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Major Photographic Archive of Art and Architecture Celebrates 75th Anniversary with Installation at National Gallery of Art



Unknown British photographer, Photo of Giorgione's *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1505/1510) while in the collection of Lord Allendale, gelatin silver print, 1935. Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library

Washington, DC—One of the largest archives of art and architecture images in the world will be celebrated in a new installation at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. On view from May 7 through August 24, 2018, ***In the Library: The Richter Archive at 75***, an exhibition of works drawn from the founding collection of 60,000 archival photographs, showcases the breadth of George M. Richter's priceless image archive on the 75th anniversary of its 1943 acquisition by the Gallery. The installation traces the history and development of the Richter Archive and its role in authenticating works of art and their provenance following World War II.

The George M. Richter Archive of Illustrations on Art

Created by George M. Richter (1875–1942), a collector and authority on Renaissance art, the archive consists of 60,000 photographs and clippings from books and catalogs with a special concentration in Italian painting. The acquisition of the Richter Archive was particularly important because of growing concern for art and architecture lost or destroyed during World War II. Announcing the gift in a press release dated August 1943, the Gallery stated that "the photographs . . . will be an invaluable record of many works of art from great European museums now either destroyed or dispersed. The photographs of paintings in private collections, to which Mr. Richter had access, are in many cases unique, and may be of great assistance in establishing the rightful ownership of works of art when the war is over."

History of the Department of Image Collections

Today the library's department of image collections oversees nearly seven million black-and-white photographs and negatives and more than seven million microform and digital images, making the collection one of the most extensive in the world.

After the historic acquisition of the Richter Archive in 1943, the National Gallery of Art Library purchased photographs from the New York branch of the French art dealers Durand-Ruel at the Parke-Bernet Galleries in 1950. This group of approximately 14,000 photographs depicts all the works of art sold by the firm in Paris—primarily impressionist works—including some sale information on the versos and, in rare instances, identifications of sitters. At some unknown point in the Library's history the Library photo collection was merged with Richter Archive, and subsequent photographic acquisitions by the Library were added to this combined photographic archive. The photo collection of Gustav Glück (1871–1952), Austrian art historian and former director of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, was purchased for the Richter Archive in 1955. They were soon joined by purchased and exchanged photos from European museums and clippings from duplicate sales catalogs.

In 1970 plans were announced to establish a photographic archive at the Gallery with the Richter gift as its core. Through a generous start-up grant and the promise of continued support from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Alessandro "Sandrino" Contini-Bonacossi was hired in September 1970 as the archive's first curator. Contini-Bonacossi, who had previously served as a curator at the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, quickly began amassing what the Kress Foundation's vice president described as "one of the great photographic collections of the world."

A year later the photographic archive had acquired nearly 2.5 million photographs. The purchase in July 1971 of approximately 130,000 negatives from the Parke-Bernet auctions and the gift of the Clarence Ward Medieval Architecture Archive nearly doubled the archive's holdings. Other

acquisitions included the purchase of the Foto Reali and Gramstorff negatives, as well as the complete offerings of Fratelli Alinari. Contini-Bonacossi also initiated the archive's associations with Zodiaque and the Corpus Photographicum of Drawings.

Contini-Bonacossi was succeeded by Ruth Philbrick in 1975, who continued to strengthen the archive by seeking out notable commercial and private collections. Among the numerous important collections acquired during her tenure are the René Huyghe and Venturi/Rewald archives, the archives of the Witt Library and the Conway Library on microfiche, and images from Art International and the Munich Central Collecting Point.

In 2004, under the leadership of Gregory P. J. Most, chief of the department of image collections, the photographic archive and the slide library were merged into a single resource. Most has continued to expand the collection with the addition of a digital imaging program, the acquisition of the Paul Katz Archive of portraits of artists, and the Cleveland Museum of Art Photograph Library and its extensive non-Western holdings, in addition to rare photographs and albums that document the history of art and architecture. The department of image collections' reciprocal relationships with other departments at the Gallery, especially the curatorial offices, has resulted in the development of an exhibition archive—photographs, transparencies, and negatives documenting objects from every exhibition in the Gallery's history.

The department serves the Gallery's staff, CASVA members, visiting scholars, and qualified researchers. Initial access to the library is by appointment, Monday through Friday. Call (202) 842-6026 or email image-collections@nga.gov for more information.

The installation is organized by the National Gallery of Art Library and curated by Gregory P. J. Most. It is open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, in the East Building Study Center.

Library and Rare Books Collection

The National Gallery of Art Library, founded in 1941, contains more than 400,000 books and periodicals, including more than 15,000 volumes in the rare books collection, with an emphasis on Western art from the Middle Ages to the present. In 1979, with the move to a seven-story facility in the Gallery's new East Building and the establishment of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA), the library broadened its purpose and the scope of its collection. Its goal has been to establish a major national art research center, serving the Gallery's curatorial, educational, and conservation staff, CASVA members, interns, visiting scholars, and researchers in the Washington art community. Call (202) 842-6511 or email refdesk@nga.gov for more information.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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Press Release

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