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Lonely Aphrodites: On the Documentary Photography of Sculpture

Mary Bergstein

Sculpture, Photography, and Time

Photographs of sculpture are representations of representations: charged with nuances of the photographer's choice as well as the cultural circumstances of their formation and reception, photographs of sculpture define their own realities, which are dense and self-referential. Photography and sculpture have long enjoyed a close, complicit relationship, which is determined by an inherent asymmetry: whereas photography does not especially lend itself to being sculptured, sculpture (three-dimensional, static, and inflected by light) is a highly photogenic art form.¹ If the work of sculpture is to be considered the primary referent, then the intervening photographic process, with its inevitable subjectivity, propels the representational image away from the referent, if psychologically closer to the beholder. In the history of sculpture, photography acts as a mode of critical intervention, and so, simply stated, the documentary photography of sculpture is a special area of art historiography.

The fourth dimension, time, determines both mediums, sculpture and photography, in reception as well as expression. Traditional Western statuary tends to be hard, opaque, and monumental, and it aspires to durability in metaphorical language in addition to descriptive fact. Permanence is essential to the sculptural presence: even according to the rather grudging *paragone* of Leonardo, "the one advantage that sculpture has [over painting] is that of offering a greater resistance to time."² The essential physical and metaphorical fabric of photography, instead, is perceived as soft and transparent, a rapid, mechanically easy process that aspires to neutrality and a relatively compressed survey of continuously concatenated but separable moments whereby the permanence of the depicted object evaporates into time.³ Insoluble paradoxes about photography and time surface in contemporary literature. Roland Barthes, for example, coined the metaphor that cameras are essentially "clocks for seeing," and that photographs provide a "certain but fugitive

testimony" to historical time.⁴ James C. A. Kaufmann puts it differently in his essay on photographs and history, contending that, "History is temporally evolved, the product of time, and the photograph deflates time."⁵

If works of sculpture have semi-secret, acquired lives of their own, shaped by the accidents of history and by the historical stance of the beholder, then photography reacts, as it were, to that accreted circumstance ("takes" it, as we take a picture), and plays the part of the framing, isolating, interpreting voyeur. Notions of the human-made inter-fabrications of photography, sculpture, and historical time have been addressed by such seemingly disparate authors as Susan Sontag, Marguerite Yourcenar, and Donald Preziosi.⁶ Sontag was the first to observe that "old" photographs, like the ruins of ancient monuments, become more desirable through the passage of time: each medium acquires a special patination and a romantic detachment from quotidian context that enhance its value as a stimulant to the historical imagination.⁷ Yourcenar concerned herself with the aging of figurative sculpture, "hard objects, fashioned in an imitation of forms of organic life [which have] . . . in their own way undergone the equivalent of fatigue, age, and unhappiness," and continue to suffer or benefit from the "shifts in taste of their admirers."⁸ Preziosi cares about the constructed discipline of art history and the tendency of the historian to assume the dominance of finite objects through the panopticism of the photographer's lens. Whereas the reader of Yourcenar's essay (or Sontag's) is invited to contemplate the psychological mode in which we receive concrete figurative remnants from the remote past (through veils of patination and the accidental fracture of fragmentation), Preziosi critiques the technical apparatus of academic art history, that is, the way in which photography as a pseudo-science has claimed ("taken") these transmogrified objects for speculation in the present tense.⁹ All of these writers, however, are engaged in examining the relativity, elasticity, and subjectiv-

Of the many friends and colleagues who share my interest in the photography of sculpture, Baruch Kirschenbaum, Elizabeth Bartman, and Emanuela Sesti were especially helpful in the early preparation of this essay. I am indebted to Joel Snyder for his astute critical reading of a draft of this article for *The Art Bulletin*: the subsequent revisions to my text cannot do justice to the eloquence of his critique.

¹ The relationship is causal rather than symbolic, and not actually reversible: the photograph acts upon the referent object. For an analogue, see U. Eco, "De Consolatione Philosophiae," in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. W. Weaver, New York, 1986, 221–255: "The stroke of lightning burns the tree; the male member inseminates the female uterus. These relationships are not reversible: The tree does not burn the stroke of lightning, and woman does not inseminate man" (p. 248).

² Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 2038, cc. 24, 25, quoted and trans. in *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, ed. I. Richter, New York and Oxford, 1987, 207.

³ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard, New York, 1981.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 93–94.

⁵ J.C.A. Kaufmann, "Photographs and History: Flexible Illustrations," in *Reading into Photography*, 193–199; 198.

⁶ S. Sontag, *On Photography*, New York, 1977; M. Yourcenar, "That Mighty Sculptor, Time," trans. W. Kaiser, *New Criterion*, June, 1990, 85–87; 1st ed., "Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur," *La Revue des voyages*, xv, December, 1954; republ. in *Voyages*, Paris, 1981, 181–185, and in *Le Temps, ce grand sculpteur: Essais*, Paris, 1983, 59–66; Preziosi (in Sources).

⁷ Sontag (as in n. 6), 79.

⁸ Yourcenar, 85–87; quotations are from 1990 trans. unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ Preziosi, xiv, 72–76, 87, 158. See also reviews of Preziosi: W. Davis in *The Art Bulletin*, lxxii, 1, 1990, 156–166; A. Silvers in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, xlix, Winter, 1991, 95–96.

ity of a mutable point of view. Yourcenar's and Preziosi's themes, for instance, are more or less obliquely predicated upon ideas first announced in the essays of Walter Benjamin ("The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 1936) and André Malraux ("Museum without Walls," 1947).¹⁰ Benjamin and Malraux were among the first non-photographing theorists to set forth those salient precepts about the photographic "reproduction" of works of art—precepts with which our current conversation about the history of art (as well as the making of contemporary art) are particularly saturated.

Benjamin made claims in 1936 that may seem obvious to art historians—all art historians living in the later part of our century are perforce connoisseurs of photography—namely that, "process reproduction can bring out aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the lens, which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will"; and of course that, "technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself."¹¹ These quotations are excerpted from a study in which Benjamin was to some extent bringing an extended dialectical argument to observations made by the English inventor-practitioner William Henry Fox Talbot in *The Pencil of Nature*, which he composed almost a century earlier.¹² Fox Talbot had stated empirically that, "a very great number of different effects may be obtained from [photographing] a single specimen of sculpture."¹³ But the complex Benjaminian idea that the "aura" of the work of art may wither and disappear in reproduction is double-edged in the sense that the delectation of a photograph is inseparable from its function.¹⁴ And the enchantment and historical prestige of the original are typically augmented, not dissipated, by photography. Indeed, the ultimate significance of mechanical reproduction may be that when the same photographic images are used time and again in publication after

publication, they effectively displace the actual artifact in the collective art-historical imagination.

At a time when the commercialization of photography and the photography of art was at a post-World War II crescendo, André Malraux argued after the fashion of Benjamin against the "aura": to Malraux, photographic representation was the primary instrument of our intellectualization of art. Photography pressed that which was photographed to acquire significance through the denial, or at least the alteration of relative scale, so that the beholders' sensations of distance, be they physical or temporal, receded perceptually. Even as those orientations of time and place vanished, photography could create a homogeneous pool of images from which the sensitized eye could pick and choose (Fig. 1). In this way, the broken torso of a Praxitelean Venus could be set against a cropped photograph of a stone Apsara from Khadjuraho (India) for purposes of cross-cultural comparison (Fig. 2).¹⁵ Similarly, a small Scythian gold plaque from the steppes of Central Asia was photographed and published to the same scale as the large Romanesque horizontal stone relief figure of Eve at Autun: the works of sculpture become comparable in style, and their respective geographic locations are transcended (Fig. 3).¹⁶ Ergo, according to Malraux's system, the chooser can compare and contrast images in an almost algebraic way, as along the matrices established by Wölfflin and Panofsky. Malraux, who had been an art book editor since 1928 ("La Galerie de la Pléiade") and who became Minister of Culture under Charles de Gaulle, codified and elaborated a visual method that determines our classroom practice today.

Malraux's idea of the "fortunate mutilation" whereby "the fragment of sculpture is king," embraced, in that author's photographic universe of images, all known constellations: Khmer heads transplanted from French Indochina to France occupied the same psychological zone as the ruins of French Romanesque sculpture on French soil. Any kind of fragment was equally "set free [by photography] from its architectural setting and its God."¹⁷ According to Malraux, effective photography could cause a fragment or a detail to disclose the full significance of a work of art in its universal meaning according to a kind of reverse Gestalt configurationism. As the represented artifact is freed of its physical limitations, of its finite bulk, and the numinous aura of its site, the stance of the beholder becomes a particularly fertile coefficient in an essentially modernist dialogue that occurs between the photographed image (floating free in time and place) and the slippery cerebral state of its viewer. Marguerite Yourcenar disclosed no special fondness for, or aversion to, looking at photographs, but her thoughts on the sculptural fragment conform to the Malrauvian argument, especially his assertion that "mutilations [of sculpture], too, have a style."¹⁸

The idea of the "museum without walls" as a para-political enterprise that strategically defies ownership, nationalism,

¹⁰ W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1st French ed. in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1936), in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, New York, 1969, 217–251; A. Malraux, *Le Musée imaginaire (La Psychologie de l'art)*, 1, Geneva, 1947, *passim*. Malraux's *Musée imaginaire* appeared in English as *The Museum without Walls (The Psychology of Art)*, 1, trans. S. Gilbert, New York, 1949. See Malraux's subsequent works: *Les Voix du silence*, Paris, 1951; *The Voices of Silence*, trans. S. Gilbert, New York, 1953; and *Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale*, 3 vols., 1: *La Statuaire*; 11: *Des Bas-reliefs aux grottes sacrées*; 111: *Le Monde chrétien*, Paris, 1952–54. For complete Malraux bibliography in French and English, in order of publication, see P. Galante, *Malraux*, trans. H. Chevalier, New York, 1971, 260–262.

¹¹ Benjamin (as in n. 10), 220.

¹² See A. Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October*, xxxix, Winter, 1986, 3–64, who describes *The Pencil of Nature* as "a series of prescient meditations on the promise of photography" (p. 5).

¹³ From W.H.F. Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, London, 1844–46, in L.J. Schaaf, ed., *W.H. Fox Talbot, The Pencil of Nature, Anniversary Facsimile*, New York, 1989, 14. For the photography of plaster reproductions of sculpture by Fox Talbot and other early inventors, see Ballerini (in Sources; Professor Ballerini kindly provided me a copy of her paper in typescript form.) The quotation is related to Talbot's own photographs of the plaster cast of the bust of Patroclus, which he purchased in 1839 specifically for his photographic experiments, and photographed in 1844. See also *Pymalion photographe*, 65–67; and E.P. Janis, "Fabled Bodies: Some Observations on the Photography of Sculpture," in Fraenkel, 9–23; 7.

¹⁴ See R. Vine, "Walter Benjamin," *New Criterion*, June, 1990, 44, and A. Grundberg, "John Berger and Photography," *New Criterion*, March, 1983, 43.

¹⁵ Malraux, 1953 (as in n. 10), figs. 82–83.

¹⁶ Malraux, 1949 (as in n. 10), 26, and *passim*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62, and *passim*; *idem*, 1953, 21, 24, and *passim*.

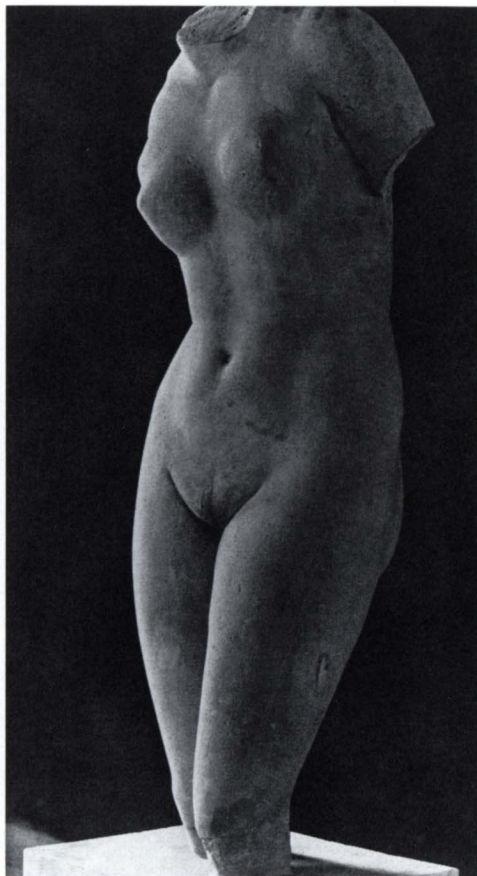
¹⁸ Malraux on the *Aphrodite from Melos*, 1953, 67; note that Yourcenar's essay first appeared in 1954 (see n. 6): the ideas she shared with Malraux include her notion that (1983, 62), "Certaines de ses modifications sont sublimes."



1 Maurice Jarnoux, *André Malraux at work*, in *Paris-Match*

and the Church, coincided with (if it did not cause) a marked rise in the study of Continental European art in America and Britain, and the study of Asian and African art outside their proper continents. Photography appeared to endow the

activity of looking at art with a calculable impartiality. Malraux would have sympathized, perhaps, with the postwar internationalist tone of Erwin Panofsky's "Three Decades of Art History in the United States" (1955): in this essay



2 *Apsara and Venus*, from Malraux, *Les Voix du silence*

Panofsky celebrated the twentieth-century arrival of photographic documentation per se, citing examples such as the "Index of Christian Iconography" at Princeton and Arthur Kingsley Porter's multi-volume scholarly handbook, *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads* (first ed. 1923).¹⁹ The transplanted European Panofsky made his medium into a metaphor when he stated that, "seen from the other side of the Atlantic, the whole of Europe from Spain to the eastern Mediterranean merged into one panorama the planes of which appeared at proper intervals and in equally sharp focus." In America, art historians "were able to see the past in a perspective picture undistorted by national and regional bias . . .," and "historical distance . . . proved to be replaceable by cultural and geographic distance."²⁰ This Malrauvian posture as articulated by Panofsky represents exactly the phenomenon that Preziosi has analyzed critically, namely that, "art history as we know it today is the child of photography."²¹ Preziosi's critique of the discipline spurs us to recognizing that the universal "museum without walls" is a problematic concept, charged with polyvalent, contradictory ideologies. If in some sense to deny local ownership means to permit ownership to "everyone" (or at least to a stratum of people in the West), then the museum without walls also runs

the risk of becoming a closed, authoritative archive that locks its material referents into ordered sets for pre-packaged consumption.²²

Let me turn to an example of such ordering that has, I believe, political overtones: a 1950 UNESCO publication entitled *Répertoire international des archives photographiques d'oeuvres d'art/International Directory of the Photographic Archives of Works of Art*.²³ The UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) *Répertoire* is a handbook that consists of an indexed guide to photographic resources of works of art in 1,195 collections worldwide. In the introduction, Leigh Ashton (then director of the Victoria and Albert Museum) extolled the "standard document, the guide and counsellor of all study, the photograph." Speaking as photographic reproduction did, with what he called an "International voice," Ashton maintained that photographic material had its own "cultural value."²⁴ Photography of art is thus characterized as a scholarly and diplomatic commodity, not only complementary to, but comparable with, and in some sense even superior to, the intuitive, subjective instrument of human memory. If, as John Berger states, "the camera relieves us of the burden of memory," then this photo-inflicted amnesia would appear to be the

¹⁹ E. Panofsky, "Three Decades of Art History in the United States: Impressions of a Transplanted European," epilogue in *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, New York, 1955, 321–346; 325.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 325, 328–329.

²¹ Preziosi, 72.

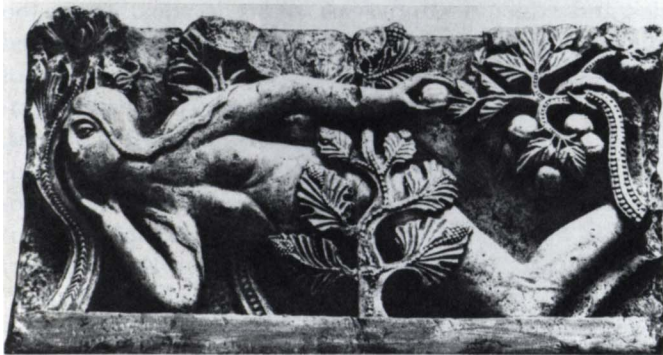
²² Silvers (as in n. 9), 95.

²³ *Répertoire international des archives photographiques d'oeuvres d'art/International Directory of Photographic Works of Art*, intro. L. Ashton, Paris, 1950.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.



from the Steppes be shown above a Romanesque bas-relief, in the same format, it becomes a bas-relief. Thus reproductions can free a style from the limitations which make it seem a minor art.



3 Scythian Animal and Eve from Autun from *Les Voix du silence*

basis for the practice of much art-historical study, especially in the United States.²⁵ Just as Susan Sontag regards the collection of pictures in the Alinari enterprise (founded in the 1850s and still going strong) as a symbolic reflection of the political unification of Italy, the vast self-conscious awareness of photographic holdings that was acknowledged by the UNESCO *Répertoire* seems to have presented the photography of art, packaged and indexed, as a cultural prelude to the political unification of the world.²⁶ The political problematics of this phenomenon—a situation that sanctioned the potential for extra-nationals to survey and assimilate Asian, African, and European art for their own supposedly unbiased delectation and research—are complex. The ethical implications of the colonization of cultures distant in time and place through the photography of art might be argued forever.²⁷ And although Malraux's vision (and some of his personal actions) remained contradictory on the subject of property, the nation, and the Church, his idea of the expansive, visually elastic photographic museum was essentially liberating insofar as it removed (according to

²⁵ J. Berger, "The Uses of Photography," in *About Looking*, New York, 1980, 48–63.

²⁶ Sontag, in Colombo and Sontag, 12–13.

²⁷ The question is addressed by A. Scharf, *Art and Photography*, Baltimore, 1969, 253–254.

²⁸ For the life and work of Malraux, see J. Flanner, "The Human Condition," in *Men and Monuments*, New York, 1957, 1–70.

the precepts of Walter Benjamin) the capital and emotive premium from the "original" work of art.²⁸ Antiquated property rights and national borders could be vanquished through photography, in the interest of the humanities.

I and others see Malraux's dicta as ethically poignant, as well as open to debate. But setting aside the problematic political implications of the photography of art, there remains the abiding question of the documentary verity of the photographic medium as reproductive. The photography of art may be a genre unto itself, but its study is burdened with oppositions that have haunted the study of photography for the past century: objectivity versus subjectivity, documentation versus interpretation, transparency versus opacity.²⁹

Paintings and other primarily two-dimensional images represented through photography are already several times removed from presumed authenticity. But sculpture (precisely because of its photogenic properties) may be the plastic art most deflated, most deprived of its substance in photographic representation.³⁰ When it comes to the depiction of sculpture, it is simply a trivial truth that a picture cannot replicate a three-dimensional object. But unlike natural landscape or human physiognomy, sculpture is a human-fabricated, three-dimensional object of representation to begin with. What the photograph, the slide transparency, and the art book do to sculpture is to transform it ipso facto into pictorial art. Drained of physical presence, its density, mass, and textural qualities are replaced with representations of those qualities in the cool play of light on sensitized paper or the hot translucent internal glow of the color slide projected with electric light.³¹ For these reasons, the typical student of

²⁹ The most recent and valuable essay on the subject is B.E. Savedoff, "Transforming Images: Photographs of Representations," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, L, Spring, 1992, 93–106. See also G. Currie, "Photography, Painting and Perception," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XLIX, Winter, 1991, 23–29. W.M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication*, Cambridge, Mass., 1969, 144–147, 176–177, maintained that photographs had the advantage of objectivity as opposed to the culturally determined biases of the engraving: subjectivity was bypassed in effect by the mechanical nature of the camera. Ivins's view was refuted by E. Jussim, *Visual Communications and the Graphic Arts*, New York and London, 1974, 297–301. J. Snyder and N.W. Allen, "Photography, Vision, and Representation," in *Reading into Photography*, note that "writers as diverse as Etienne Gilson, R.G. Collingwood, Stanley Cavell, William Ivins, and E.H. Gombrich (and only Gombrich entertains doubts as to the usual reference to photography to settle questions of pictorial fact) have all used photography as a benchmark of 'pictorial fact' against which to measure the more traditional pictorial media" (pp. 61–91; 66). The demystification of photographs as documentary "proof" of property rights, classifications of people, or historical and archaeological fact is argued by S. Armitage and W.E. Tydeman, intro., *Reading into Photography*, 3–6; and Kaufmann (as in n. 5), *passim*. The impossibility that the photograph can be a representation of neutral fact is also a theme of Sontag's work (as in n. 6 and in Sources). A good overview is provided by Williams, 5–9.

³⁰ See, for example, the beautiful passage opening A.S. Byatt's short story entitled "Art Work" (*New Yorker*, May 20, 1991, 36–51), in which she describes a black and white art book reproduction of Matisse's *Le Silence habité des maisons*: "It is a dark little image on the page: charcoal gray, slate gray, soft pale pencil-gray—subdued, demure. We may imagine it flaming, in carmine or vermilion, or swaying in indigo darkness, or perhaps—beyond the window—gold and green. We may imagine it."

³¹ See E. Wind, "The Mechanization of Art," in *Art and Anarchy*, London, 1964, 68–84, who took exception to Malraux's principle of small objects attaining the plastic eloquence of monuments through photography. See also Savedoff (as in n. 29), 95–96 and *passim*.

art history, especially when learning about art from other continents, apprehends sculpture as a pictorial and serial experience—an experience that usually consists of looking at illustrations cropped and printed on the pages of a book, or watching color slides projected on a screen in a darkened room. Violette de Mazia's eccentric pamphlet entitled *The Lure and Trap of Color Slides in Art Education*, published recently under the auspices of the Barnes Foundation, remarks on a “duplicious collaboration” of projected light with the dark surroundings at a slide lecture, the mood of which “blur[s] our identity, captivates, fascinates, casts a spell.”³² For de Mazia, the color slide is a kind of “tainted ambrosia,” and her metaphor of the menu—the pamphlet is subtitled “A Repast in Five Courses Followed by Entertainment and Postprandial Musings Hosted by the Proud Possessors’ Club”—goes on to posit that through slides, “. . . everything has been so sugarcoated, made so easy of access and so appealing in color and glow, that our taste for the ‘real thing’ may have been surreptitiously undermined, even destroyed.”³³ She argues in favor of the aura of the original and believes that the “attempt to study paintings by way of ‘performances’ in entirely different media,” namely the color slide or print, has no place in the study of art. De Mazia was concerned mostly with the ills of translating easel paintings into slide form; but in photographic transformation, the apprehension of bas-relief or statuary in space is equally traduced when filtered first by the photographer through the lens of the camera and then through a sequential scansion of pages or a quasi-cinematic viewing. Violette de Mazia might have had more in common with Donald Preziosi than either of them would have tended to acknowledge: both are troubled by the fact that slide transparencies have forced the learning of art history into a quasi-cinematic matrix.³⁴

In the forum of the art book, too, the photographer metamorphoses an image, which itself is as much a gloss on the history of the primary object as is the column of text at its side. And frequently books are composed as though the photographs were the fundamental material to be “read,” with the text functioning as an accompanying illustrative apparatus. (Malraux's own “museum of the imagination,” for instance, reveals the ways in which the varying frames used to display a photograph on the page can determine the reception of information about a work of art.) The representation of sculpture and its appropriation by photography isolate (or even fabricate) pictorial, narrative, and anecdotal elements in the visual encounter. The apprehension of such images makes the activity of considering sculpture (“looking at”

sculpture) more like that of viewing paintings on a gallery wall, reading a book, or going to the movies.

Shades of Transparency

Figurative sculpture in photographic representation has its own special history, and even a cursory glance through an exhibition like the survey *Photography until Now*, curated by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art for the photography sesquicentennial, reveals that the photography of sculptured objects looms large in the history of that medium.³⁵ Accordingly, the analysis of pictures of encrusted architecture, ruins, plaster casts, fragments, and the integral sculptural entity (all cousins of the still life, landscape, and portrait genres) has recently engendered a kind of sub-speciality in the history of photography, with a number of scholarly, more or less theoretically grounded books, articles, and exhibitions appearing in this decade; they are too numerous and too varied to be listed, let alone reviewed here.³⁶ Suffice it to say that the mainstream histories of photography now include the social history of the photography of monuments (sculpture and architecture) *sui generis*, and as an integral aspect of the larger art-historical continuum. Naomi Rosenblum (herself an expert on the photographic documentation of sculpture by Adolphe Braun) dedicates a section of her textbook survey, *A World History of Photography*, to “Art Works in Photographic Reproduction,” reviewing the roles of several early documentary photographers of art, including James Anderson, Roger Fenton, the Alinari brothers, Braun, and Goupil.³⁷ Rosenblum presents the historical origins of photography of art in a deterministic and ultimately melioristic tone (the book is presumably intended for students who have been exposed to the traditional discipline of art history):

While students thoughtfully continued to insist on contact with real works of art, photographic reproductions did have a profound effect on the discipline of Art History. For the first time, identically replicated visual records enabled scholars in widely separated localities to establish chronologies, trace developments, and render aesthetic judgements. . . . Besides familiarizing people with acknowledged masterpieces of Western art, photographs made lesser works of art visible and awakened interest in artifacts and ceremonial objects from ancient cultures and little-known tribal societies.³⁸

Leigh Ashton's “International voice” from the UNESCO *Répertoire* resonates in this passage from Rosenblum's survey,

³² V. de Mazia, *The Lure and Trap of Color Slides in Art Education: The Time Released Venom of Their Make-Believe, A Repast in Five Courses Followed by Entertainment and Postprandial Musings Hosted by the Proud Possessors’ Club*, Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pa., 1986, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6, 9.

³⁴ Preziosi, 73, observed that, “the art history slide is always orchestrated as a still in an historical movie.”

³⁵ See J. Szarkowski, ed., *Photography until Now*, exh. cat., Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1989.

³⁶ Among these contributions are, in order of publication date: F. Zeri, ed. *Alinari: Photographers of Florence 1852–1920*, exh. cat., Alinari,

Florence, 1977; Eng. ed., intro. J. Berger, Florence, 1978; P. Bechetti, *Fotografi e fotografia in Italia 1839–1880*, Rome, 1978; K.B. Einaudi, ed., *Fotografia archaeologica 1865–1914*, exh. cat., American Academy in Rome, Rome, 1979; *Pygmalion photographe*, 1985; Williams, 1988; Colombo and Sontag, 1988; M. Falzone del Barbarò, M. Maffioli, and E. Sesti, eds., *Alle origini della fotografia: Un itinerario toscano 1839–1880*, exh. cat., Alinari, Florence, 1989; Ballerini, 1991; Fraenkel, 1991.

³⁷ N. Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, New York, 1989, 239–241; see also *idem*, “Adolphe Braun: A Nineteenth-Century Career in Photography,” *History of Photography*, III, October, 1979, 357–372.

³⁸ Rosenblum, 1989, 241.



4 Esther B. van Derman, *Inscription to Gaius et Lucius*, 1902 (courtesy: Fototeca Unione, Rome)

and the persistent ghost of transparency, the idea that photography can be used to know or possess an object outside interpretation is yielded to anew. A more relativist textbook might stress the idea that photographs—much as they may provide certain evidentiary information about works of art—are constructed representations, and as such do not function as strictly neutral scientific “proofs” of objects: Gisèle Freund in *Photography and Society*, for instance, devotes a section to “Photography as a Means of Art Reproduction,” a phenomenon that Freund reflects upon in terms of society. According to Freund (who was a personal acquaintance of Malraux), the photography of art has, more than anything else, “altered the artist’s vision and changed man’s view of art.”³⁹ Within this condition of what (for want of a better word) one may call “subjectivity,” photographs have formed some of our most fundamental and abiding perceptions of art, and of sculpture in particular. Therefore we need to ask deep questions of each synthetic documentary image that is used in art history.

The notion of documentation in photography is so charged with oppositions that it is perhaps best to remove this discussion of the photography of sculpture from the realm of theoretical argument and to proceed to the more concrete subject of intention, or photographic formation, and recep-

tion. In this way, I propose to analyze the extent and quality with which an individual photographic image inflects, transforms, or even consumes the sculptural subject.

It is useful, when possible, to consider the assumptions and intentions of the individual photographer together with the resulting mode in which a sculptured object is portrayed and presented. A case in point is the work of the American documentarian Arthur Kingsley Porter, who considered his travels to Europe to be a kind of pragmatic “laboratory work.”⁴⁰ His ten-volume *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads* (1923) consists of a single volume of text, with the subsequent volumes presenting quarto-size credited photographs in handbook format; typically a single image per page is set off by regularized margins.⁴¹ Photographic material is to be received as scholarly documentation equal if not greater and more scientific in importance than the text: following the bibliography comes an annotated list of “Addresses of Photographers,” including Alinari, Anderson, Brogi, Giraudon, Clarence Kennedy, the Kunsthistorisches Seminar Marburg, Moscioni, and others.⁴²

³⁹ See *Medieval Studies in Memory of Arthur Kingsley Porter*, ed. W.R.W. Koehler, intro. L. Kingsley Porter, 2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1939, 1, xiii.

⁴¹ A.K. Porter, *Romanesque Sculpture of the Pilgrimage Roads*, 10 vols., Boston, 1923, *passim*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1, 357.

³⁹ G. Freund, *Photography and Society*, New York, 1980, 95.



5 Esther B. van Deman, *Roman Forum*, 1902 (courtesy: Fototeca Unione, Rome)

Porter's own photographs are integrated into the handbook format along with those he acquired from the listed sources. Some of his photographs are luscious, or crisp, or evocative; there are others that he obviously had trouble with, but his goal was clearly that of inclusion, rather than that of personal interpretation or photographic celebrity.

It is evident that Arthur Kingsley Porter would have wished to be received and judged as an art historian and a purely documentary photographer. In this sense, his mentality is distant from that of, say, Le Secq at Chartres, Atget at Versailles, Steichen on Rodin, or Mapplethorpe on Praxiteles. But it would be facile to categorize Porter's work as having less potential for interpretation than that of the *auteurs* of earlier or later periods simply because he was a practicing art historian. Porter's moderate, restrained, unarresting presentation is also vastly different from, for example, that of his near-contemporary, another American-born

academic, Esther B. van Deman, who photographed in Rome.⁴³ Van Deman's photographs, although ostensibly made for archaeological purposes, persistently, and perhaps unconsciously, defy the limits of documentation and express a more poetical vision. Possibly because the inanimate body held little interest for Van Deman for its own sake (her scholarly expertise was in Roman architectural structural processes), her finest images portray a vast scale and tend to

⁴³ K.B. Einaudi, ed., *Fotografia archaeologica 1865-1914*, exh. cat., American Academy in Rome, Rome, 1979, 14-15; *idem*, ed., *Esther B. van Deman: Immagini dall'archivio di un'archeologa americana in Italia all'inizio del secolo/Images from the Archive of an American Archaeologist in Italy at the Turn of the Century*, exh. cat., intro. J. Connors, essays K.A. Geffcken, K. Einaudi, L. Scaramella, American Academy in Rome and Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1991.



6 Romuoldo Moscioni, *Lanuvium*, 1885 (courtesy: Fototeca Unione, Rome.)

transform the archaeological fragment into a monumental component of Romantic landscape. In her *Inscription to Gaius et Lucius* (1902), for instance, the old stones in question loom large in the foreground, creating a strong, craggy diagonal against an opposed diagonal of horizon, and the Arch of Titus hovers small and remote at the upper left (Fig. 4).⁴⁴ In her *Roman Forum* photographed in the same year, when the Forum was flooded, she apprehended the place through the Arch of Septimius Severus: water, ruins, and light create a fantastic vision of Rome—we are utterly dislocated as to present and past—reminiscent of the *Course of Empire* series by Van Deman's co-national Thomas Cole (Fig. 5).⁴⁵

An erudite archaeologist, Esther van Deman never contained her flair for visualizing emotions about the grandeur of the past. To understand her intentions one should consider the cultural trajectory within which Van Deman worked, itself the potential stuff of a study that would go beyond the scope of this paper. Here I limit myself to examining the images of one of Van Deman's Roman predecessors, Romuoldo Moscioni, who worked as a documentary photographer of the sculpture excavated at Lanu-

vium in 1885 (Fig. 6).⁴⁶ Such a splendid, dreamlike sense of isolation and impression of time past are expressed in Moscioni's works that his pictorial material seems to predict the dark tenor of Marguerite Yourcenar's prose, as in her phrase "torse que nul visage ne nous défend d'aimer."⁴⁷ Moscioni's documentary images communicate the anonymity of place and the somber consciousness of the mutilation of the figurative object so powerfully that I could not suppress an initial emotional response in the interest of gathering purely archaeological facts.

The photographer and the beholder of a photograph of sculpture share interacting expectations, and the emotive ingredient of time in Van Deman's and Moscioni's photographs (and those of hundreds of others) again calls forth Susan Sontag's memorable dictum that photographs themselves look "better" when they are aged, stained, tarnished, and patinated: like ruined sculpture, photographs are subject to an "inexorable promotion through the passage of time."⁴⁸ When antique sculpture is photographed, that mood is intensified as form and content commingle. Vision is pressed further (and probably far beyond the intentions of

⁴⁴ Einaudi, 1979 (as in n. 43), 51, no. 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52–53, no. 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁷ Yourcenar (as in n. 6), 1983, 62.

⁴⁸ Sontag (as in n. 6), 79.

the photographer) when the medium of light on paper parallels that of the gradations of light and dark apparent in the actual staining and corrosions of the represented marbles and bronzes. The mechanical or pondered documentary activity behind an old photograph carries its own pathos, a sense of sadness and absurdity that renders the image opaque with self-reference. In the case of Moscioni's Lanuvium photographs, the body inanimate, poignantly mutilated, and at the remove of the lens creates just that sense of estrangement that was later explored by the Surrealists: Moscioni's work—to all purposes archaeological and documentary in its primary motivation—is instilled with that sense of anonymity and historical displacement that would resurface in the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico.⁴⁹ The wish to look *through* such photographs—as though they were Albertian “windows” permitting one to scrutinize the sculpture they represent—is denied.

Our contemplation of our mixed feelings about the past as represented in images fabricated *in* the past is intriguing, but more recent photographs of sculpture can be deeply perplexing as well. Documentary photographers of sculpture perceive and offer for interpretation what interests them most about the three-dimensional referent. They thus formulate and perpetuate ideas about the reception of sculpture (be they personal, societal, aesthetic, or intellectual) that demand critical attention. An inquiring critique may appraise, at least descriptively, the extent to which the author of the photograph is the real subject, and the sculptured referent is simply used to appeal to aesthetic emotions, as any artist would be expected to use landscape or a nude model. To address this critical dilemma, I will introduce a few case studies in twentieth-century photography of sculpture. The following examples are culled from personal experience as encountered in published books and are intended as no more than a prolegomena to an overarching historical critique of the rich variety of the documentary photography of sculpture.

The Boston *Aphrodites*, Edward J. Moore, Baldwin Coolidge, and Adolphe Braun

In the forward to *Greek Sculpture* (1957), Max Hirmer extends his gratitude to Reinhold Lullies, “who wrote the text for this book, for his useful advice in the choice of works of art to photograph.”⁵⁰ *Greek Sculpture* is the product of a fairly common sort of collaboration, in which the scholarly text and notes complement a group of photographs assembled by the photographer or publisher. In the spirit of Arthur Kingsley Porter, photographic images are the primary scholarly material. The text tends to illustrate the photographs rather than vice versa, and the tone of the book is largely attributable to Hirmer's photographic production,

⁴⁹ Einaudi, 1979, 84, no. 51, *Lanuvio*, ca. 1885, photo Moscioni 20275. According to Ballerini, “The inanimate body from the very beginnings of photography provided . . . terms of displacement that were later explored by the Surrealists in particular.” For de Chirico's notions of “plastic solitude,” see W. Bohn, “Giorgio de Chirico and the Solitude of the Sign,” *Gazette des beaux-arts*, cxvii, April, 1991, 169–185.

⁵⁰ Lullies and Hirmer, unpag.



7 Max Hirmer, *Head of a Youth from the Sanctuary of the Ptoan Apollo in Boeotia*, National Museum, Athens, from Lullies and Hirmer, *Greek Sculpture*

which is characterized by what we are meant to perceive as interpretive restraint. Hirmer sought very consciously to present each work of sculpture as an object that was more than a pretext for the expression of his own vision through the lens. Since no photographer is neutral or passive, the historian of sculpture must evaluate Hirmer's documentary style. His black and white photographs are composed scrupulously in a spectrum of infinite shades of gray: light is evenly dispersed from above so that dramatic contrast for its own sake is eschewed; light is frequently stronger from one side than the other to insure a “proper” representation of three-dimensionality; each object is placed against a light gray ground meant to be neutral; an inclusive, inquisitive rather than expressive, emphasis is given to the texture of the material photographed (Fig. 7).⁵¹ Hirmer's technical control is smoother than that of, say, Arthur Kingsley Porter,

⁵¹ Hirmer's technique corresponds closely to the norms for the photography of sculpture prescribed by B. Bothmer in “Musings of an ARCE Fellow at Work” (published under the pseudonym “A”) in *Newsletter of the American Research Center in Egypt*, lxxiv, July, 1970, 11–19; see below and n. 127.



8 Edward J. Moore, *Chios Girl*, 1910 (courtesy: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

so that each image is eminently readable by the contemporary viewer; the photographic medium is used with an economy suggesting that it deferred to the richness of the other medium—sculpture. Hirmer's method is consistent throughout the book, aiming for a self-conscious, normative "innocence" that remains little changed by the nature of the individual object. In his chosen documentary style, the extrinsic emotional temperature is always cool. For this reason, plates 242 and 243, *Head of a Girl from Chios*, a fourth-century fragment in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, arrest the reader as exceptions (Fig. 8).⁵² Here, any and all pretense of fastidious neutrality is denied: a gorgeous, disfocused, disembodied head floats against a dense black ground. (The quality and density of black are what we are told in art school is peculiar to the print media, etching, lithography, and photography.) The representation of the *Girl from Chios* has clearly sprung from the imagination of a much more pictorializing personality than Hirmer's. Normative conditions of seeing are denied in favor of an artful lack of focus that obliterates hard contours and exaggerates the qualities of softness and dissolution that are intrinsic to the object.

The unfocused gaze and softened smile of the sculptured woman are reciprocated, here, by the softened gaze of the

⁵² Lullies and Hirmer, pls. 242, 243; cat. nos. 242, 243.

⁵³ I am grateful to Dr. Florence Wolsky, Senior Research Associate in the Classical Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, for helping me ascertain that these photographs were made in March 1910 by Edward J. Moore.



9 Baldwin Coolidge, *Bartlett Aphrodite* (courtesy: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

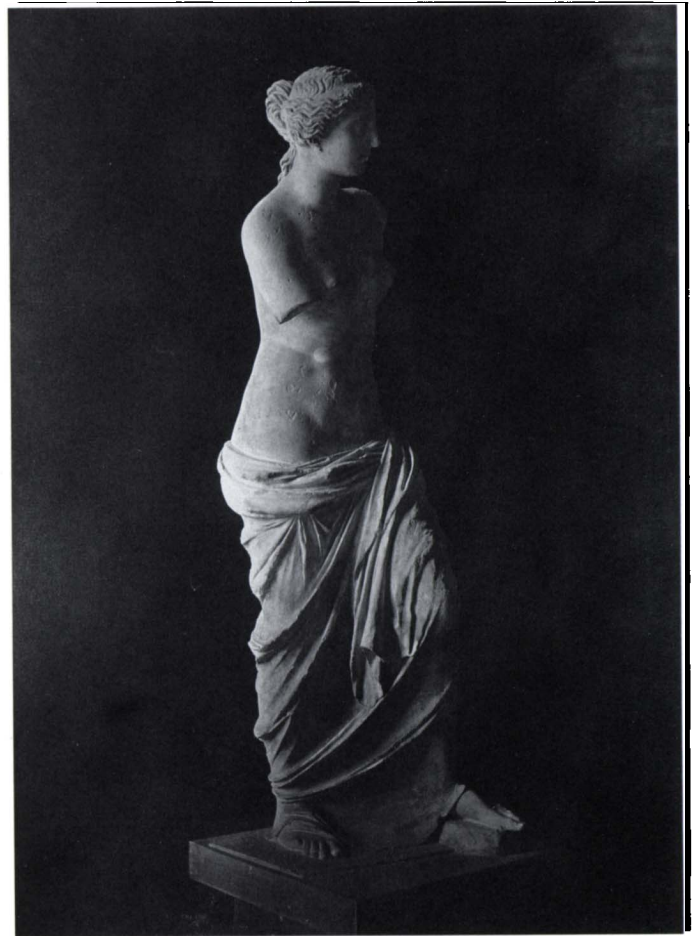
photographer—an American named Edward J. Moore.⁵³ Moore was the staff photographer at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston for over half a century, and his photographs of the *Chios Girl* were made in 1910, at the time of its acquisition by the museum, under the prevailing aesthetic of Pictorialism.⁵⁴ The piece was acquired and photographed just six years after Auguste Rodin published an essay about it entitled "La Tête Warren" in *Le Musée* on the occasion of the exhibition of the head at the Burlington Club.⁵⁵ Rodin's essay (illustrated with two small, dramatically softened photographs apparently provided by the owner, Monsieur Warren) is celebratory in tone and written in the first person: "L'antique est pour moi la beauté supreme . . . c'est la transfiguration du passé en un vivant éternel." For Rodin, works like the *Chios Girl* exuded a "jouissance" and

⁵⁴ For Moore as staff photographer, see W.M. Whitehill, *Museum of Fine Arts Boston: A Centennial History*, 2 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1970, I, 232; II, 673. For the acquisition of the *Chios Girl* by the museum, see *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Thirty-fifth Annual Report for the Year 1910*, Boston, 1911, 58–59; and *Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, VIII, 44, 1910, 11–12. G. Rodenwaldt ("Ein photographisches Problem," *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, I, 1935, 354–363) observed that antique works of art were photographed differently according to the aesthetic influences of Realism, Impressionism, and [German] Expressionism. His perceptions of various photographs of the Dipylon head (Athens, National Museum) and the head of Apollo at Olympia are extraordinarily subtle.

⁵⁵ A. Rodin, "La Tête Warren," *Le Musée: Revue d'art antique*, I, 1904, 298–301.

"sensualité," as well as a perfect balance of weights and volumes.⁵⁶ Edward J. Moore, while perhaps not consciously photographing as an *auteur*, responds in a like way to the object, and one receives from his photographs a highly emotive image of feminine beauty as if speaking from some remote place in the past, or from the preconscious locus of a dream.⁵⁷

Today the *Chios Girl* is displayed in Boston in a glass vitrine above eye level: for the museum-goer acquainted with Moore's photographic representation, confrontation with the object itself may be a bit of a disappointment. The relatively intense, glistening whiteness of depatinated Parian marble (the object was cleaned with acid when it was first unearthed) overwhelms the softness of carving to the point where articulation is all but lost.⁵⁸ Lullies's description of the head is evocative—"All the shapes and contours of this glorious work appear as though seen through a gossamer veil and as though the surface were beginning to dissolve." But one senses that the description was motivated, consciously or not, as much by Moore's style of representation as by a memory of the object itself.⁵⁹ This is not to disdain Moore's visualization, for it belongs ultimately to a tradition far more venerable than the aesthetic "jouissance" of Rodin. The photography of sculpture is, of course, just one mode of historical intervention in the long story of the vicissitudes of the reception of Greek and Roman artifacts.⁶⁰ When the Roman writer Lucian (A.D. 120–200) described the legendary *Aphrodite of Knidos*, he spoke of the "dewy gaze" of the sculptured goddess.⁶¹ Here the liquidity of the gaze is returned, complemented, by the eye of the photographer. Modern beholders and readers participate in the Praxitelean transcendence of the sculptor's material: thanks to the pictorial style of Moore's photograph, the Chios head holds the light, articulating a perfected balance of weights and



10 Adolphe Braun, *Aphrodite of Melos*, Louvre, 1868–70 (courtesy: Bryn Mawr College Photograph Collection)

volumes, even as the hardness of the stone metaphorically evaporates from the very pages of *Greek Sculpture*.

Moore was employed by the Museum of Fine Arts as a behind-the-scenes documentary photographer. Virtually none of his hundreds of photographs of sculpture (including those of the *Chios Girl*) are credited to him. Susan Sontag has compared such archival photographers, whose names have disappeared from history, with the anonymous stonemasons who carved in the workshops of the Gothic cathedrals; and indeed, the pictorial style of Moore's *Chios Girl* belongs to the workshop tradition of his predecessor at the Museum of Fine Arts, Baldwin Coolidge, and then, ultimately to the genre of museum photography established by Adolphe Braun, who was the official photographer for the Vatican and the National Museums of France in the 1860s and 1870s.⁶²

Before Moore documented the *Chios Girl*, Baldwin Coolidge had photographed the so-called "Bartlett Aphrodite," which was acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1900.⁶³ Coolidge turns the head, which is believed to be by a younger

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 298–301. For the related subject of Rodin and photography, see K. Varndoe, "Rodin and Photography," in A. Elsen, ed., *Rodin Rediscovered*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1981, 203–247; apropos Rodin and the sublime nature of the antique fragment, see Yourcenar (as in n. 6), 1983, 63–64.

⁵⁷ See Janis's idea (in Fraenkel, 18) that, "in viewing photographs of sculpture we play perpetually the frustrated lover or striving spiritual seeker," and that, "to photograph was not only to record, but in some strange fashion to raise the dead from complex and discontinuous time, as an archaeologist might do in pulling from the dust the latest remnant that has pushed its way to the surface." One is reminded of Freud's "archaeology of the mind"; see P. Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, New York, 1988, 170–173, 674–675; D. Kuspit, "A Mighty Metaphor: The Analogy of Archaeology and Psychoanalysis," in *Sigmund Freud and Art*, ed. L. Gamwell and R. Wells, exh. cat., State University of New York, Binghamton, N.Y., and London, 1989, 133–151.

⁵⁸ Boston, MFA, no. 29, Inv. no. 10.70. See L.D. Caskey, *Catalogue of Greek and Roman Sculpture in the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, 1925, no. 29; M.B. Comstock and C.C. Vermeule, *Sculpture in Stone: The Greek, Roman, and Etruscan Collections of the Museum of Fine Arts*, Boston, Boston, 1976, no. 56, p. 40.

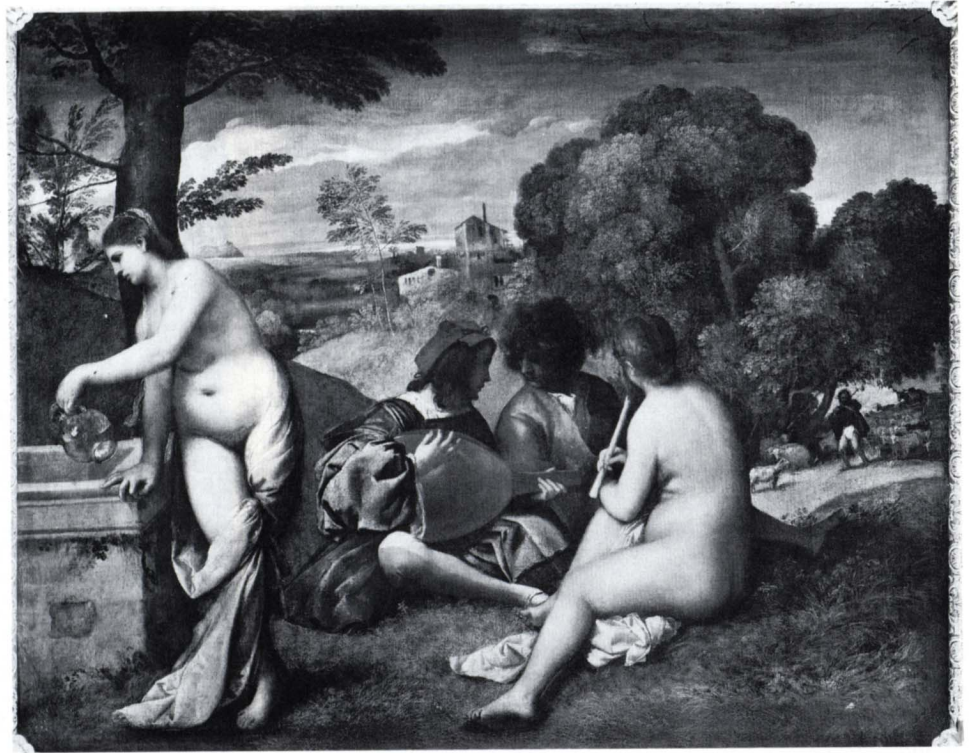
⁵⁹ Lullies and Hirmer, 97; Cornelius C. Vermeule, Director of the Classical Department at the Museum of Fine Arts, told me in conversation that he believed Lullies's entry on the Boston *Chios Girl* in *Greek Sculpture* was probably based upon Moore's photographs.

⁶⁰ See N. Bryson and M. Bal, "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin*, LXXIII, June, 1991, 179.

⁶¹ Lucian, *Imagines* 6, excerpted and trans. J.J. Pollitt, *The Art of Greece: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965, 130.

⁶² Sontag, in Colombo and Sontag, 12; for Baldwin Coolidge, see below; for Adolphe Braun, see Freund (as in n. 39), 96, and Williams, 1–3, 10. For the expectations of authorship with regard to photographs, see Bryson and Bal (as in n. 60), 180–181.

⁶³ Florence Wolsky directed me to Coolidge's photograph of the *Bartlett Aphrodite*; see also Comstock and Vermeule (as in n. 58), no. 55.



11 Giorgione, *Concert Champêtre*, ca. 1509. Paris, Louvre (photo: Alinari)

contemporary of Praxiteles, into a deeply contemplative, warm-toned, absorbing image (Fig. 9). His rendering conveys, again, what Reinhold Lullies calls the “zerschmelzenden” gaze of the quintessential Hellenistic *Aphrodite*.⁶⁴ And the sensation of romantic mystery exuded by Coolidge’s photograph is reflected in an essay about the Bartlett *Aphrodite* written five years later by Henry James. When James visited the United States after a long absence, he wrote, among other observations, a charming essay about the Bartlett head entitled “The Lonely Aphrodite,” in which he proclaimed it well worthwhile to cross the Atlantic to see the genius of ancient Greece in the “American light.”⁶⁵ As he encountered the Bartlett head, James experienced “feelings not to be foretold.” He described the disembodied fragment in an ekphrastic reverie upon its disjuncture of time and place: “The little Aphrodite, with her connections, her antecedents and her references exhibiting the maximum of breakage, is no doubt as lonely a jewel as ever strayed out of its setting; yet what does one quickly recognize but that the intrinsic lustre will have, so far as might be possible, doubled?”⁶⁶ The isolation of the fragment that James construed is at the cultural heart of the photograph made by Coolidge. His poetic use of light as *sfumato* speaks of a desired but remote and unknowable past in the life of the statue, and communi-

cates the geographical, temporal, and psychological chasm between Aphrodite and her beholder. “The intrinsic lustre” of the sculpture, doubled in its fragmentation, has, in representation, been redoubled.

Because Adolphe Braun’s pioneering work for the Vatican and Louvre created a paradigm for the historical genre of museum photography. I will examine a relevant subject in just one of his thousands of images, images that lived on into the next century in the photographs made across the Atlantic by museum photographers like Coolidge and Moore. In a photograph by Braun of the world’s most famous Aphrodite, the *Aphrodite of Melos*, acquired by the Louvre in 1821, the setting is negated and the statue emerges—another “lonely Aphrodite”—from deep soft shadows in a three-quarter view (Fig. 10).⁶⁷ The pervasive darkness that veils her gaze into the distance makes the figure psychologically unavailable to the viewer and creates a suggestive representation of the past. Paradoxically, the same softening shadows that deny the true hardness of the material enhance the viewer’s sense of intimacy and simultaneously evoke the goddess’s historical and emotional distance. It is as though desiring viewers were forced to pull the image forth from a place in the preconscious mind at the same time that they retrieve the sculpture psychologically from beyond the barrier of time past.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ R. Lullies, *Die Kauende Aphrodite*, Munich, 1954, 69; Lullies believes the *sfumato* gazes of the Chios and Bartlett heads were ultimately determined by Praxiteles’ paradigmatic *Aphrodite of Knidos*.

⁶⁵ H. James, “The Lonely Aphrodite,” in *The American Scene* (1905), ed. L. Edel, Bloomington, Ind., 1968, 252–253.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 252–253.

⁶⁷ Williams, 1–3, 10, and no. 2.

⁶⁸ Janis (in Fraenkel, 9) observes that sculpture was “one of the few available sources that allowed photographers to gaze at idealized forms from other times and other places, the very remoteness of which continued to fuel the flame of romantic longing.” Regarding 19th-century tensions of real versus ideal and sexual versus aesthetic in images of Aphrodite, see J.L. Shaw, “The Figure of Venus: Rhetoric of the Ideal in the Salon of 1863,” *Art History*, xiv, December, 1991, 540–570.



12 Clarence Kennedy, from *Studies and Criticism*, II: *Desiderio da Settignano, Marsuppini Tomb, Base Sphinx at Left* (courtesy: New York Public Library)

Many of Braun's museum photographs are invested with profound art-historical and historiographical insights.⁶⁹ Here, his handling of the inanimate female nude looks back, consciously or not, to a pre-photographic, even Giorgionesque, mode of representing classical sculpture. Braun's depiction of the *Aphrodite of Melos* strongly engages the beholder's imagination: one restores the image to that of a whole, if ultimately unavailable, woman. The dreamy mood of Braun's photograph and the tonality of enveloping shadow allow the viewer to deny the famous Aphrodite's lack of arms, and to act the part of Pygmalion and bring her to life. In Braun's *Aphrodite*, as in Giorgione's *Concept Champêtre*, for example (on view in Braun's time as today in the Louvre; Fig. 11), the viewer is implicated in the poetic experience through the deliberate absence of explicit information.⁷⁰

Within the prevailing aesthetic of Pictorialism, neither Edward J. Moore nor Baldwin Coolidge had a self-conscious signature in their photography of sculpture. Their work for

⁶⁹ See Williams; for examples of Braun's perception of the museum setting, see A. Braun, *Views of Examples of Greek and Roman as well as Roman Copies of Greek Sculpture in the Collection of the Vatican Museum*, album in 3 vols., Paris, n.d. (acquired by New York Public Library, 1927). In a separate study, "Adolphe Braun's Antiquity," currently in preparation, I will discuss the various ways in which the museum site is invested with meaning in Braun's work



13 Clarence Kennedy, from *Studies and Criticism*, II: *Desiderio da Settignano, Marsuppini Tomb, Foliage Right of Vase* (courtesy: New York Public Library)

the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was subordinate to the documentary service of the museum. The preface to the catalogue of *Greek and Roman Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts* (1925) states that, "nearly one hundred of the illustrations are from photographs by Mr. E. J. Moore, photographer of the museum; 18 by Mr. E. E. Soderhaltz; 54 by Mr. Baldwin Coolidge; and 28 by Professor Clarence Kennedy of Smith College."⁷¹ The catalogue does not credit individual photographers for individual images, and styles are difficult if not impossible to identify on the intuitive level of connoisseurship. Only one of the contributing documentary photographers, Clarence Kennedy, has achieved recognition for his images of sculpture.

Clarence Kennedy and Desiderio

Clarence Kennedy's oeuvre in the photography of sculpture has been the subject of no fewer than five recent retrospec-

⁷⁰ See D. Rosand, "Giorgione, Venice, and the Pastoral Vision," in R.C. Cafritz, L. Gowing, and D. Rosand, eds., *Places of Delight*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1988, 41.

⁷¹ Caskey (as in n. 58), vii.



14 Clarence Kennedy, from *Studies and Criticism*, II: *Desiderio da Settignano, Marsuppini Tomb, Capital of Pilaster* (courtesy: New York Public Library)



15 Clarence Kennedy, from *Studies and Criticism*, II: *Desiderio da Settignano, Marsuppini Tomb, Vase with Pears from Soffitt* (courtesy: New York Public Library)

tive exhibitions.⁷² Kennedy (1892–1972) was a historian of sculpture; from the very outset of his career he chose photography as the primary means to investigate the sculpture of classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance. His Harvard doctoral dissertation (1924) was entitled “Light and Shade and the Point of View in the Study of Greek Sculpture,” and he continued as a practician and theorist to write copiously on the strategy for effective photography of sculpture while teaching art history at Smith College.⁷³ The “how and why” of his earliest endeavors make for intriguing biography, but his vision is of course best known through his work. Kennedy’s photographs of sculpture are at once sensuous and spare, in a word modern: as such, his oeuvre stands at the threshold of contemporary art-book photography.

Just a year after his relatively anonymous contribution of twenty-eight images to the antiquities catalogue of the

Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Kennedy began to work on his imposing series called *Studies in the History and Criticism of Sculpture*, the aim of which is announced in the subtitle: “Photographic details of figure sculpture and architectural decoration taken expressly to facilitate the study of attribution and the critical analysis of style.” Published under the auspices of Smith College and the Carnegie Corporation, the *Studies* consist of seven large folio-sized boxed volumes of individually mounted black and white photographs. The most representative and popular of these portfolios are those dedicated to the sculpture of Desiderio da Settignano.⁷⁴ Desiderio’s sculptural oeuvre seemed made to order for Kennedy’s concerns, namely to photograph a work of sculpture part by part, in series, with an absorbed, even obsessive

⁷² See *Photographs by Clarence Kennedy*, intro. B. Newhall, exh. cat., Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass., 1967; “The Photographs of Clarence Kennedy,” curated by A. Weinberg, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, 1979; “Clarence Kennedy: Scholar-Photographer,” curated by L. McGavin, Sterling and Francine Clark Institute, Worcester, Mass., 1980; J. Van Haften, ed., *Clarence Kennedy and His Photographs of Sculpture*, exh. cat., New York Public Library, New York, 1987; Swenson.

⁷³ For a salient précis of Kennedy’s life and work, see Swenson.

⁷⁴ C. Kennedy, *Studies in the History and Criticism of Sculpture*, 7 fol. vols., New York and Northampton, Mass., 1928–32. See *The Tomb of Carlo Marsuppini by Desiderio da Settignano and Assistants. Studies . . .*, II, 1928; *Tabernacle of the Sacrament by Desiderio da Settignano and Assistants. Studies . . .*, V, 1929; *The Magdalen and Sculptures in Relief by Desiderio da Settignano and His Associates, Studies . . .*, VI, 1929. See Swenson, 6, 10, 11.

eye given to the play of light on the surface of carved marble.⁷⁵ The resulting photographs are breathtaking, and they may have had a greater formative impact on the American vision of fifteenth-century Italian sculpture than any single descriptive text. In the *Desiderio folios* there is, in fact, no text to interfere with our apprehension of the photographs, save for a table of contents at the beginning of each volume.

In format, Kennedy's project assumes the status of a work of art unto itself: one does not leaf through the portfolio, because each image is too separate, self-contained, and arresting to encourage a rapid overview. With Kennedy's *Desiderio* pictures, the relationship between photographer and subject can be described as one of virtual fixation. Each picture is composed according to an intimate, rather than historical, point of view: the hyper-reification of the sculptural surface stresses its seductive objecthood as well as the physical presence of the photographer's paper and chemicals. Context—that nebulous, concentric ambience of historical empiricism that contains, or frames, the work of art—is pushed as far away as possible from the photographer's real subject, which is frequently limited to material details, whether it be a sculptured seam where *verde da Prato* joins white Carrara marble or the way *Desiderio* finished the skin of a marble hand. Although there is no question that Kennedy conformed his image-making to the way *Desiderio* carved, that is with a consummate attention to subtle gradations of surface, the documentary aspect of this body of work is, despite his stated aim, always immersed in, or just beneath, an impenetrably beautiful surface of light floating on paper. For this reason, the pleasure of experiencing the sculpture is secondary to the pleasure of contemplating the photograph.

Kennedy's representation of the Marsuppini Tomb at S. Croce in Florence, for instance, allows little historical or even physical distance from the studied object. The mentality is that of an exclusive dialogue—the marriage for life, so to speak, of a twentieth-century photographer with a work of fifteenth-century sculpture. There is no sense of narration outside that dialectic: in this sense Kennedy is a purist and a modernist. Subjects such as the harpy at the corner of the sarcophagus section of the Marsuppini Tomb (Fig. 12)⁷⁶ give way to even more fragmentary details (Fig. 13), where the closeup study creates a closed in, almost claustrophobic experience. Palmette vases with pear branches in relief, for example (Figs. 14–15), are photographed with a maximum isolation and peculiarly ahistorical melancholy.

In our age of social contextualization, Clarence Kennedy's photography is received rather coolly by many graduate

⁷⁵ Swenson, 2.

⁷⁶ Titles of individual plates are simplified here according to the style of Swenson's titles.

⁷⁷ I am grateful to Deborah L. Lubera for her critical review of *The Magdalen and Sculpture in Relief* written for a seminar in Florentine sculpture at Princeton University, September, 1989; I would also like to thank the other members of the seminar, Alex Curtis, Frederick Hchman, Caroline Levine, Jennifer Milam, Jacki Musacchio, and Dr. Susan B. Packer, for their insights regarding the photography of Renaissance sculpture.



16 James Anderson, *Michelangelo's Moses, S. Pietro in Vincoli, 1850s* (photo: Alinari)

students. The thrill of the beautiful is not felt on the same terms as it was during Kennedy's lifetime, and his photographs are often considered too contemplative and beautifying to be useful as documents.⁷⁷ Time in Kennedy's work is sensed as myopic and slow. This sensation is, of course, paralleled, if not caused, by the photographer's technique, whereby the aperture was closed down to a minimum and left open for long periods of time while a hand-held light was directed over the surface of the sculpture: the resulting black of the gelatin silver print is denser, richer, and more delectable than normally seen in the interior shadows of a church like S. Croce, and the illumination is spread more evenly than interior conditions would typically permit.⁷⁸

Kennedy's photographs, like those of Moore, Coolidge, Braun, Van Deman, Mosconi, and even the less personally driven Arthur Kingsley Porter and Max Hirmer, once again argue against the possibility that a photograph can serve as a transparent windowpane that simply opens upon the referent as it "is" or "was."⁷⁹ Kennedy's photographs are superbly crafted and profound. But they do little to inform the viewer as to the "cognitive style," in Michael Baxandall's phrase, of

⁷⁸ For Kennedy's technique, see Swenson, 2–3; C. Kennedy, "Photographing Sculpture," in *Encyclopedia of Photography*, New York, 1964, xviii, 3346–57.

⁷⁹ Sontag, in Colombo and Sontag: "Photographs are not windows which supply a transparent view of the world as it is, or more exactly, as it was" (p. 12).



17 Aurelio Amendola, *Giovanni Pisano, Massacre of the Innocents, pulpit, S. Andrea, Pistoia*, from Carli and Amendola, *Giovanni Pisano: Il Pulpito di Pistoia*, 1986.

a contemporary participant in the native culture for which the portrayed objects were made.⁸⁰ It might be argued, however, whether a documentary photographer of sculpture can or should attempt to re-create a particular cognitive approach or conceptual situation. Most of us would say yes to this ideal, but no to any resulting codification of practice, simply because the photographer visualizes, at least to some extent, in the “cognitive style” of his or her own moment; and photographs are woven, like other images, into the fabric of their own time.⁸¹

Heinrich Wölfflin came closest to advocating cognitive authenticity in the photography of sculpture, when he proposed, in a series of articles written around the turn of the last century (“Wie Man Skulpturen Aufnehmen Soll?”), that norms for correct lighting could be determined by looking at paintings and drawings from the same period: for instance a *Madonna and Child* in relief by Verrocchio should be illuminated according to the lighting system in drawings and

⁸⁰ M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Oxford and New York, rev. ed. 1989, 36–40.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, *passim*; and C. Geertz, “Art as a Cultural System” (1st published in *Modern Language Notes*, xc1, 1976) in *Local Knowledge*, New York, 1983, 94–120.

⁸² H. Wölfflin, “Wie Man Skulpturen Aufnehmen Soll,” *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, N.F. viii, 1896, 294–297; N.F. vii, 1897, 224–228; “Wie

paintings of that subject by the same artist.⁸² For Wölfflin, the problem of the presentation of sculpture in photographs (in lighting and vantage point) was analogous to that of the presentation of sculpture in museum installations.⁸³ Perhaps an analogy can be drawn from the physical presentation of real sculpture: few of us would, for the sake of cognitive authenticity, give up the opportunity to view Donatello’s *Prophet* statues, for instance, in the artificial environment of a museum so that they could be placed some sixty feet above the ground in their original niches of the Florentine bell-tower. Likewise, few would flatly refuse the intervention of the telephoto lens in viewing architectural sculpture in place on large buildings.

Clarence Kennedy’s photographs occupy an aesthetic place all their own, but his oeuvre is not outside the historical continuum of the photography of Italian sculpture, which over time has telescoped, so to speak, from a distant, static panorama, to a more emotionally agitated close view, to the enlargement of separate microcosmic elements within the whole. In other words, the overriding change in interpretive theme from the 1840s to the present in the photography of Italian monuments in situ has occurred in terms of relative distance in vantage points.⁸⁴ In this history Kennedy’s work stands for deliberate stylization, and blends the traditional long exposure time with the advancing importance of the modernist close-up. At the beginnings of photography, works of figurative sculpture as well as architecture were commonly used as photographer’s subjects precisely because they did *not* move, and because the whiteness of marble or plaster enhanced luminosity; hence the implied “silence” of old photographs is frequently determined by the inanimate nature of the subject.⁸⁵ This sense of silence and physical distance was altered to some extent by the English photographer James Anderson, who was originally a painter: his photograph of Michelangelo’s *Moses* at S. Pietro in Vincoli, Rome, an albumen print from the 1850s, for example, embodies a spiritual response to a work of sculpture known for its *terribilità*, and may be the first emotively close view in the photographic representation of Renaissance sculpture

Man Skulpturen Aufnehmen Soll? (Problem der Italienische Renaissance),” *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, N.F. xxvi, 1915, 237–244; trans. V. Barras as “Comment photographier les sculptures,” and “Comment photographier les sculptures? (Problèmes de la Renaissance italienne),” in *Pygmalion photographe*, 127–136.

⁸³ Wölfflin, 1896 and 1897 (as in n. 82), *passim*.

⁸⁴ Veraci’s calotype of Michelangelo’s *David* (1853), for example, reveals a group of carabinieri moving in the background as if they were shades: the living soldiers virtually disappear as trajectory wisps behind the static white colossus; see Falzone del Barbarò, Maffioli, and Sesti, eds. (as in n. 36), 41; Bechetti (as in n. 36), 20, 68, 280. Moving figures created “ghosts” in early photographs because of the long exposure times, whereas posed and motionless animate figures suggested scale and mood; see J. van Haften, ed., *From Talbot to Stieglitz: Masterpieces of Early Photography from the New York Public Library*, exh. cat., New York Public Library, New York, 1982, 32.

⁸⁵ Ballerini, *passim*; Janis (in Fraenkel), 9: “The languor of its sublime intimacy made the decision of what to photograph easy.” The relationship was reciprocal because archaeologists sought rapid means for visual documentation of their objects; see F. Schubert and S. Grunauer-von Hoerschelmann, *Archäologie und Photographie: Fünfzig Beispiele zur Geschichte und Methods*, Berlin, 1978, 29–37.

(Fig. 16).⁸⁶ This visionary, rather decontextualizing presentation announced a specific direction for the photography of sculpture in Italy.

The now-accepted habit of making pictures of sculpture more emotionally charged than the original by means of a decontextualized close view, in either black and white or color, bleeding to the limits of the page, has been taken up by many contemporary photographers who work in what we might call a "virtuoso" style for art books. One such is the Pistoiese photographer Aurelio Amendola, whose rich color pictures of Giovanni Pisano's pulpit at S. Andrea, Pistoia, for example, are meaningfully framed, cropped, and bled in a Mondadori publication of 1986, with an accompanying text by Enzo Carli.⁸⁷ The publisher's preface to this volume praises Carli's expository text, and extolls Amendola's photographs, which present the figures as "... sweet and disturbed, recaptured in their lights and shadows."⁸⁸ Amendola's vision is an active one, and he makes a series of choices to bring the viewer closer to the sculpture than normal on-site experience would permit. And his warmth of color seems particularly suitable to his tactile scope. In his representation of the Pistoia pulpit, Amendola's photographs capture tangible shadows, volumes, and the patination of time; they reveal drill holes and chisel marks; they breathe the warmth of worked stone as well as the sheer weight of sculptural forms. His close-up detail of a mother and child from Giovanni Pisano's *Massacre of the Innocents* relief, for instance, shows us how the sculptor translated the human drama into stone with punches, drills, and files (Fig. 17). Amendola understands Giovanni Pisano's understanding of his subject—the emotional distortion of the mother's face, the gravitational weight of her hair and breasts, and the broken passivity of her dead child.⁸⁹

In the spirit of Violette de Mazia's "tainted ambrosia," however, I would ask whether Amendola's photographs in fact give us too much of a good thing. Perhaps these brilliant, frameless visions of narrative relief sculpture are simply made in the spirit of current cinematic taste. Indeed, the glamorous warmth of the chroma of these slick pages seems to beg for transformation into slides. To rephotograph and project any detail of this book as a color slide magnified exponentially in a lecture hall creates a sensational overstatement of what fourteenth-century sculpture is about. Still, art historians will be of two minds, because Amendola's is the kind of work that creates a certain reassurance: if Giovanni

Pisano's pulpit crumbled to shards tomorrow, we would have a brilliant memory of it preserved in a book on the shelf.

David Finn: "Prophet of Modern Vision"

David Finn is perhaps the most self-conscious modernist *auteur* in the world of art-book photography. His vita can be found in the preface to his *How to Look at Sculpture* (1989), a sort of personal credo about sculpture as an art and a retrospective sampling of his own photographic work.⁹⁰ Finn states that he has been involved with sculpture all his life and has taken "tens of thousands of photographs of sculpture for over twenty-five books," which, he admits, "is probably something of a record."⁹¹ Most of us have encountered his work in book format at some point, whether as the photographic illustration of a text, as in the Braziller edition of Meyer Schapiro's *The Sculpture of Moissac*, or as a relatively independent photographic essay such as *Donatello: Prophet of Modern Vision*, for which Frederick Hartt produced the text.⁹² Finn has also worked with Kenneth Clark, John Pope-Hennessy, Fred Licht, John Boardman, Charles Avery, Stephen Spender, Sam Hunter, and Caroline Houser.⁹³ The problem—a problem I consider both historiographic and critical—with Finn's work is that he assumes the role of a proponent of modern vision no matter what the subject of his photographs.

The Abrams extravaganza *Donatello: Prophet of Modern Vision* (1973) is an extreme example of Finn's patently modernist interpretation of sculpture. On occasion matching Hartt's descriptive prose (composed, in any event, as an obligato to the pictures) Finn seems to strive for an equation between Donatello's art and expressionism.⁹⁴ Someone gave the book a sensational, ahistorical title—as though Donatello could possibly have foreseen the phenomenon of modernism: the "modern vision" here is all in the eye of the photographer.⁹⁵ Modernist art is highly self-referential and typically separated from a specific sense of place, but here a deliberate negation or alteration of the material qualities of Renaissance sculpture is effected in the name of a supposed quattrocento *proto*-modernism.⁹⁶ In his visual hyperbole, Finn dematerializes form through blow-ups of details, a method that reaches a state of absurdity in his unfocused views of Donatello's bronze *David*: in an image of David's elbow, for example, the beholder is presented with the haunting nihilism of total vagueness on an oversized page.⁹⁷ The photographer's composition is dimensionless.

John Pope-Hennessy's "Shots of Donatello," published in *The New York Review of Books* in 1974, is the definitive review

⁸⁶ W. Watson, ed., *Images of Italy: Photography in the Nineteenth Century*, exh. cat., Mt. Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, Mass., 1980, 13, no. 19. Anderson (b. Isaac Atkinson), who was active in Italy in 1849–77, made watercolors and small bronze casts for the tourist trade; by mid-century he sold photographic reproductions of works of art as well as panoramic views.

⁸⁷ E. Carli with A. Amendola, *Giovanni Pisano: Il Pulpito di Pistoia*, Milan, 1986. Amendola has produced books of high quality with several art historians: e.g., L. Cai, *L'altare argenteo di San Jacopo nel Duomo di Pistoia: Contributo alla storia dell'oreficeria gotica e rinascimentale italiana*, Turin, 1984; J. Beck, *Ilaria del Carretto di Jacopo della Quercia*, Milan, 1988.

⁸⁸ Carli with Amendola (as in n. 87): "... soavi ed inquiete, riprese nelle loro luci ed ombre" (unpag.); my trans. in text.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pl. LXIX.

⁹⁰ Finn, 7–9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹² M. Schapiro with D. Finn, *The Sculpture of Moissac*, New York, 1985; D. Finn, with F. Hartt, *Donatello: Prophet of Modern Vision*, New York, 1973.

⁹³ Finn, 7–9.

⁹⁴ Hartt claims, for instance, that Donatello's *Lille Feast of Herod* was "conceived in passion and carved in fury"; in Finn, with Hartt (as in n. 92), 5.

⁹⁵ I wish to thank a former student, Caroline Levine, for an incisive review of this book (see n. 77).

⁹⁶ For the self-referential aesthetic of modernist sculpture, see R. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October*, VIII, Spring, 1979, 31–44.

⁹⁷ Finn, with Hartt (as in n. 92), unpag.



18 Photograph by David Finn, *Michelangelo, Rondanini Pietà* (courtesy: David Finn)

of Finn's volume.⁹⁸ Pope-Hennessy condemned Finn's use of Donatello's sculpture as "camera fodder," and stated that, "on the evidence of this book Mr. Finn is an excitable, rather self-indulgent photographer, whose concern is less with truth than with photography as a record of emotional response."⁹⁹ He went on to object to the photographs' "color blindness," insensitivity to texture, obfuscation of style, smudgy illegibility, "horrifying" blow-ups, and lack of historical sense, the sum of which "deprives the book of all validity."¹⁰⁰ Pope-Hennessy disclosed rather archly in his review that he had been approached to collaborate on the project, but upon seeing how "insensitive and meretricious" the pictures were, he "turned the crazy project down."¹⁰¹

Some years later, however, Pope-Hennessy's own *Benvenuto Cellini* (1985) was produced with "principal photography" contributed by David Finn, and according to Finn, Pope-Hennessy thought the photographs were among the best ever taken of the works of a Renaissance sculptor.¹⁰² Pope-

⁹⁸ J. Pope-Hennessy, "Shots of Donatello," review of D. Finn and F. Hartt, *Donatello: Prophet of Modern Vision*, New York, 1973, in *New York Review of Books*, January 24, 1974, 7–9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² J. Pope-Hennessy, *Benvenuto Cellini*, New York, 1985; Finn, 7–8.

¹⁰³ Pope-Hennessy (as in n. 102), 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*: I refer to Finn's pls. 85, 44, 45 respectively; Liberman's pls. 109–112; Okamura's pls. 115–118, 127, 128, 155.



19 Photograph by David Finn, *Bernini, Rape of Persephone* (courtesy: David Finn)

Hennessy's preface betrays a certain volte-face on the subject of Finn's approach to sculpture: "His [Finn's] remarkable photographs are acknowledged elsewhere in the book, but it should be mentioned that he is responsible for the detailed coverage of the Nymph of Fontainebleau, of Cellini's marble statues in the Bargello, and of the Perseus and the bronzes from its base."¹⁰³ It seems fair to me to say that Finn's images of Cellini's *Perseus* in situ and a number of his other color photographs (especially the views of a medal of Pietro Bembo with Pegasus on the verso, shown in a lustrous raking light) are effective; but in truth they are no more "remarkable" than the ones contributed by Ralph Liberman or Takashi Okamura.¹⁰⁴ It is plain that Finn suppresses his preference for expressionistic photography when he works with art historians such as Pope-Hennessy, Charles Avery, Michael Boardman, and Meyer Schapiro. (For whatever reason he was most free with modernist interpretation when he collaborated with Frederick Hartt, and where he tried his hand at a non-Western subject, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Oceanic Images*.)¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, when readers of Pope-

¹⁰⁵ Cf. C. Avery, *Giambologna, the Complete Sculptor*, Oxford, 1987; J. Boardman and D. Finn, *The Parthenon and Its Sculptures*, London, 1985; F. Hartt, with D. Finn, *Michelangelo's Three Pietàs*, New York, 1975; F. Hartt, with D. Finn, *David by the Hand of Michelangelo: The Original Model Rediscovered*, New York, 1987; D. Finn and D. Newton, *Oceanic Images*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1978 (and cf. the Walker Evans photographic portfolio of "Exhibition of African Negro Art," made for traveling exhibitions in 1936 by the Museum of Modern Art, New York; see Williams, 4, and nos. 33, 30, 42, 41, 25).

Hennessy's *Benvenuto Cellini* turn to a spectacular color detail of the famous Saltcellar of Francis I, they may wonder why it is so out of focus.¹⁰⁶ And, despite his more restrained documentary style with Avery, Boardman and Pope-Hennessy, a glance at *How to Look at Sculpture* betrays the fact that Finn's vision had not changed as of 1989, and his philosophy, stated as it is in very full words, had if anything, congealed. For example:

Touching the works [of sculpture] is often prohibited in public places, yet physical contact produces a powerful response to the work. This is because the art of making sculpture is a sensual form of creativity. It grows primarily out of the emotional relationship we have to the human figure—our own to begin with, and more importantly those of others who arouse in us the passions associated with physical love.¹⁰⁷

Before readers arrive at this passage they may wonder whether *How to Look at Sculpture* was intended as a children's book. It is pitched at a very general audience, but this is not a critique of Finn's literary style. He is oddly squeamish about the nude and protests too much: for instance, "It is not enough to say 'naked' when describing sculptures of the human figure; *naked beauty* [his italics] is closer to the mark."¹⁰⁸ In much of Finn's photography, this squeamishness is transformed into a strategy of revelation through defamiliarization; it can be seen as a kind of modernist "Ostranenie," or "making strange," as if to compensate for our supposedly impoverished, humdrum ways of seeing the body in sculpture.¹⁰⁹ Finn as a proponent of modern vision is just that—a categorically modernist photographer, whose works aspire to the condition of images like those of Edward Weston, who can make a nude look like a pepper or a cloud, and vice versa.¹¹⁰ In Weston's universe all photographed subject matter is suggestively organic and the viewer is challenged to ascertain whether the model was a woman or a pear: Finn takes this idiom of photographic modernism into the realm of Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini, and the resulting representations are flagrantly falsifying.

Finn tells us, for example, that when he photographs Michelangelo he works "feverishly," and indeed a case in point is a representation of Michelangelo's Rondanini *Pietà* (first published in *Michelangelo's Three Pietàs*, in which the photographic view expresses a disorientation nearing delirium; Fig. 18).¹¹¹ Even an expert in Renaissance art would be hard pressed to fathom exactly which portion of the sculpture is presented here, so abstracted, out of focus, and two-dimensional are the linear traces of white that flash across the blackness of the page. Equally bereft of any frame

of reference is a detail of Bernini's *Rape of Persephone*, where a few softened white contours emerge without significance from a dense black ground (Fig. 19).¹¹²

I have already observed that David Finn's published statements correspond with his personal photographic style: he aims to make photographs that reveal secrets about the sculpture instead of presenting a mere "series of descriptive archaeological details."¹¹³ In Finn's "Notes on Photographing Primitive Sculptures," the introduction to his portfolio *Oceanic Images*, for instance, he advocates the Brancusian idea of letting the camera's eye roam in the "sculptural landscape."¹¹⁴ Finn's modernist point of view, which leads to a modernist "technique," is also revealed in his statement that, "Primitive sculptures are often most effective when seen under spotlights, because these works were carved in tropical zones. . . ." Under these conditions, "Extraordinary designs appear, sometimes as great as those by Brancusi, Modigliani, and Moore."¹¹⁵ After the fashion of André Malraux, he states that, "A small work demonstrates its monumental qualities when enlarged photographs of its details reveal harmonies of lines and shapes as striking as those in the sculpture as a whole."¹¹⁶

These pictorially obscure, temperamentally abstract expressionist visions typify David Finn's photography: he wants to reveal the unknown in a work of sculpture. Finn as a cameraman is curiously intrusive about the representation of the body, but Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini were not. Bellies, buttocks, and genitals all have their place in figurative sculpture, but to set them apart as Finn frequently does, in series of either framed details or voyeuristic blow-ups, traduces the seriousness of the sculpture in favor of a childish *Schaubust*. Finn's personal style is emotive, and the vaguely morbid, high emotional temperature of some of his compositions does perceptual damage to figures made by Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini, artists who themselves had an emotionally charged relationship with their materials as well as a profound understanding of human corporeality. Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini are sculptors whose visions would be compromised, if not falsified, were we to rely exclusively on Finn to teach us how to look at sculpture.

Photography and Nonfigurative Sculpture

David Finn's photography may emerge from an excessively modernist stance, representing figurative Renaissance and Baroque sculpture as if it were abstract and placeless. But by the same token, sculpture that was fabricated in an abstract formalist language—modern sculpture—thrives on an interpretive counterpart in photography. (Incidentally, Finn pho-

¹⁰⁶ Pope-Hennessy (as in n. 102), pl. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Finn, 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰⁹ For the modernist concept of "making strange" in photography, see S. Watney, "Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror," in V. Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography*, London, 1982, 154–176.

¹¹⁰ For a trenchant discussion of Edward Weston's photographs, see J. Malcolm, *Diana and Nikon: Essays on the Aesthetic of Photography*, Boston, 1980, 20–21 and figs. 12, 13.

¹¹¹ Finn, 18, pl. 14.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pl. 23.

¹¹³ D. Finn, "A Note on the Photography," in Hartt, with Finn, 1975 (as in n. 105), 138–139.

¹¹⁴ Finn and Newton (as in n. 105), unpag.; and see below for Brancusi as a photographer.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*



20 Constantin Brancusi, *View of the Studio*, ca. 1920 (courtesy: New York Public Library)

tographs the work of Constantin Brancusi, Alberto Giacometti, and John Chamberlain most effectively, possibly because he doesn't have to contrive to make the sculpture look modern.)¹¹⁷ With modernism as an operative premise, photographers and sculptors became participants in the same ethos; the result is a synthetic overarching conceptual matrix, a continuity of design that becomes the real content of the picture. Photography and sculpture interlock with a

familiarity that is not possible when the camera is forced to "look back" at figurative objects made in a pre-photographic era or "look across" at objects made in non-photographing cultures. The Vorticists, Surrealists, and Constructivists, for example, created photographs that were in effect sculptural constructions in the photographic medium. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, and many other photographers actually conceptualized sculptural forms through their photography.¹¹⁸

Constantin Brancusi was an artist who deliberately reworked his sculpture in photography through the manipulation of light: his prints of the studio environment and of his series *The Golden Bird* and *Mlle. Pogany*, for example, fuse

¹¹⁷ E.g., Finn, 106–144.

¹¹⁸ See M. Nesbit, "Photography, Art, and Modernity," in J.-C. Lemagny and A. Rouillé, eds., *A History of Photography*, New York, 1987, 103–123.



21 Gianfranco Gorgoni, *Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty* (photo: Contact)

sculpture and photography in a modernist unity, with the synthetic relationship as the real referent, so that the photograph is consciously all about itself, sentient in intention and effect (Fig. 20).¹¹⁹ Brancusi creates the sculptural landscape, and lets his camera's eye travel through it, so the work of sculpture is not merely transformed in representation. It is a component in an environment rather than a solitary pretext; and the process itself becomes an intuitive, placeless essay undertaken in the formalist vocabulary of modernity. The modern photograph of modern sculpture depicts nothing if not its own iconographic and formal autonomy.¹²⁰ A sense of synthetic alchemy replaces the notion of documentation so that the medium of photography is absorbed, as it were, back into the work of sculpture like a fine coalescing vapor rather than remaining a separable transparent lamination.

If the modernist aesthetic fused photography with sculpture in an apparently effortless, seamless, formal synthesis, Postmodernist sculpture reversed that premise, and called upon the medium of photography as its documentary agent. In a denial of the "inherent," traditionally perceived qualities of sculpture as permanent monumental statuary, some Postmodernist sculpture is deliberately oversized and ephemeral; it is therefore meaningless without documentation, whether it

be documentation in memory, writing, or photography.¹²¹ Site-specific Postmodernist sculpture—gestural, prankish works that challenge any notion of permanence, such as Christo's *Running Fence*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, or Walter de Maria's *Lightning Field*—were constructed to be photographed, or at least with the independent photographic referent in mind (Fig. 21).¹²² Such Postmodernist sculptors were secure in the knowledge that most people would know their works only in photographic representations: in an artistic system where sculpture is assembled or installed for camera "documentation," a word that loomed large in art-school jargon of the late 1960s and early seventies, the issue of the photographic image as a separate transparent recording apparatus resurfaced.

Photography as a documentary instrument of Postmodernist sculpture revalidated the role of the photographic image as a quasi-journalistic screen through which the object is apprehended. All processes of visual representation contrive to distinguish between nature (that which is discovered) and art (that which is invented): sculptors like Smithson and Christo, among others, compose in the gap between discovery and invention, with the collusion of the camera as Barthes's pseudo-historical "clock for seeing."

¹¹⁹ Janis (in Fraenkel), 11; for Brancusi's studio as an environment of ideal intimacy, "a world apart," see H. Kramer, *Brancusi: The Sculptor as Photographer*, London, 1979, unpag.

¹²⁰ For modernist sculpture that "depicts its own autonomy," see Krauss (as in n. 96), 31–44.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 31–44; and R. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America," *October*, III, Spring, 1977, 68–81.

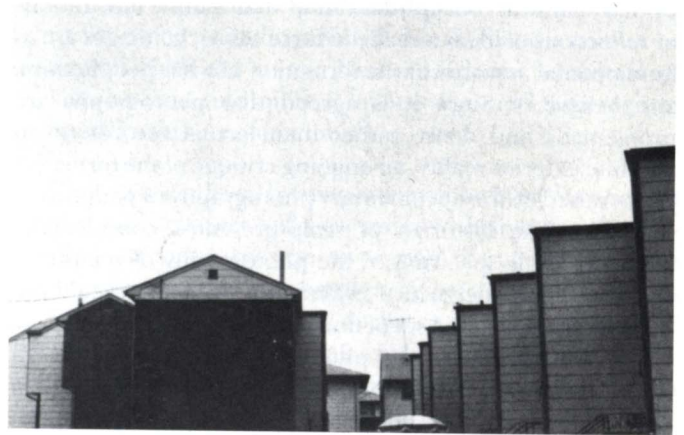
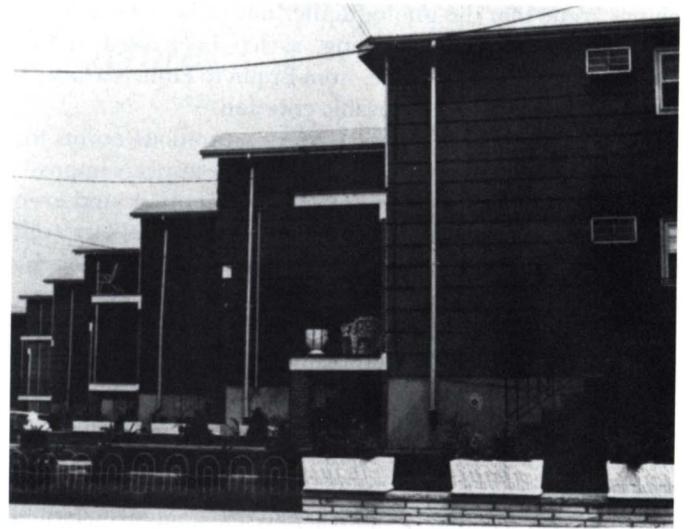
¹²² Krauss, 1977, 1979 (as in n. 96), *passim*; Sontag, 1977, 147–48; P. Dubois, "Photography and Contemporary Art," in Lemagny and Rouillé (as in n. 118), 231–245.

An extreme and conceptually rather eccentric instance of the Postmodernist ethos of the role of photography—photography that is used to justify its subject sculpture—can be found in the work of Dan Graham, an artist who was characterized by Marcel Duchamp as a “photo-journalist.”¹²³ Selections of Graham’s photographs were published in 1968 in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gregory Battcock, where the photographic essay (with images apparently put together ad hoc) was meant to illustrate what Battcock calls “minimal-type surfaces and structures as they are found by the artist [photographer, sculptor] in nature. . . .”¹²⁴ Battcock states that the minimal forms are “found” by the photographer, and yet, at the same time, are “divorced from nature . . . subjective and social.”¹²⁵ Bland, innocuous, accidental-looking compositions based on the American suburban landscape are offered as transparent “proof” that minimalism is a “natural” way of seeing (Fig. 22). Graham’s photographs, placed in this volume as a visual analogue for minimalist sculpture, are characterized by an intentional lack of what we might call conviction. Unlike Harry Callahan’s spare, intrinsically pleasing, minimal images of ordinary houses in Providence, Rhode Island, for instance, Graham’s pictures of similar subjects float in an ambience between harmony and drabness: they address the viewer with the startling discontinuity of a joke.¹²⁶

For the past hundred years or so, photography and sculpture have danced together. Relative socio-cultural preferences have continuously reformulated the point of view from which photography is made to apprehend sculpture, and have redefined the possibility of its documentary role. For the historian of sculpture, then, can any firm criteria of method be established for making and using photographs of three-dimensional works of art?

Conclusion: A Movable Critique

Turning for a moment from theory to practice, I would like to consider the procedures that some twentieth-century documentary photographers of sculpture have prescribed. Most of their instructions conform to what would be expected from people who have a scholarly affinity for the history of art: in their variety of styles, academic photographers of sculpture consistently advocate a sympathetic deference to the original referent. Heinrich Wölfflin, Clarence Kennedy, S.K. Matthews, Bernard Bothmer, Ernst Langlotz, and Klaus Fittschen all favor what they consider to be an informational rather than interpretive approach: depth of field, illumination, vantage point, and other factors ought to render the work as legibly as possible with a minimum loss of what may be taken as historical authenticity.¹²⁷ Sensational viewpoints, airbrushing for sfumato, overly picturesque chiaroscuro, and spectacular contrasts are rejected in favor of a more inquisitive “critical focus.” Fastidious, empirically tested instructions such as those recommended by Kennedy or



22 Dan Graham, untitled photographs, from *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, 1968

Bothmer are meant to help art historians, archaeologists, and epigraphers who need to make photographs as *aides-mémoire* and to publish them as striking or at least good-looking reproductions. Still, the scholar-photographers’ consensus is that norms for vantage point, depth of field, and lighting are to be determined by means of an educated intuition; the photography of sculpture is considered an active art as opposed to a mechanically transcriptive science.¹²⁸ Those who represent sculpture in photography will

¹²⁷ Wölfflin (as in n. 82) believed that the documentary photographer of sculpture had the responsibility to choose a vantage point and lighting system that were historically accurate. Clarence Kennedy called for a “critical focus” in terms of shadows and depth of field (as in n. 78, 3346–51). See also C. Kennedy, “The Selection of Copy for Illustrations,” (*Art Bulletin*, xxxi, June, 1949, 135–38); S.K. Matthews, *Photography in Archaeology and Art*, London, 1968, 101–104; Bothmer (as in n. 51); *idem*, “On Photographing Egyptian Art,” in *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, (*Festschrift Hans Wolfgang Müller*), vi, 1978, 51–53; E. Langlotz, “Über das Photographieren Griechischer Skulpturen,” *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Institutes*, xciv, 1979, 1–17; K. Fittschen, “Über das Photographieren Römischer Porträts,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, LXXXIX, 3, 1974, 484–494.

¹²⁸ Like Wölfflin, Kennedy, Matthews, and Bothmer, Langlotz (see above, n. 127) believed that the photography of Greek sculpture was an art, rather than a transcriptive science—an art that can be learned if the photographer enters into the mentality (“cognitive style”) in which the work of sculpture was originally created.

¹²³ G. Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York, 1968, 175.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ For remarks on Callahan’s Providence photographs, see Malcolm (as in n. 110), 122–128.

always argue that the photographer must understand his or her subject, but understanding, as has been seen in this chronological survey of taste, from Braun to Finn, is a largely historiographic affair, a movable criterion.¹²⁹

To establish a codified program of scrupulous norms for the documentary photography of sculpture appears impossible given the slippery nature of visual perception. And even if it were possible to prescribe such a method, would we want it? Since every photograph is necessarily determined by the photographer's vision as well as the aesthetic and iconographic ethos of the society from which it springs, can we entertain the idea of some fictitious neutrality? Even if we could, would we want to iron away the particular cultural moment, the visual "accidents" and intertextual intervention, the iconography and visual style of the photographer's choices?

We may assume that all fabricated visual images, including photographs, even as they function as representations, are primary cultural conceptions rather than simple illustrations or reflections of ideas already in force. As such, images are as fundamental as words in the formation of what people think and believe.¹³⁰ Since it is agreed that photographs are problematic and dense rather than factual records of an absolute exterior reality, an ongoing critique of the formative issues raised by the documentary photography of sculpture is desirable. The historian of sculpture must consider the historiographic spectrum of the photography of sculpture; only then can richer critical evaluations be made, even if not according to any fixed set of immutable criteria.

Stated synthetically, the photography of sculpture is an area of prismatic visual complexity in the historiography of art. As with the entire documentary tradition of photography, the documentation of sculpture has shifted around changing ideals of objectivity, transparency, and subjective interpretation. Art historians who use photographs for research would be well advised to listen to the voices of current theorists of photography, such as those of Shelley Armitage, William E. Tydeman, James A.C. Kaufmann, Joel Snyder, and Neil Walsh Allen in the anthology *Reading into Photography*. The collective message of these writers is that any scholar who is tempted to use the photograph as factual "evidence"

¹²⁹ A recent issue of the magazine *Sculpture* (November–December, 1990), featured an article entitled "Lighten Up" by A. Rokeach and A. Millman, a brief technical piece devoted to "how to" photograph sculpture. Their freewheeling advice seems to reflect a venerable consensus: "By all means photograph your work in the light you find most compatible with its spirit" (p. 85).

¹³⁰ This idea is presented, for instance, in R. Goldwater, "Art and Anthropology: Some Comparisons of Methodology," in *Primitive Art and Society*, ed. A. Forge, London and New York, 1973, 1–10.

¹³¹ In *Reading into Photography*, see Armitage and Tydeman, 3–6; Kaufmann, 193–199; Snyder and Allen, 61–91; and see n. 29 above.

or "proof" will necessarily risk using it in ways that ignore the accepted scruples of historical scholarship. Scholars whose methods depend upon the authenticity of written primary source material and the integral quality of secondary textual or visual analysis rarely bring the same rigorous intensity of questioning to the reliability, or quality, of the photograph that they routinely bring to the written document.¹³¹ Thus, art historians should be as critically attentive to the photograph as to written art history, to archival apparatuses, and to the contextual aura of social history. Photographs of sculpture are as culturally determined, as "datable," as self-referential, and as individual as the verbal art-historical essays that accompany them; and they will vary as much in imagination and enduring quality. The message is cautionary—but not negative. Attention to historiographic issues arising from the photography of works of art can bring a new richness to art-historical inquiry. The photography of sculpture, therefore, deserves a flexible, ongoing critique.

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