career in the European institutions. I met Tristan Schwilden, antiquarian bookseller and rare Belgian specialist in early photography. I explained my interest, and he broke out into a broad smile. For years he had been acquiring photographically illustrated books, and his stock had continued to grow in the face of local indifference. ‘You have found a customer’,

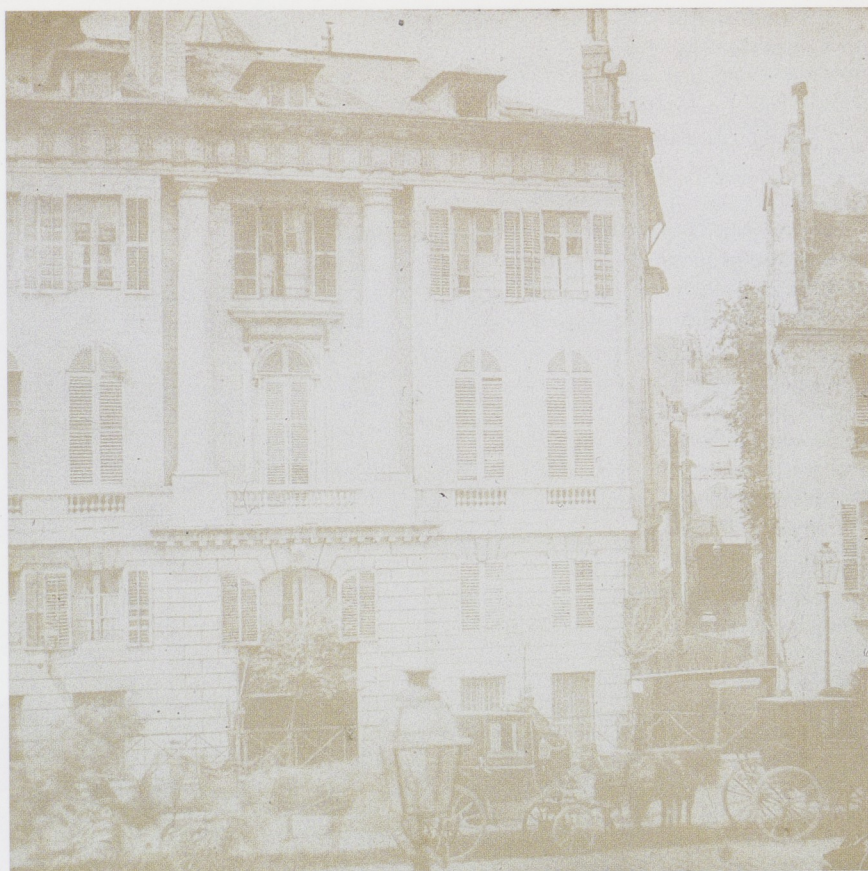
I declared, and at that point my serious collecting began.

Quaero, colligo, studio... Like all recognised viruses, collecting passes through discrete stages of infection. The febrile stages of hunting and possession were already in full spate, as the collection was being built and my acquisition criteria had become clearly defined. The third and intellectually challenging stage of study was about to grip me. The photographically illustrated book needed its bibliographers, and the first tools were being published – a fine introduction to the field based on an exhibition held at the Grolier Club in New York,³ as well as two national bibliographies of wildly differing approach and scope.⁴ If there was one crucial fact that my embryonic collection soon taught me, it was that most of the works in the domain were unknown to scholarship. I estimate that the field comprises easily 25,000 separate titles, including about 500 of Belgian origin.

Encouraged by Tristan Schwilden, who made his own notes available to me, I began research at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Brussels. It seemed obvious to start with Belgian production, little of which had been appraised historically or evaluated aesthetically. Any such study needed firstly to be supported by a solid substructure of fundamental research into the creators of the works – the photographers who created the images and printing houses which made the prints. Hence, I was soon diverted from my original bibliographic purpose, side-tracked into fully fledged study on the development of photography in Belgium during the 19th century. A most necessary detour, pursued with the skilful and patient collaboration of Tristan Schwilden, it has resulted in a series of exhibitions held at the two Belgian museums of photography in Antwerp and Charleroi,⁵ as well as several articles in specialist periodicals. I am currently refocusing on the bibliography

Fig. 2

W.H.F. TALBOT
Street scene in Paris.
 Salt paper print, in:
The Art-Union, 1846.
 The inventor of the
 negative-positive
 process endeavoured
 to promote his photo-
 graphic printing
 establishment in
 Reading by having an
 original print inserted
 into every copy of the
 June 1846 issue of this
 British art periodical.
 Talbot used every
 available suitable
 negative in order to
 fill a print-run of sev-
 eral thousand copies.
 The Steven F. Joseph
 collection contains
 five copies, each with
 a different image.



of Belgian photographic literature, and hope that its lengthy gestation period will soon be brought to term.

The year 1989 marked the sesqui-centennial anniversary of photography, and commemorative exhibitions were held the world over. A chance meeting with the bookseller and image conservationist Adriaan Verburg led to our organising an exhibition of books drawn from my collection at the Zeeuws Museum in Middelburg, the first to be held in The Netherlands in this domain.⁶ Preparing the exhibition and accompanying catalogue with someone as knowledgeable and committed as Adriaan Verburg naturally meant evaluating the collection as an ensemble, and a main theme emerged. A realisation dawned that we had both known intuitively: it would be virtually

impossible to analyse the development of photography, both technologically and aesthetically, without reference to its essential role in reproducing and disseminating pictorial information, initially in the form of photographic prints, then in printer's ink. The exhibition *De Andere Fotografie* thus attempted to survey the evolution of the dialogue between the upstart medium of photography and the older medium of the printing press.

The exhibition was divided into four parts, each corresponding roughly to a distinct period in the development of phototechnical processes in the 19th century,⁷ and represented by primary source material from my and other collections. The first phase in the socialisation of the new technology was the experimental or laboratory

Fig. 3
James McDonald,
Entrance to Hospital of the Knights of St. John and Ecce Homo Arch. Albumen prints, in: *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem, Southampton 1865*. The accompanying report contains a statement: *Photography was not considered an essential part of the survey; the views were taken at spare moments and were intended to illustrate as far as possible the masonry of the walls and architectural details of the different buildings. Consequently, the relative informality of the views distinguishes this series from commercial work produced for tourists and pilgrims to the Holy Land. Members of the survey team pose in many of the images alongside local inhabitants.*

VIEWS WITHIN THE CITY.



ENTRANCE TO HOSPITAL OF THE KNIGHTS OF ST JOHN.



ECCE HOMO ARCH.

phase. In this period, which runs roughly from 1825 to 1855, the inventors or their representatives hoped to market the invention, without it fulfilling however the two necessary preconditions of viability and market need (Fig. 2). The second phase, stretching from about 1855 to the end of the 1860s, was a period when the application of photography to book illustration was not widespread, but when the profit motive, and the activity of entrepreneurs willing to shoulder the risk of commercialisation, enabled the invention to become truly viable.

The third phase, which spanned the 1870s and 1880s, was a period of continuous expansion, as publishing houses grew accustomed to exploiting

and integrating the new technology. Until 1870, photographically illustrated publications had overwhelmingly contained albumen prints, the manufacture of which was labour-intensive: each image had to be printed out, trimmed, then pasted onto paper or cardboard mounts (Fig. 3). There were no cost benefits in volume production, since costs rose in direct ratio to the output. With photomechanical processes, printing plates were used as matrix in place of photographic negatives, and long print runs from a single plate could benefit from economies of scale. Two such processes gained widespread acceptance during this period – the Woodbury-type and collotype (Fig. 4).⁸ The fourth phase, beginning around 1885, saw

Fig. 4

A.H.P. STUART-WORTLEY
A witch and prophetess. Collotype, printed by the Autotype Company, in: *Tahiti*, London 1882. Colonel Henry Stuart-Wortley toured the South Pacific in 1880. He brought back a magnificent collection of topographical and ethnological studies, which were exhibited by the Autotype Company at the Photographic Society of Great Britain in 1882. The photographer himself was undeservedly modest about his achievement: *The result, chemically speaking, was satisfactory; but alas! how inadequate photography or painting is to render accurately the exquisite beauty of Tahiti scenery.*



No. 21. *A Witch and Prophetess. Tahiti.*



a quantitative leap in the application of photography to the printing press. The printed photograph came to be accepted routinely within the context of everyday life (periodical press, advertising), due to the generalised use of the half-tone block, which enabled text and image to be printed simultaneously. Older processes were gradually abandoned (such as the Woodburytype) or had to find new markets (collotype used for picture postcards). In reaction to the mediocre quality of much half-tone relief printing, the emergent Pictorialist school of art photographers favoured the delicacy and soft contours of the photogravure (Fig. 5).

In my first decade of collecting, I had acquired over 500 works, of which about one-third were British imprints and a quarter Belgian. Thematically, there was a heavy concentration on art reproductions, and a disproportionate number of works with a single print, generally a portrait frontispiece. I recall the American collector and

dealer Stephen White cautioning me against the risk of accumulation and repetition, and so I decided to broaden the scope of the collection, both thematically and geographically. During the 1980s, prices had risen steadily, in the wake of the bombshell launched by the J. Paul Getty Museum of Malibu, California, into the heart of the community of photography collectors in 1984. In June of that year, the Getty announced the acquisition of five major private collections, including 16,600 prints and 1,300 photographically illustrated books.⁹ Overnight, ample supply was replaced by scarcity, while a number of major art museums took up photography as a suitable field for their permanent collections, and acted accordingly.

The cyclical nature of the market was confirmed as demand levelled off in the early 1990s, during the last recession of the 20th century and the political uncertainty precipitated by the Gulf War. I made the conscious decision to take advantage of this lull

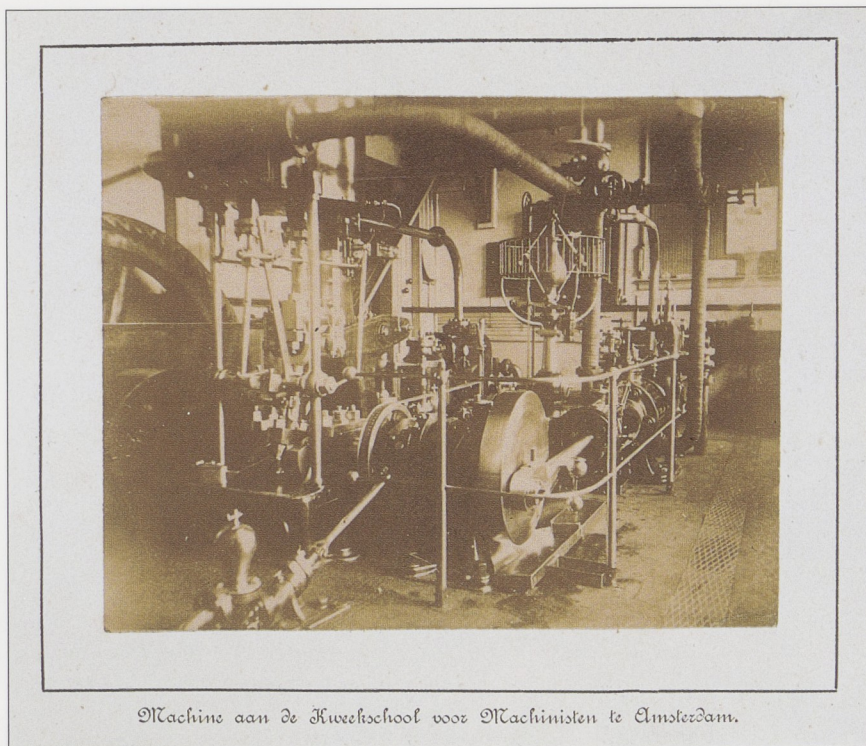
Fig. 5

G. CHRISTOPHER DAVIES
Urk Harbour. Photogravure, printed by Annan & Swan, in: *On Dutch Waterways*, London 1887. Davies' evocative and lyrical treatment of Dutch landscape prefigures the style adopted by the Pictorialist movement which flourished at the turn of the 20th century. The deluxe edition of the book in the Steven F. Joseph collection contains 12 plates; the ordinary edition has a single frontispiece illustration.

Fig. 6

KAZUMA OGAWA
Lilium speciosum varieties Kanoko-yuri. Coloured collotype, in: F. Brinkley, *Japan Described and Illustrated by the Japanese*, Boston 1897(-1898). Ogawa was the leading photographic printer and publisher in Japan when he received a commission to illustrate Brinkley's ten-volume prestige publication, a highspot in the history of early photographic publishing. Ogawa's large-scale flower studies are amongst his finest work, both aesthetically and from a technical point of view.





Machine aan de Kweekschool voor Machinisten te Amsterdam.

in order to shape the collection more keenly, in particular by expanding it into a comprehensive survey, covering not only the inventors and pioneers, but all significant applications of photographic illustration to disciplines in the arts and sciences, ranging from astronomy and botany (Fig. 6) to urban development and zoology. Furthermore, I made every effort to acquire material published throughout the world, and which would highlight the many ways in which the new technology was received in different cultures. For instance, I put together, piece by piece, a representative selection of photographically illustrated Dutch student almanacs (Fig. 7), a tradition unique to this country (elsewhere yearbooks still tended to be illustrated by lithography and woodengraving). Revealing the pattern of these national traditions in subject matter has been one of my great collecting pleasures.¹⁰ My holdings of German-speaking

imprints were still rather weak, and could not do justice to the leading role of both Germany and Austria in the development of photomechanical printing during this period. I was therefore particularly fortunate when my friend and fellow collector Werner Neite of Cologne offered me his collection.¹¹ Over one weekend in 1992, we examined his 140 imprints (two-thirds of German origin) and agreed terms. I returned to Brussels exhausted and very happy – in one fell swoop I had bridged a major gap in my collection. By November 1994 I had reached my 1000th accession, and was well on the way to meeting my objectives for the collection in terms of thematic coverage and geographical scope.

The final phase in building the collection was due to a technological advance in our days as fundamental and revolutionary as photography had itself been in its infancy. As photo-

Fig. 7

H. POTTER

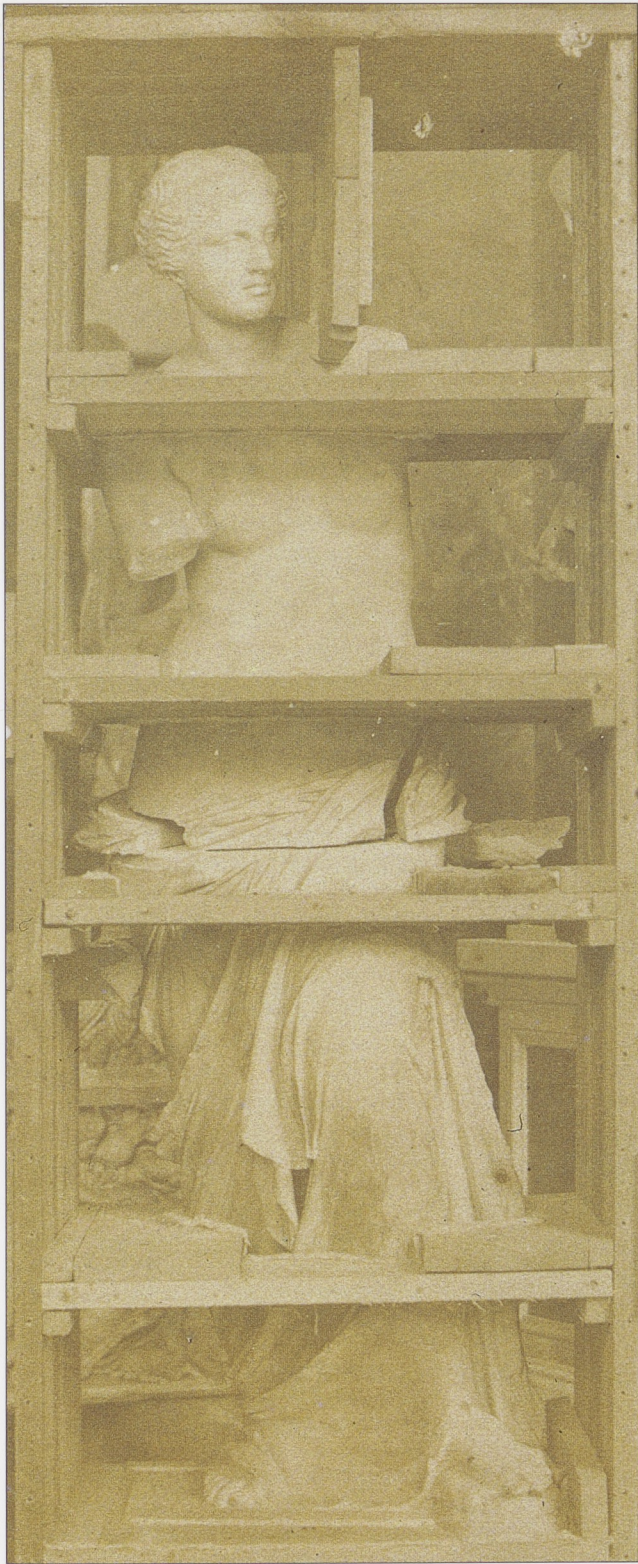
Machine aan de Kweekschool voor Machinisten te Amsterdam. Albumen print, in: *Kweekschool voor Machinisten. Jaarboekje der Kweekelingen*, Den Helder 1892 (2de jaargang). An uncommon industrial subject for a yearbook, the illustrations of which were largely confined to portraits of the rector and teaching staff.

Fig. 8

ANONYMOUS

Venus de Milo in a crate. Albumen print, in: F. Ravaisson, *La Vénus de Milo*, Paris 1871.

One of the great icons of western art caught in an unusual pose, standing in the packing crate used to remove her from her home in the Louvre to a place of safety during the bombardment of Paris in the Franco-Prussian war. An enigmatic image, proto-surrealist in effect if not in intent.



graphy provided a startling and more immediate alternative to conventional methods of illustration (Fig. 8), so the world wide web offers a forum for the exchange of goods in many ways more extensive and powerful than conventional markets. Books and the internet are natural partners, a partnership reinforced by the use of search engines and the provision of specialised antiquarian book sites. Quite simply put, the web has taken the waiting out of wanting. Whereas searching a particular title by conventional means once required painstaking hours of contacting booksellers individually or advertising in the trade press, the same operation can now be conducted in just a few minutes on the web. I grasped the opportunities offered by the new medium, as millions of items poured onto the internet from thousands of dealers worldwide. The connoisseur, armed with a portfolio of key words and 'magic' titles, had an innate advantage, and I thus managed to acquire several hundred titles from 1996 onwards. Needless to say, the initial rush, so reminiscent of the heady days of photography collecting two decades earlier, has since turned into a trickle, as these untapped sources have progressively dried up.

The successful and influential collector Werner Bokelberg once made a prescient comment on our singular métier: *You are basically working for the museums. Sooner or later every private collection will be with the public.*¹² Initially puzzled by the directness of his statement, I now appreciate the clarity of it. Public collections work well as a centripetal force. Institutional holdings of photographically illustrated publications are either the result of copyright deposit, such as in the major national libraries, or repose on the existence of acquisitive individuals whose desire to erect ramparts against the ravages of time spills over into the public domain. I have already

mentioned the J. Paul Getty Museum, so well served by Sam Wagstaff, André Jammes and others. A longer list would include the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, which houses the Gernsheim collection, the Norsk Museum for Fotografi, Horten, Norway, built upon Leif Preus' collection, and the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, the library of which owes much of its rich holdings to the limitless enthusiasm of Alden Scott Boyer.¹³ Nothing could have been further from my mind than the thought of 'placing' my collection when I first met Mattie Boom, at the opening of the exhibition *De techniek van de Nederlandse boekillustratie in de 19e eeuw*, held at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague in 1995.¹⁴

We readily communicated our mutual interest in the field, and our contacts increased. In retrospect, the Rijksmuseum's acquisition of my collection, now numbering nearly 2,000 separate volumes, seems a natural outcome, the organic conclusion to my endeavours, these last twenty years, to re-evaluate this fascinating chapter in printing history, and to demonstrate that photographic book illustration merits full and focused research in an appropriate setting as an exceptional cultural and technical phenomenon.

*The very best collections are usually those which select, study, appreciate, integrate and value the material on many different levels; all working together and, by either sheer number or serendipitous association, enriching the total.*¹⁵ During the sixty years up to 1900, conventional photography evolved and transformed the practice and craft of book illustration through the application of successive waves of photomechanical processes. In the present day, a similar revolution is being wrought by means of photography and digital imaging. It is my ambition that the collection will provide new generations of researchers with the source material to study in depth the important milestones of the earlier revolution, documenting how photography first made a technological and artistic impact on our visual and intellectual culture (Fig. 9).

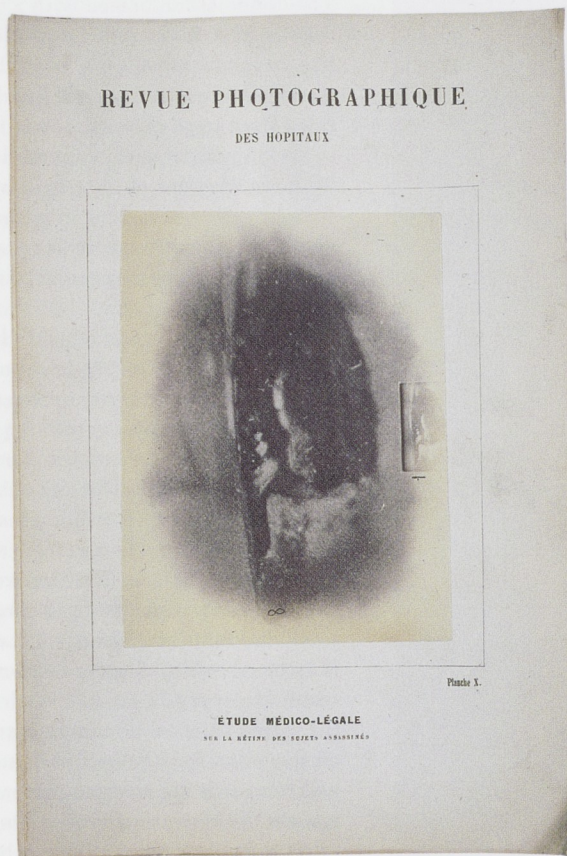


Fig. 9

A. DE MONTMÉJA
Etude medico-légale sur la rétine des sujets assassinés. Albumen print, in: *Revue photographique des hôpitaux de Paris*, 1870. The notion that the last image seen by a dying person would be imprinted on the retina gained credence in some medical circles.

Experiments were conducted to ascertain whether this final image could be photographed in the case of murder victims, in order to assist the criminal investigation. An explicit analogy is thus made between the human eye and the brass-lidded camera lens.

NOTEN

- 1 Robert A. Sobieszek, 'Introduction', in: *Stephen White's Photo Album Gallery. Catalogue 1977 Photographica*, Los Angeles 1977, n.p.
- 2 I am referring principally to Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *The History of Photography from the Camera Obscura to the Beginning of the Modern Era*, London/New York 1969, Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present*, New York 1964, Raymond Lecuyer, *Histoire de la photographie*, Paris 1945 and Josef Maria Eder, *Geschichte der Photographie*, Halle 1932, translated as *History of Photography*, New York 1945.
- 3 Lucien Goldschmidt and Weston J. Naef, *The Truthful Lens. A survey of the photographically illustrated book 1844-1914*, New York 1980, contains 192 annotated entries.
- 4 Helmut Gernsheim, *Incunabula of British Photographic Literature. A bibliography of British photographic literature 1839-75 and British books illustrated with original photographs*, London/Berkeley 1984, with 638 entries based to a large extent on the author's own collection; Frank Heidtmann, *Wie das Photo ins Buch kam. Der Weg zum photographisch illustrierten Buch anhand einer bibliographischen Skizze der frühen deutschen Publikationen mit Original-Photographien, Photolithographien, Lichtdrucken, Photogravuren, Autotypen und mit Illustrationen in weiteren photomechanischen Reproduktionsverfahren*, Berlin 1984, with 3105 entries mostly culled from the systematic combing of 19th-century secondary sources.
- 5 *Le Chevalier L.P.T. Dubois de Nehaut (1799-1872): sa vie et son œuvre*, Antwerp/Brussels 1987; *Edmond Fierlants (1829-1869): photographies d'art et d'architecture*, Charleroi/Brussels 1988; *A l'aube de la photographie en Belgique: Guillaume Claine (1811-1869) et son cercle*, Charleroi/Brussels 1991, and the two-volume *Directory of Photographers in Belgium 1839-1905*, Antwerp/Rotterdam 1997.
- 6 *De Andere Fotografie. De geschiedenis van de fotomechanische reproductie in de negentiende eeuw*, Vlissingen 1989.
- 7 I applied the approach recommended for the analysis of technological innovation by François Russo, *Introduction à l'histoire des techniques*, Paris 1986.
- 8 For an explanation of these processes, see the section 'Fotografische procédés/Photographic processes' in: Mattie Boom and Hans Rooseboom, *Een nieuwe kunst. Fotografie in de 19de eeuw. De Nationale Fotocollectie in het Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*, Amsterdam/Ghent 1996, pp. 289-293.
- 9 Harry Lunn, 'Hunter-Gatherers in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Aperture* 124 (1991), pp. 46-49. This special issue is subtitled 'Connoisseurs & Collections'.
- 10 Here might be an appropriate place to pay tribute to some of the many individuals who have supported my endeavours, and whose eagle eyes and quick-witted action have contributed so much to the collection. I cite my work colleagues Michael Hocken and Tim McNamara, the bookdealers Martijn and Ada Oleff in Brussels, Fred and Elizabeth Pajerski in New York City, Charles B. Wood III of Cambridge, Massachusetts, my friendly collecting rivals David A. Hanson of New Jersey and Stephen White of Los Angeles, and last but not least, my collaborators and fellow researchers Tristan Schwilden and Dr Anthony Hamber.
- 11 An extensive selection from the Werner Neite collection had previously been exhibited at the Museum voor Fotografie in Antwerp. The accompanying catalogue *Fotografie als boekillustratie*, Antwerp 1988, has entries for 60 titles, including 6 from the museum's own holdings and 7 secondary titles.
- 12 'The Collection of Werner Bokelberg', *Aperture* 124 (1991), p. 4.
- 13 For an account of this endearing eccentric's collecting activities, see Rachel Stuhlman, "'It isn't Sanity, but it Sure is Fun'", *Image* 34 (1991), nos. 1-2, pp. 23-28.
- 14 The accompanying catalogue *De techniek van de Nederlandse boekillustratie in de 19e eeuw*, Amstelveen 1995 contains informative and well illustrated essays by *inter alia* Jan Coppens (mounted prints), Ad van Iersel (colloTYPE) and Johan de Zoete (heliogravure, Woodburytype, half-tone relief printing).
- 15 Robert A. Sobieszek, *op.cit.* (note 1), *passim*.