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Introduction to the issue devoted to photographic albums.

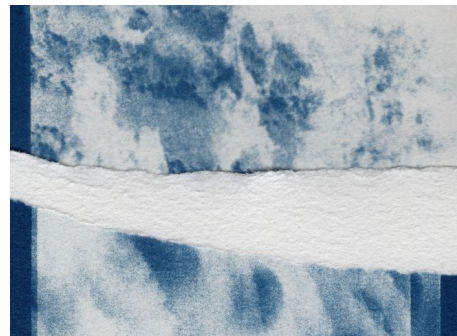
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Photoalbums

Various forms of albums demand different movements and gestures – bending the body, bringing the album closer to the eyes, gently flicking the tissue paper with the hand. Albums are not just there to be looked at; they require much more than optical engagement.

First, it is as if the album moves us, and at this stage we already begin an adventure and a relationship with it. The photographs in it are not mere illustrations, and the reading of the album should not be linear. Its form encourages complex interaction, opens space for imagination, and enters memory in a peculiar way. We know we are dealing with a photo album by what we do with it and what it does to us.

The current issue of *View*, dedicated to photo albums, has been conceived and edited in cooperation with the Centre for Photography of the Museum of Warsaw. The curatorial team of the exhibition *Lovely Is the Youth of Our Age. Photo Albums 1850–1950*¹ aimed to engage anew with the Museum's collection of photo albums. The albums have been collected by generations of people working there, fascinated by them. For various reasons, these objects were mostly regarded as collections of photographs, with their specific character as albums repeatedly overlooked or ignored. There are some albums in the Museum's collection that have kept the curatorial team engaged and curious. We knew that they could say much more or something different than before, if only the right questions were asked. We began with the observation that albums are the natural habitat of photography – it is in them that its greatest potential is discovered; it works there as if freed from rules. At the same



An over air pursuit of likeness (formation study 1) (detail) 2021

time, albums pose a research and curatorial challenge, and new tools, languages, and procedures are required to work on them, to capture the album as something other than a product, a document, or a work of art. The field for their exploration has been joint work on the exhibition dedicated to photo albums as well as on the current issue of *View*.

It was important for us to recognize that an album is a performative object – it evokes stories, connections, and affects, and its effect goes far beyond what can be seen in the photographs. It also took a change in our work habits for us to recognize that an album's authorship can be very complex.² The album is co-created by the people who took the photos, selected them, pasted them, signed them, sometimes deleted them, and finally viewed them, telling a different story each time. Yet questions remain: Is the album made or maintained? Is one its creator, owner, or compiler? Or more a participant, if the album is understood primarily as a special practice? Sometimes the person offering an album or gifted with one seems most relevant. Simply noticing these many different roles and stages of creation can be an answer in itself, as it is often impossible to determine who specifically created a given album, since it is an activity that does not require a signature. Albums lose their value when they are expected to be as unique and coherent as works of art. Reflecting on what is repetitive, banal, or unfinished in them draws attention to the practices associated with them.³ During our work, we also realized that a photo album is a lasting object – a torn-out photo, an added caption or number, and a change of owner all contribute to its history. Each time it is opened, every intervention and interpretation adds a new layer. One such layer is also created by our gesture of publicly displaying albums, many of which were originally intended for a narrow audience.

While working on the exhibition, the curatorial team sought a key to arranging the objects, but the divisions that arose based

on form or function always seemed to miss the mark in terms of what particularly interested us and what we wanted to exhibit. We have wondered how the photo album works – how it might have worked on its original audience, how it works on us today. Does it evoke feelings, allow associations and stories to be created, enable a sense of connection, or perhaps seem to report events or oblige us to remember? We named the two main parts of the exhibition *Developing* and *Fixing*, wanting to point to the tension and intertwining of these modes of operation, especially in the context of a museum, where the reception of each object is inseparable from its status as testimony to the past.

We noticed that many albums could be included in both parts. They would then take on different meanings, different aspects would gain importance, and the entire constellation would acquire a new sense. We were fascinated by these relationships, by the conversations between the albums. We were interested in what was happening between albums placed side by side: Aneta Grzeszykowska's *Album* (2022) and the private album of a young mother from 1937; an album given as a name day gift in 1943 with the epigraph "Lovely is the youth of our age" written on a page and the album of a German Red Cross nurse who spent her formative years in occupied Warsaw.

The tension between *Developing* and *Fixing* reminded us of a thought expressed in a text about a nineteenth-century album devoted to the construction of the Kierbedź Bridge: in albums, "the photograph wavers between accepting its status as a document and a souvenir, between being an image and an object."⁴ As André Rouillé notes, it is in the album that its modern potential, or even the potential of modernity, is realized:

It would be difficult to count all the albums that were published in only a few copies since the late 1840s and which collected original collections of photographs. [...] The albums will cover such diverse fields as architecture, public works,

travel and exploration of previously unknown places in the world, science and industry, medicine, archaeology, war, and will feature nudes, portraits of famous figures, photographs taken during the Paris Commune, current events, etc. [...] The combination of photography and albums is therefore the first important and modern instrument for documenting the world and creating image archives. For almost a century, albums and documentary photography existed in perfect symbiosis,⁵ even before the development of agencies and archives.

The opposite of engaging with documentary photography is the practice of viewing family photos, where even an empty album can support the processes of remembering and the affective operations associated with individual and collective memory. Philistwa Lila described this in an inspiring way. Her family album, emptied of photos and bearing the traces of many people's touch, remained – and perhaps became even more of – a source of connection:

In a sense, the album is empty, but not devoid of the ability to communicate as a visual object. The absence of photographs is not the issue here, because the residues of human touch, stains and traces left by the removed photographs provide me with items to look at and think about; to interpret the symbolic narrative experiences that attend to remembering or piecing together memories. [...] My family photo album embodies memories that concern the people who made contact with the album or who impacted on the processes of its meanings. The album carries on it marks of its history and of its representation as a timeworn object that was at one point an active record of the collective entity called the family.⁶

Referring to the work of researcher Nthabiseng Motsemme, the artist shows that an album can be thought of as a "site" where memories are collected so that they can be revisited.

The most obvious category, the "family album," was the most difficult for us to exemplify. We could imagine a "typical" family

album, but upon closer inspection, almost every one turned out to be something different or something more than. Perhaps a family album is more of a metaphor, a cliché, a social pattern that does not need to be confirmed by any specific album.⁷ In this sense, an album can also be a site of shared imagination. Albums such as *Fotografie chłopów polskich* [*Photographs of Polish Peasants*, 1993] or *I ciągle widzę ich twarze* [*And I Still See Their Faces*, 1996], whose publication was preceded by public collections and exhibitions, can be understood in a similar way.

The exhibition *Lovely Is the Youth of Our Age* has also become a site for questions about the role of albums that were never made but existed as projects in the collective imagination. The expectations placed on them and the role they were assigned seems to have created this site and the community around it. Such “non-existent albums” were presented in the third section of the exhibition, *Album as a Project*, alongside empty albums that draw attention to their construction and materiality.

An album is a haptic object that enables the material life of photographs, their journey between people, places, and times, with this movement leading to both the creation of albums and to their dismantling.⁸ To appreciate the importance of materiality one can, instead of looking, think about interacting with albums, about gestures, and through them, about establishing relationships. This perspective allows us to see the simultaneity of the image and the thing, and to treat the album not so much as a medium but as a form of the presence of photography.⁹

Perhaps we did not find “typical” albums because we did not want to reduce any of them to a template, and consequently a person’s life to a pattern. After all, it is precisely these repetitive and ordinary, yet unique and meaningful details that attracted us to albums. Even if we know the history of a given album, we always view it here and now. The way we read it is related to how the album and photography move us, touch us.¹⁰

Reflection on albums interests us so much because,

among other things, it brings us closer to questions about this emotion.

Lovely Is the Youth of Our Age was the first part of a collective reflection on theories, histories, and practices related to photo albums. The second part, the conference titled *Photo album. Practice, metaphor, context*, took place on April 8–9, 2024, at the Museum of Warsaw.¹¹ Its aim was to exchange experiences on working with albums in an international environment of researchers, curators, and artists. The current issue of *View* is yet another episode of this conversation and exchange of tools between museum, academic, and creative communities.

The issue opens with **Viewpoint**, in which we present Izabela Pluta's project *Every even page from a nineteenth century photo album* (2013), consisting of twenty-one pigment prints on photo rag paper and an essay by the artist. These are the results of artistic research on the role of photography in shaping memory and experience, in which collecting and collage play a central part as gestures and strategies for producing reflective objects. Expressing her fascination with fragmentation, the artist deconstructs the photo album as a choreography of gazes. Olga Stanisławska's album of Israel "Julek" Gombiński is part of a larger project titled *Legacy (Something in Common)*, which the researcher, who calls herself a "spoken history labourer," began in 2007 by focusing on Sompolno, where her father, Ryszard Stanisławski, a historian, art historian, art critic, and long-time director of the Museum of Art in Łódź, was born, grew up, and spent the war. Sompolno is located in the historic Kujawy region, between Lake Gopło, Licheń, and Chełm on the Ner River. Stanisławska calls her project a "rescue history," looking back with concern and reaching for stories that have survived from the multicultural town, a phantom of a certain territory and a certain community. In the eyes of Stanisławska, daughter and listener, Gombiński's album becomes a potential gateway to

that world, a meeting point where many times and places coexist.

In **Perspectives**, the team of researchers and curators from the Museum of Warsaw's Centre for Photography shares the results of their research on individual photo albums in the Museum's collection. Thanks to these in-depth case studies, we gain insight not only into the complicated histories and materiality of these objects, but also, most importantly, into the self-reflective experience of encountering this type of collection, the intricacies of archival work, and the empathetic encounters with the protagonists of these albums. Katarzyna Adamska recounts her work on the "controversial testimony" of two photo albums by Rosemarie Lincke (1917–2001), a German Red Cross nurse working in Warsaw during World War II, which the author analyzes together with Lincke's preserved negatives and letters. These albums tell a story of travel and life in a foreign land, of work in a hospital and the destruction of the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. Adamska raises questions about the photographic gaze then and now. Ewa Nowak-Mitura, in her text "An Album of Scenes from Rural Life?" analyzes a series of photographs taken in 1856 by amateur photographer Marcin Olszyński in the village of Starogród near Warsaw, which she treats as a fascinating and innovative project. In her view, the album becomes something more than ethnographic documentation, as it forms a narrative primarily about the photographer's labor and relationships. Julia Staniszevska's essay titled "From the Point of View of the Factory Director" also deals with labor. The author analyzes the album of Stefan Stattler, an employee and technical director (1872–1912) of the Lilpop, Rau and Loewenstein factory. For Staniszevska, a key to her reading of the album, which is largely a story of the company's success, is the last page, which she interprets in a deconstructive spirit as a kind of affective provocation by Stattler. In turn, Monika Michałowicz shares her experience of curatorial engagement with three photo albums by Stella Szacherska (1911–1997), a historian, medievalist, archivist,

and translator. She is primarily interested in the role that the practice of creating photo albums might have played in Szacherska's intimate and professional life, and treats the objects themselves as evidence of a very special undertaking of self-discovery. This text brings together two self-reflective projects: that of the album creator and that of the researcher.

Close-Up opens with Andrea Kunard's "Constantly Unfolding and Consistently Present: The Active Life of Historical Photograph Albums." The article explores the many lives of the photographs within the albums – seen by the author as a predominantly imaginative and creative medium – as they unfold across numerous temporalities and sites, and suggest themselves as oral, auditory, visual, as well as tactile experiences. These in turn are responsible for the heterogenous imaginative collectives of viewers who engage with the photographs. In "Jo Spence: Radicalizing the Family Album," Patrizia Di Bello offers a close reading of Spence's *Beyond the Family Album*, as well as opening the artwork up to much broader and still resonant questions of a socialist feminist perspective. Spence was devoted to critiquing the genre of the family album and inventing a multi-layered alternative to it that tells of domestic joy and hardship, illness and powerlessness, the adventures of unruly bodies. Her album was supposed to be a site shared with others and an insight into the political import of photography. Di Bello stresses the continuing relevance of Spence's lessons. In "Foreign, but Homely: What Can Be Gained from Studying Family Vacation Albums?" Mette Sandbye analyzes Danish and British private vacation photo albums from the early 1970s in the broader cultural-historical context of the post-World War II welfare state societies of Northern and Western Europe and charter tourism. Mary Trent's contribution, "Re-envisioning African American Motherhood in Two Nineteenth-Century Women's Photographic Albums," examines albums created by Ellen Craft and Arabella Chapman. The

author concentrates on the relationships between these intimate visual objects and the creation and preservation of individual and collective identity and history. As her argument unfolds, Trent discovers unexpected social networks between African American women across times and places. This section of the journal concludes with a Polish translation of the chapter "Family Touches" from Tina Campt's influential *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (2012), which traces the emergence of the Black European subject by examining how specific Black European communities used family photography to create identity and community. The author examines two photographic archives, one of which consists mainly of snapshots of Black German families taken between 1900 and 1945. She shows how these photographs conveyed deep aspirations for national and cultural belonging. This is a remarkable reflection on what vernacular photography allowed Black Europeans to say about themselves and their communities.

The issue concludes with two **Snapshots**: an essay by Mikołaj Bojnarowicz, "Pesymizm pełen wiary" [Pessimism Full of Faith], devoted to Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Interviste corsare sulla politica e sulla vita 1955-1975* [*Pirate Interviews on Politics and Life, 1955-1975*], which the author interprets as an attempt to transcend the horizon of late capitalism. Pasolini emerges from this reading as a left-wing theorist for whom fascism is a tool of capitalism – a form of cultural violence serving its further reproduction and domination. Marta Gospodarczyk then looks at Wojciech Śmieja's book *Po męstwie* [*After Manhood*], reconstructing, following the author, the transformations of dominant cultural patterns and images of masculinity in Poland from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. The author reflects on Śmieja's conceptualizations of the "end of masculinity" and its past, placing them in the current political

context.

We invite you to delve into the world of photo albums, into the hustle and bustle of histories they collect and the emptiness that demands to be filled, or perhaps simply contemplated. As a medium for photography and memory, albums reveal their political, performative, and community-building potential. Enjoy!

Katarzyna Adamska, Monika Michałowicz, Katarzyna Bojarska



Documentation of the exhibition *Lovely Is the Youth of Our Age. Photo Albums 1850-1950*, Fot. Tomek Kaczor

- 1 The curatorial team included Karolina Puchała-Rojek, Anna Topolska, Piotr Głogowski, Ewa Nowak-Mitura, Monika Michałowicz, Julia Staniszevska, and Katarzyna Adamska. The exhibition took place at the Museum of Warsaw, Rynek Starego Miasta, February–May 2024.
- 2 This corresponds with the shared conviction that the authorship not only of albums but also of photography is a matter of collaboration. See Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, Wendy Ewald, Susan Meiselas, Leigh Raiford, and Laura Wexler, *Collaboration: A Potential History of Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2024).
- 3 Similar challenges face researchers of “amateur” photography, see Geoffrey Batchen, “SNAPSHOTS: Art history and the ethnographic turn,” *Photographies* vol. 1, no. 2 (2008).
- 4 Iwona Kurz, “Snapshots from the Construction of the Alexander Bridge on the Vistula River,” trans. Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, *View* no. 10 (2015), <https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2015/10-the-visual-complex-of-the-polish-nineteenth-century/snapshots-from-the-construction-of-the-alexander-bridge-on-the-vistula>.
- 5 André Rouillé, *Photography: Between Document and Contemporary Art*, trans. O. Hedemann (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 107–108.
- 6 Philiswa Lila, “Navigating personal memories in my family photo album,” <https://www.creativeknow.org/bopawritersforum/navigating-personal-memories-in-my-family-photo-album-3nhf8> (accessed May 2025).
- 7 Iwona Kurz, *Album rodzinny*, in: *Obyczaje polskie. XX wiek w krótkich hasłach*, ed. Małgorzata Szpakowska (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2008).
- 8 Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 18–19.
- 9 Margaret Olin, *Touching Photographs* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).
- 10 Campt, *Image Matters*, 31–34.
- 11 The exhibition and conference were part of the “Focus on Photography” grant implemented by the Museum of Warsaw and the National Museum of Iceland, thanks to the Norwegian Funds and the European Economic Area.

