
The Association of Historical and Fine Art Photographers

ISSUE NO 5

August 1988

EDITORIAL

1988 is proving to be quite a Fuji year as far as our Association is concerned and we are most grateful to them for providing opportunities and services. What for 1989?

As you know from our last conference, Jerome Perkins is taking over the editorship of the journal, so may I make a request on his behalf. Please contribute articles for inclusion. Don't be shy, do it now! Perhaps tell us something about your job - it might be commonplace to you, but there is bound to be many who would benefit from your experiences.

Perhaps you would like to comment on the education available to would be photographers, the ways photography could be used in fields yet untapped or perhaps to relate a special experience - you know, the "once in a life time" job. What ever it is let Jerome have it.

I believe illustrated articles are preferable and can certainly reduce the amount of writing you would otherwise have to do and of course that is what our business is about - images.

Just as a reminder to you, don't forget that we are always pleased to see you in the British Museum or any of the other Museums and Galleries if you are coming to town - just give us a call first and I am sure a tour round the department and an exchange of information would be forthcoming.

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FUJI NEWS

Dear Members,

Further to the recent successful open day at our London offices in Swiss Cottage, we would like to take this opportunity of thanking all of those who attended. We trust that the event was not only informative in learning a little more of what Fuji manufactures in the way of cameras, emulsions and equipment; but was also an opportunity for some members of your newly formed association to meet and discuss matters of a common interest in an informal setting. We hope that you will support future events sponsored by ourselves with similar enthusiasm.

We would remind all members that Fuji are supporting this years annual conference to be held at the National Gallery in October, in which we intend to mount an exhibition of delegates work. We would be most obliged if you could now begin to submit any negatives or transparencies to Peter Macdonald, Chief Photographer at the Victoria and Albert Museum; who has kindly offered to liaise between ourselves in the production of this display.

Finally, myself and my colleagues at Fuji trust that your association goes from strength to strength, and you have the assurance of our continued support. If anybody has any ideas in which they feel we may wish to have some involvement, please do not hesitate to contact us. Also, if any member of the association requires any Fuji Professional Film products to field test against their current material, please contact me at our Swindon office. It would be nice to be writing about a different project with your association in every addition of your magazine, let's hear from you!

Trevor Drake
Southern Area Sales Manager
FUJIMEX PROFESSIONAL DIVISION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Would anyone interested in the formation of a sub-group of the Association to cover the above subject, contact Alan Hills, Photo Service, British Museum, (01-636-1555 x 644).

I envisage that the group would address itself more to the problems of being an archaeological photographer rather than the technical details of photography. For instance, the problem of the logistics of the job, handling of equipment and materials in often hostile environments, dealing with customs and other officials in various countries, problems of supply and relations with local people overseas, etc.

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THE CONSERVATION OF AN ALBUM OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROGER FENTON

In 1853 the Trustees of the British Museum established a small photographic studio and darkroom on the Museum premises, and commissioned the eminent Victorian photographer Roger Fenton (1819 - 1869) to begin a record of the Museum's collections. He began with the Assyrian clay tablets in 1854 and over the next six years he and his team photographed several hundred objects, producing thousands of copy prints which were offered for sale to the public.

Several years ago a large leather bound volume came to light in a basement store in the Museum's Central Archives. The volume proved to be an album containing 51 British Museum photographs by Fenton, comprising studies of natural history specimens, Roman sculpture and Old Master drawings. This group of photographs was an important record of the work of one of the first professional photographers to work for a National Museum.

DESCRIPTION

Forty of the photographs were salted paper prints, contact printed from collodion wet-plate negatives, gold toned, and mounted on thick white paper, with the title printed below (Fig.1). These sheets were, in turn, pasted along one edge to thin strips of paper bound into the album. The other eleven prints were albumen paper prints, probably dating from 1858/9.

CONDITION

The condition of the photographs was fairly good, considering they had been stored in an uncontrolled basement environment for many decades. Several of the prints were faded to a greater or lesser extent through the effects of atmospheric pollutant gases, particularly around the edges where the air had greater access (Figs. 2 and 3). However, many retained a remarkable density in the mid and deep tone areas, possessing a soft velvety purple black tone. There was evidence of a whitish mould growth on a few of the prints.

The condition of the mounts was not so good, with foxing, surface dirt and discoloration, particularly around the edges. In the centre of the volume the pages had warped, letting in air which carried dirt and mould spores. This had been followed by an invasion of silverfish, which had nibbled away the mount paper in the dirtiest areas (Fig. 4). Fortunately the prints themselves were not damaged by this infestation.

The structure of the binding had deteriorated beyond repair, with both front and back covers detached, spine loose, and leather badly decayed, shedding orange dust whenever it was touched. It was therefore decided in discussion with the Museum Archivist that the volume should be dismantled and the prints mounted individually.

TREATMENT

The first task was to remove loose surface dirt by gentle brushing with a soft brush and use of a vinyl eraser for more stubborn marks on the mount only. Vinyl is chosen in preference to rubber because of the risk of leaving tiny crumbs behind - the sulphur present in rubber might cause fading spots on the print. Mould debris was removed with the aid of a miniature suction device.

It was desirable to wash the mounts, to remove soluble acids and discoloration, but it was felt that washing might be harmful to the salted paper prints, which were originally sized with water-soluble starch. It was not

possible to separate the prints from the mounts as an insoluble mounting adhesive had been used. Accordingly, the mounted prints were floated, face up, on a water bath (containing a few drops of Kodak Photoflo 600 as wetting agent) for a few hours. After a short while the margins only were brushed with water to promote wetting, leaving the print surface dry (Fig. 5). This reduced the staining and lightened the fox marks to some extent.

After air-drying and pressing, the photographs were finally mounted in hinged window mounts made of photographic archival quality (ie acid free and sulphur free) cardboard, with an overlay of polyester film to protect the surface of the prints from abrasion (Fig. 6). For further protection they will eventually be stored in solander boxes, in the Museum's new Archives Room.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All the illustrations are published by courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. My thanks go to Miss K J Wallace, Museum Archivist, for much patience, and to Mr E G Harding, Head of Western Pictorial Art conservation for continued support and guidance.

FURTHER READING

For more information on Roger Fenton and his work at the British Museum, see:

HANNAVY, J Roger Fenton of Crimble Hall, London: Gordon Fraser 1975, Chapter 4.

HOPLEY, A Roger Fenton - Goodbye to Bloombury, British Museum Society Bulletin (March 1979), 19-23.

ALAN DONNITHORNE
Senior Conservator
British Museum

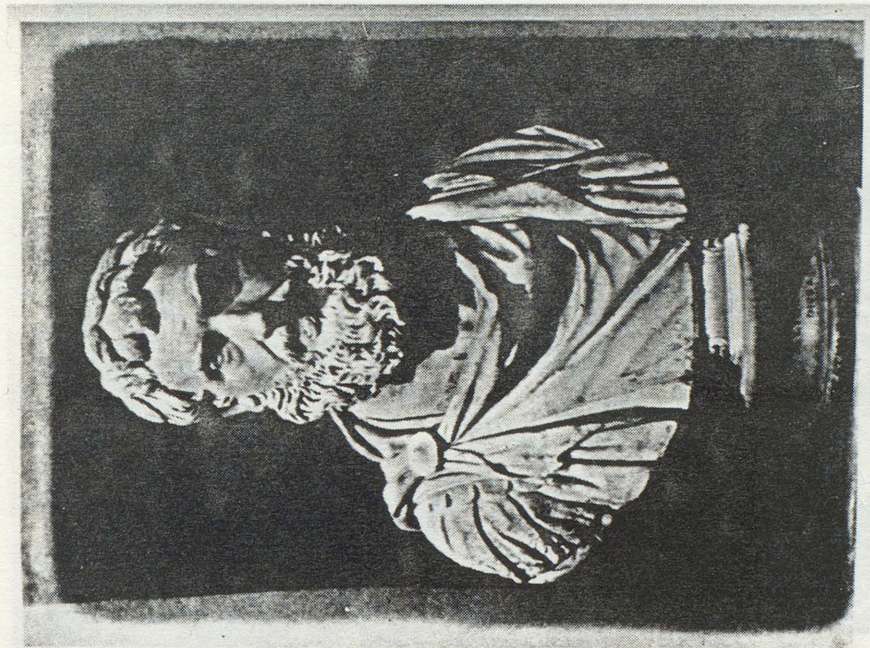


Fig 1 Bust of Aelius Ceasar
Typical print from the Album.

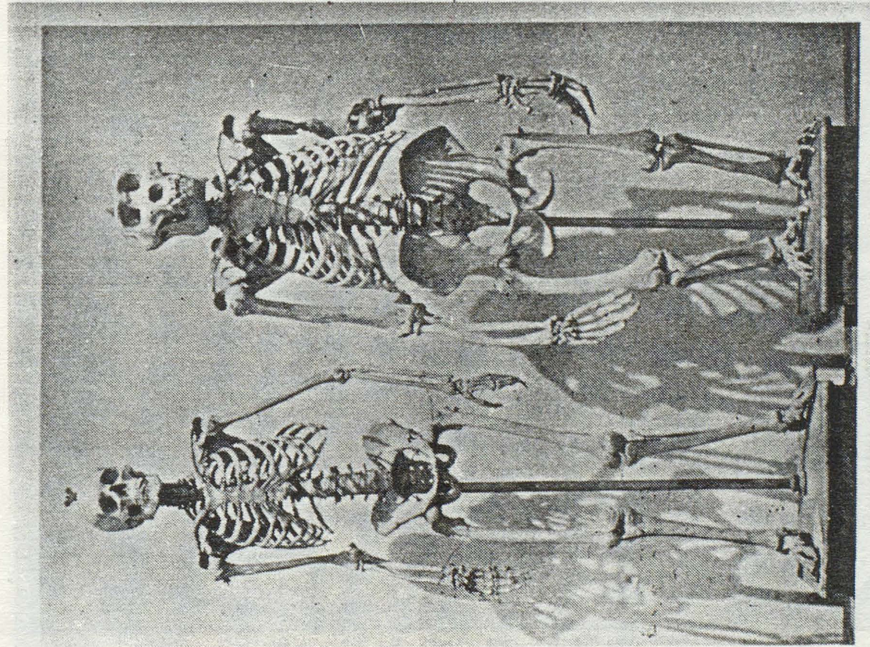


Fig 2 Skeleton of a Man of the Make
Gorilla. A severely faded print
from the first page of the Album.

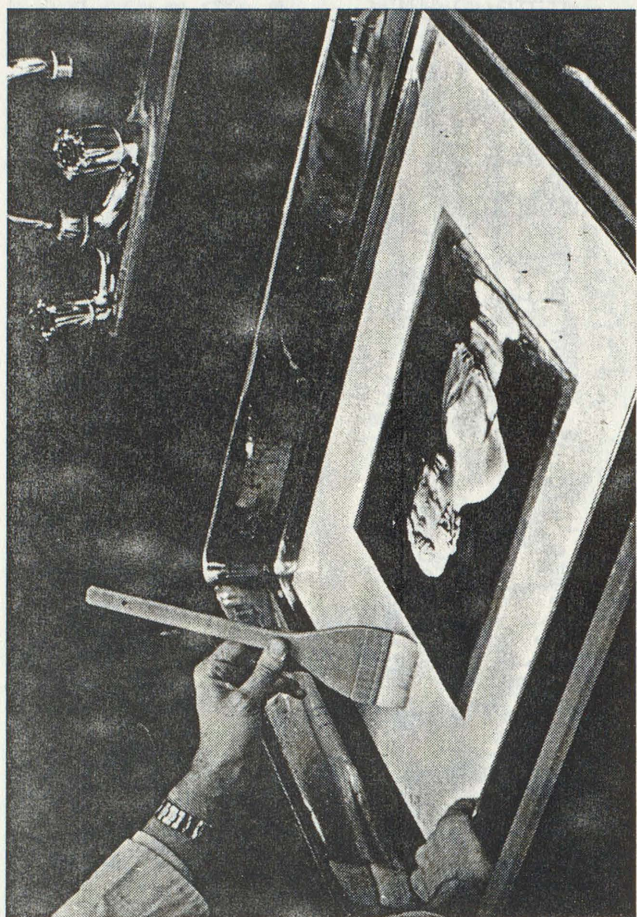


Fig 5 Float-washing a print

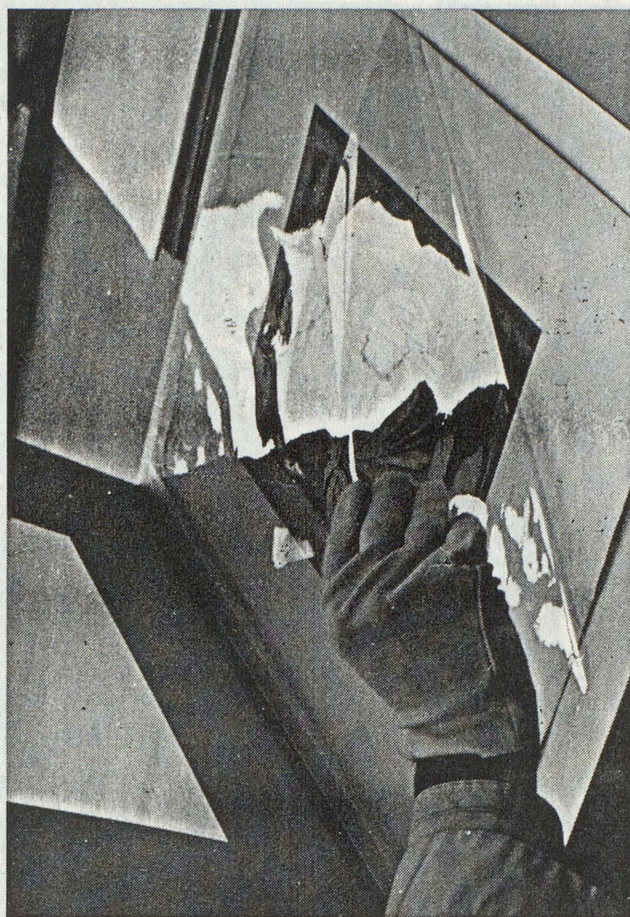


Fig 6 A mounted print



Fig 3 Bust of Minerva. Edge fading caused by atmospheric pollutant gases.

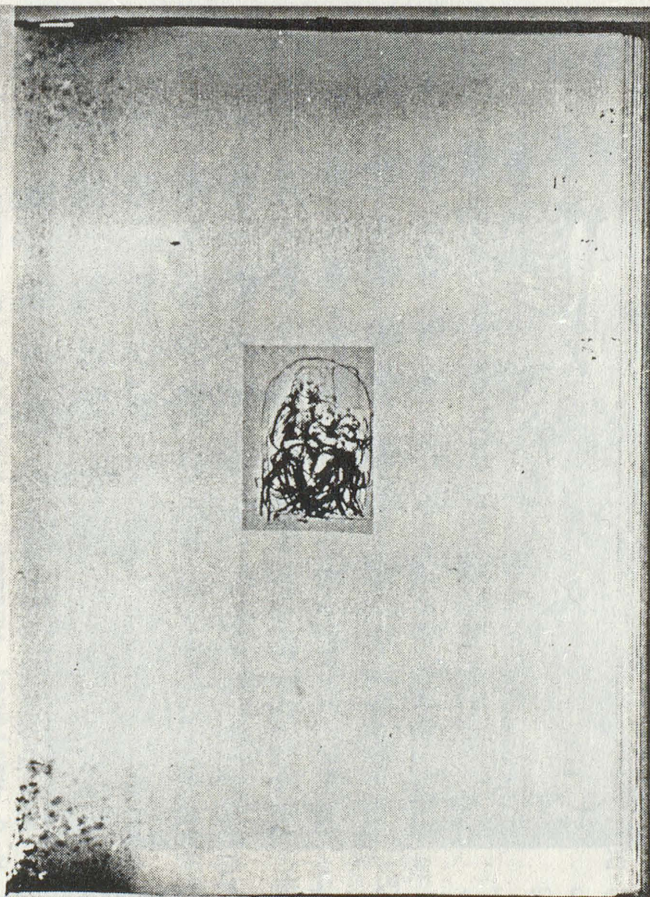


Fig 4 Study of Virgin and Child with Cat, by da Vinci. Damage caused by silverfish (b left and t left)

THE COMMERCIAL PICTURE LIBRARY

BY John Easterly

Every day, throughout the world, countless millions of pictures are used. Advertisements, books, magazines, record sleeves, calendars, audio-visual presentations, jigsaw puzzles, partworks, posters, greeting cards, travel and promotional brochures and leaflets all go towards creating an unquenchable demand for ever greater numbers of pictures.



Of the many pictures used each day, surprisingly few have actually been commissioned by their respective users. To illustrate this point, consider how impractical it would be for a small travel company to send a photographer to all the far off countries with which it might have business associations, in order to compile the annual brochure. All of you, with your experience in photography will realise that by simply being in the "right" place with your camera by no means guarantees a satisfactory result.

The weather may be unfavourable, a prominent building may be covered with scaffolding, the concept may call for a snow covered scene in the middle of summer or it may simply take too long to arrange the shoot. In these cases, and in many others, the picture library fulfils a unique role; for it is able to draw on stocks which often represent the results from a number of assignments by different photographers to any one place.

With the present high standard of Photo-library pictures or "Stock" photography, it is now entirely proper to regard the picture library as an alternative to the commissioned photograph. Indeed, in recent years, numerous awards in the creative and advertising world have been won for advertisements in which stock pictures have been used.

Those of you involved in travelling to far off and out of the way places are in a unique position to obtain pictures that may otherwise be too expensive for a great many picture users to obtain through commissioned work.

On the other hand don't neglect your own respective environments where library 'material' is all around you. Your involvement with museums, their interests and exhibits could well provide excellent opportunity for the acquisition of stock pictures. As long as it doesn't infringe on your employers rights, or take up the time they have paid you for, most of you are in a unique position of strength to obtain pictures of subjects and locations which are generally off-limits to most photographers.

It is the pictures that we have for sale that determine our success, which is why we are always interested in seeing new work, either by established photographers or by newcomers. If your pictures are good, then we can offer a selling service that is second to none.

PICTURES THAT SELL

All sorts of people buy all sorts of pictures for all sorts of applications and reasons. Put like that, it might seem that there is no real way of telling what would or what would not sell, and it is perfectly true that a picture that suits one client well will leave another cold, even if they have requested the same subject in writing. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some useful generalisations.

First and foremost, no picture is going to sell unless it gets in front of the potential buyer. Quite honestly, some truly rotten pictures have been reproduced, simply because the user has not seen any alternatives. This is where active selling comes into it: our brochures for example are sent to thousands of potential markets, and we attend national and international fairs and exhibitions so that our name is one of the first that people think of when they require pictures.

Fotobank has also recognised during recent years the importance of efficient working methods within the library. Eight years ago, in order to increase efficiency, the decision was taken to fully computerise our library. Since that date, we have formed our own Computer Software company and developed the definitive Picture Library Management system. Naturally the system is working in our own library, as well as having been installed in others, most notably the National Trust Picture Library, TODAY Newspapers and Network Photographers.

Because different people like different things; when shooting with stock in mind, try to shoot a variety of versions of the same subject. For instance, with and

without people, with and without cars, during the day, at sunset/rise and even at night. To take this way of thinking further, some of our photographers take the trouble to photograph the same view from exactly the same angle during each of the four seasons and in the extremes of all weathers!

Some photographers decide to view picture libraries as places where they can ditch their "surplus" pictures. Of these people, few are accepted as contributors, and those who do manage to slip through, rarely benefit from extensive sales. For the stock photographer to succeed, s/he must be aware, maybe more so than in any other photographic field, of visual trends and styles of the era.

Successful stock photography can be likened to having the ability to produce pictures which are acceptable and even competitive in a world where a high proportion of images are the result of the combined input of Art Directors, Stylists, Co-ordinators, make-up artists, Picture Editors and of course the Photographers. For many years in America, Stock Photography has been accepted as an essential part of the media world. Although British and European Stock Photography has some way to go before it is accepted in the same way as in America it is in every sense of the word a "growth" industry.

To those of you who are involved in travelling, whether nationally or internationally, we would suggest that roughly adhering to the following guidelines will genuinely help you to take pictures which could be effectively marketed by a photo-library....preferably Visionbank!!

1) CAPITAL CITIES: Generally the capital city is the first place we are asked for when dealing with requests for foreign countries. Therefore, it is important that we are able to have stocks of pictures which cover the following:

i) All well known or nationally important Land Marks.

ii) Places of Government, Airports, Museums, Statues, Squares, Art Galleries, Theatres, Birth-places of the famous, Shops, Cultural Centres and Markets.

iii) Financial areas, Stockmarkets, National Banks etc.

iv) All tourist attractions. When people are in shot, it is absolutely essential that they do not look shabby or out of place - otherwise the picture will never sell.

v) Important, Ancient or Futuristic architecture including major Churches, Cathedrals and Abbeys.

vi) Local festivals, with detail to national dress.

vii) Artists quarters.

viii) Parks & Gardens.

ix) Military Parades. (Rather risky in USSR!)

x) Transport systems.

xi) Skylines - attention should be paid to lighting conditions, with a variety of lighting situations and vantage points preferable. (Dusk, Bright Sun with Blue Sky, Sunset)

2) AGRICULTURE:

i) Typical crops and produce. (Such as the grape in wine producing countries and livestock in places such as New Zealand).

ii) All stages of a particular crop, from sowing to harvesting and even possibly, in the case of crops like the grape, the continuing process of wine, champagne and brandy making.

iii) Particular attention to local and national tradition. Such as the process of making Pate de Foi Gras in France, Sausages in Germany, Pasta in Italy and so on.

3) PEOPLE:

i) National costume. (Preferably not static)

ii) Holiday Makers. This is an area well worth taking time over, since we make substantial sales of pictures depicting families on the beach, walking, playing games and generally doing what one does on holidays. However, the people must look healthy, attractive and unposed. If shooting close-up, it is also essential that the subjects are clean and not looking unkempt - the hair can often let a picture down badly, by being unwashed or simply unbrushed although a tousled look is often preferred for a 'holiday' shot.

iii) People in Uniforms ie. Police, Army, Post, Butcher, Waiter etc.

iv) Occupations. People of the same profession often look remarkably dissimilar according to nationality.

v) Getting to work, travelling, indulging in sport etc.

4) OUT OF THE CITY:

i) All well known places, particularly those associated with tourism.

ii) Motorways - though please try to use imagination when photographing such a mundane subject.

iii) The land. Experiment with long and PC lenses if possible. Graduated ND Filters are also very useful to avoid bleached out sky.

iv) Industrial Areas.

v) Ports, both Fishing and Industrial.

The very rough details above will hopefully help those of you who are interested in stock photography to work more efficiently and produce pictures which will be more commercially successful.

Perhaps the two most important points to be constantly aware of are technical and compositional quality. Rather than go into detail about these, the relevance of these two areas can be illustrated by recognising that pictures from a photo-library will be judged in the same way if not more harshly than the work of top professionals. Badly underexposed or overexposed pictures will never be considered by any library. Pictures in photo-libraries are not simply records of interesting or distant places, they are on the commercial "front-line" and must consequently be punchy, atmospheric in tune with visual trends of the era.

Finally let me say that the staff at Visionbank are always willing to help with enquiries that you may have regarding submissions of work. Should you wish to take things a stage further, please call us, mentioning this article, on the following numbers:

01 734 2915
01 434 4764

We look forward to hearing from you and receiving your submissions.



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Charles V Holy Roman Emperor
(1500-1559)

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British Museum
(1986)

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NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Editor welcomes contributions on all aspects of associates' work but it would be helpful if contributors would bear in mind the following guidelines;

All contributions should be typewritten in double spacing on one side of the paper.

Give wide margins, 1 in on the left, 1 in on the right.

Those of you with word processors would you please use either 10 or 12 pitch, non-proportionally spaced and with no right hand justification.

Put your name and address on the top right hand corner of the first page, number each page as page x or y and type END at the end of your article.

It is hoped that these notes will not deter any would be contributors but they will make life easier for your hard-pressed Editor.

Jerome Perkins
British Museum