

Photographs from the collection  
Ruth and Peter Herzog

# Exposure Time

Kunstmuseum Basel  
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Edited by  
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## Foreword and Acknowledgments

The artworks housed within the Kunstmuseum Basel reflect the many historic fluctuations in the genesis of the collection. Different curatorial strategies, individual acquisitions, historically significant donations, as well as and—perhaps most importantly—the different zeitgeist of different times, have all left their traces on the institution. Any collection that has grown organically will (necessarily) have gaps. As the Kunstmuseum casts a vigilant eye back on its own history and pauses for critical reflection, taking note of the “uncharted territories” on the map of its collection provides opportunities to develop its holdings further. With photography, this dynamic is especially clear.

The very first cache of photographs to enter the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel offers a telling example. This portfolio was part of a study collection assembled by the internationally renowned Swiss painter Frank Buchser, and was bequeathed to the museum in 1896. Although an impressive donation of over two hundred photographs, it unsurprisingly failed at the time to spark any serious interest in the medium of photography. As such, it reflected the spirit of the times, especially the fraught debates over whether to consider photography an art form worthy of inclusion in a fine arts institution. The 1896 acquisition slumbered more or less undisturbed in the museum’s department of prints and drawings until 2009, when the exhibition *From Arcadia to Atlanta: Photographs from the Estate of Frank Buchser (1828–90)* finally made it accessible to the public.

The opportunity to exhibit these photographs revealed the extent to which these “study images” had inspired Buchser’s work. He had purchased photographic prints throughout his travels in Italy, France, Greece, Albania, England, and America, always with the aim of consulting them for subsequent drawings, oil sketches, and paintings.

While other international museums began to expand and develop their photography departments systematically, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, the Kunstmuseum Basel continued to regard the medium with reserve. With few exceptions—such as the significant donation by Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach of photograms by Man Ray, László Moholy-Nagy, and Kurt Schwitters in 1968—most photographs only entered the Kunstmuseum’s collection in the late 1990s and 2000s. Since then, the museum has acquired works by Bernd and Hilla Becher, Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, Robert Rauschenberg, Edward Ruscha, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Walter Dahn, Wolfgang Tillmanns, Hannah Villiger, and Roman Vishniac—works by established art photographers. Such artists had long since found their way into the canon of “art photography,” however, and were already present in many noteworthy international museum collections. Still more recently, the museum has mounted an increasing number of exhibitions devoted specifically to photography. In brief, it seems the Kunstmuseum was only really ready for photography at the turn of the millennium. And now, in 2020, we are poised to take the next important step.

The exhibition *The Incredible World of Photography* draws to a large extent on the extraordinarily large and extraordinarily diverse photographic collection assembled by Ruth and Peter Herzog. Its four hundred exhibits were carefully selected to trace the history of photography from its beginnings in the nineteenth century to the 1970s. Moreover, *The Incredible World of Photography* marks the first exhibition in the history of the Kunstmuseum to devote itself to what is generally considered “vernacular photography”—that is, scientific, documentary, political, and above all, private photographs. The project gives central importance not only to the ongoing debates in art history but also to the history of culture and media more generally. Both the exhibition and the accompanying publication *Exposure Time* acknowledge and trace the wealth of topics and concepts that shaped the photography collection assembled by Ruth and Peter Herzog.

The photo collection of Ruth and Peter Herzog has since 2015 been part of the Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett in Basel, where it is now being stored, reviewed, and thoroughly researched. The Kabinett also initiated and oversees the ongoing inventory project to catalogue and systematically digitize the entire collection and make it publicly accessible. This has been made possible by crucial financial support from central donor foundations: the Christoph

Merian Foundation, the Swisslos-Fonds Basel-Stadt, the Ernst Göhner Foundation, Swisslos-Fonds Basel-Landschaft, the Sophie and Karl Binding Stiftung, the UBS Culture Foundation, an anonymous donation, and by contributions from the architectural office of Herzog & de Meuron.

The exhibition itself marks the beginning of a cooperative relationship between the Kabinett and the Kunstmuseum, whereby the museum has regular access to the more than five hundred thousand photographs assembled in this Basel-based photographic collection. This first major collaboration between the two institutions also makes evident the extent to which the museum and the photographic archive relate to each other. They are like two resonance chambers. For the Kunstmuseum, this offers welcome opportunities to further develop its areas of expertise, especially in the history of photography.

The curators Paul Mellenthin and Olga Osadtschy, who developed and organized the exhibition, dedicated themselves to this topic with enthusiasm and acumen. Our deepest thanks are due to Ruth and Peter Herzog, not only for their tireless efforts on behalf of photography but also for the intensive collaboration we were privileged to have with them here in Basel as they placed their considerable expertise at the project's disposal. The Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel, and its team—led by director Esther Zumsteg—expressed great trust in us and provided extensive support, without which this exhibition would not have been possible. Not only did they make valuable loans available to us, but they also contributed innovative exhibition architecture directly inspired both by the working situation at the Kabinett and by the engagement with photographic objects and the medium of photography more generally. With so many small-format, light-sensitive objects on display, the exhibition architecture is characterized by considerations of presentation and perception. It is a topic that has long occupied Herzog & de Meuron with regard to its own work displays. We were very fortunate that the collection team at the Ruth and Peter Herzog Photo Collection in the Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel—and especially Birgit Huber—could prepare the comprehensive and complex material and make it available for the exhibition. Nadine Reding and her team at fokore, as well as the Atelier Patrick Lüthi, collaborated with the paper conservators at the Kunstmuseum's department of prints and drawings, especially Caroline Wyss, to prepare the objects optimally for display. Monique Meyer showed great commitment in attending to all the organizational and logistical details necessary for the exhibition. Indeed, we are extremely grateful to all of the museum's employees for their work on this complex exhibition project.

An interdisciplinary academic advisory board was convened in advance of the exhibition. For the stimulating questions raised and the frank and open exchange of ideas, we are especially grateful to Katharina Ammann, Martina Baleva, Lucas Burkart, Peter Geimer, Michael Hagner, Peter Herzog, Ruth Herzog, Markus Krajewski, Pierre de Meuron, Ulrich Pohlmann, Ricabeth Steiger, Ralph Ubl, and Margarethe Vöhringer.

We extend warm thanks to the authors of the insightful essays contained in this volume: Martina Baleva, Jan von Brevern, Eva Ehninger, Steve Edwards, Peter Geimer, Valentin Groebner, Michael Hagner, Peter Herzog, Katja Müller-Helle, Katja Petrowskaja, Vanessa R. Schwartz, and Kelley Wilder. We warmly thank Kim Beirnaert for her accomplished book design. At the publishing house of Christoph Merian Verlag, Oliver Bolanz, Claus Donau, and Iris Becher oversaw this comprehensive project with masterful control and grace. We appreciated the precise and skillful work of the copy editors of the respective editions—Doris Tranter (German) and Miranda Robbins (English)—and of our team of translators: Sylee Gore, Timothy Grundy, and Miranda Robbins, working from German to English, and Cornelius Reiber, working from English to German. We would also like to thank Andreas Muster for his expertise in the area of lithography.

Last but not least: ambitious projects require financial backing that can only come from outside patrons. We therefore extend deep thanks to all our donors, sponsors and supporters for their generosity and their trust.

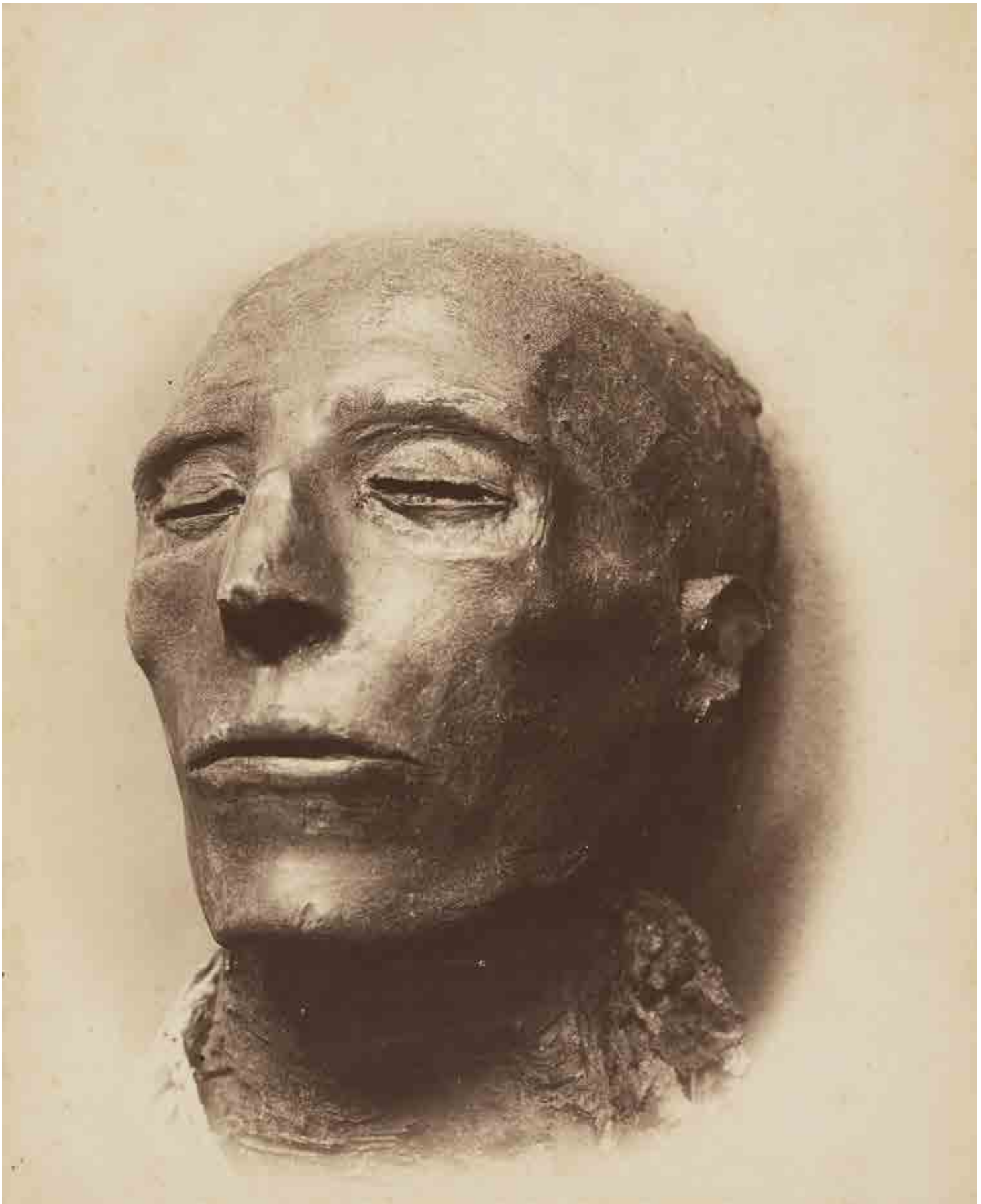
Josef Helfenstein  
Director, Kunstmuseum Basel





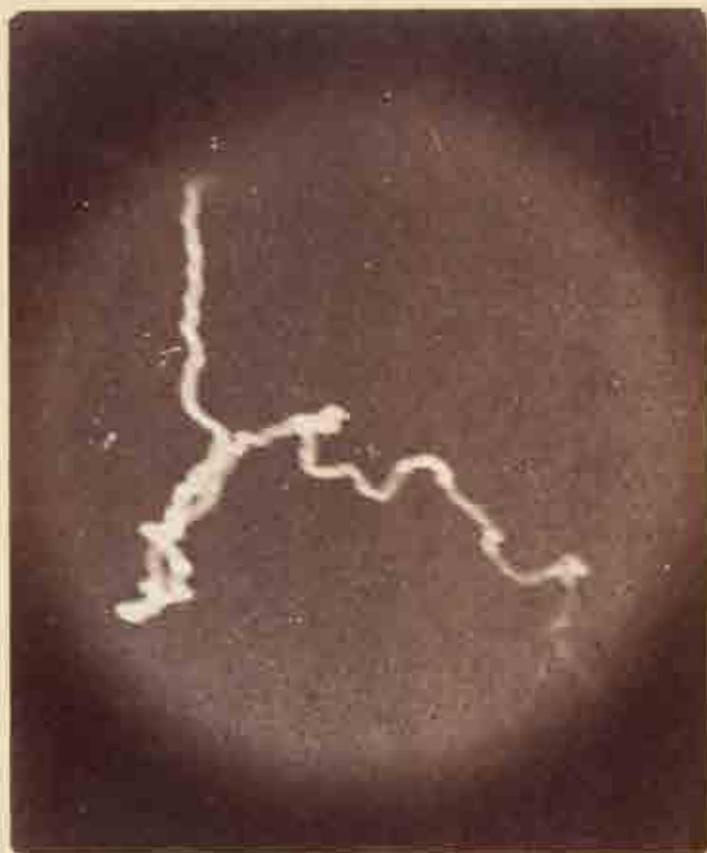


Frédéric Boissonnas, Erechtheion, 1907–10, carbon print mounted on cardboard, 29.5 × 22 cm



Emile Charles Albert Brugsch, Head of the mummy of Seti I, 1881, albumen print mounted on cardboard, 22.7 × 18.4 cm

*Orage du 12 Mai 1886*  
*Eclairs en spirale*



*Ch. Moussette phot.*

**D.** *Aggrandissement de l'éclair qui figure à gauche sur l'épreuve du cliché original.*

Charles Moussette, Enlarged depiction of lightning, 1886, albumen print mounted on cardboard, 27.1 x 20.9 cm (object)



Emile Chaix, Smoke formation over the volcano Etna (Italy), 1885–95, albumen print mounted on cardboard, 12 x 14.5 cm





Giorgio Sommer, Cast of a child killed during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius (Pompeii), 1882–86, albumen print mounted on cardboard, 23.6 × 29.6 cm (object)



Unknown, X-ray of a hand, 1896, silver gelatin print mounted on cardboard, 24 × 18 cm (object)



Unknown, Portrait of a child, 1845–55, daguerreotype in wooden frame, 19 × 16.5 × 2 cm (object)



Unknown, Man with clock, 1855–60, cased hand-colored ambrotype, 12×9.5×2 cm (closed)





Unknown, Blind woman with braille writing machine, 1845–55, cased daguerreotype, 9.2 × 8.2 × 1.8 cm (closed)

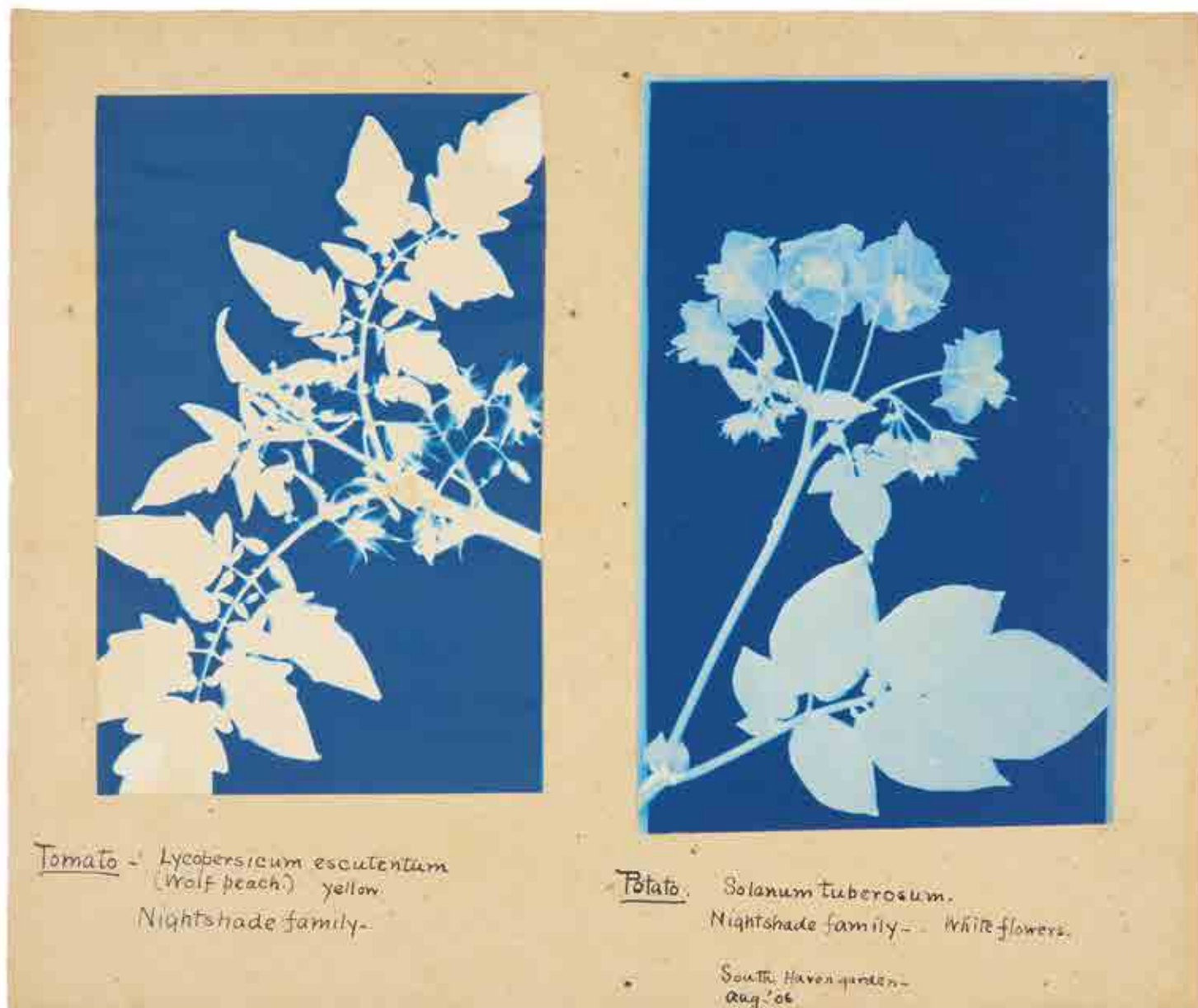


Unknown, Reproduction studies of engravings, 1880–90, albumen prints mounted on cardboard, 22.8×32.9 cm (object)



Unknown, Reproduction of Federico Barocci's *Annunciation*, 1880–90, albumen print, 21.3 x 15.5 cm



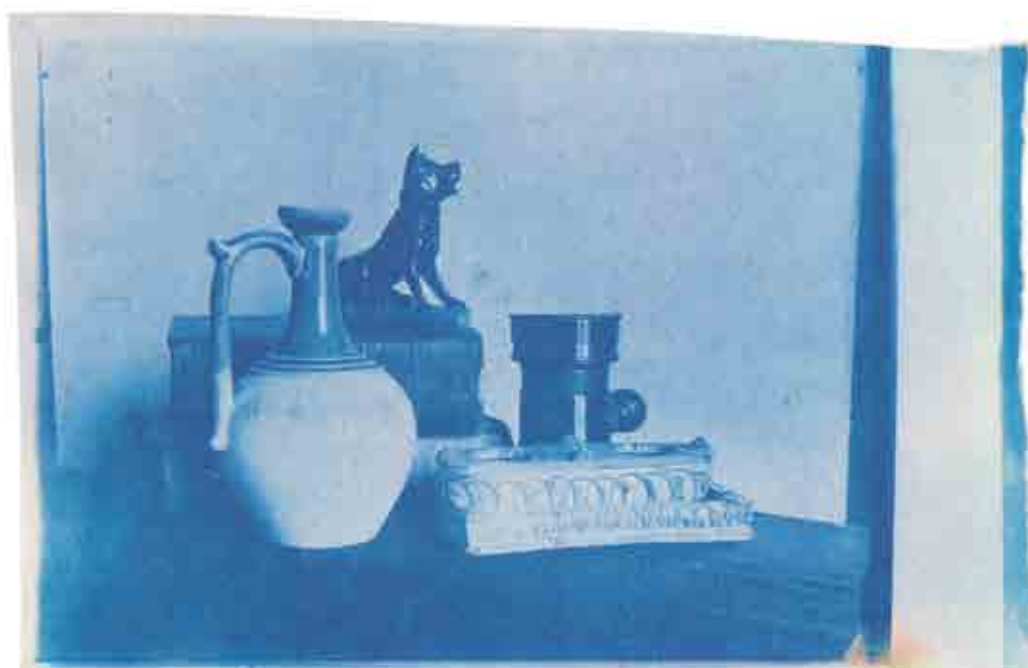
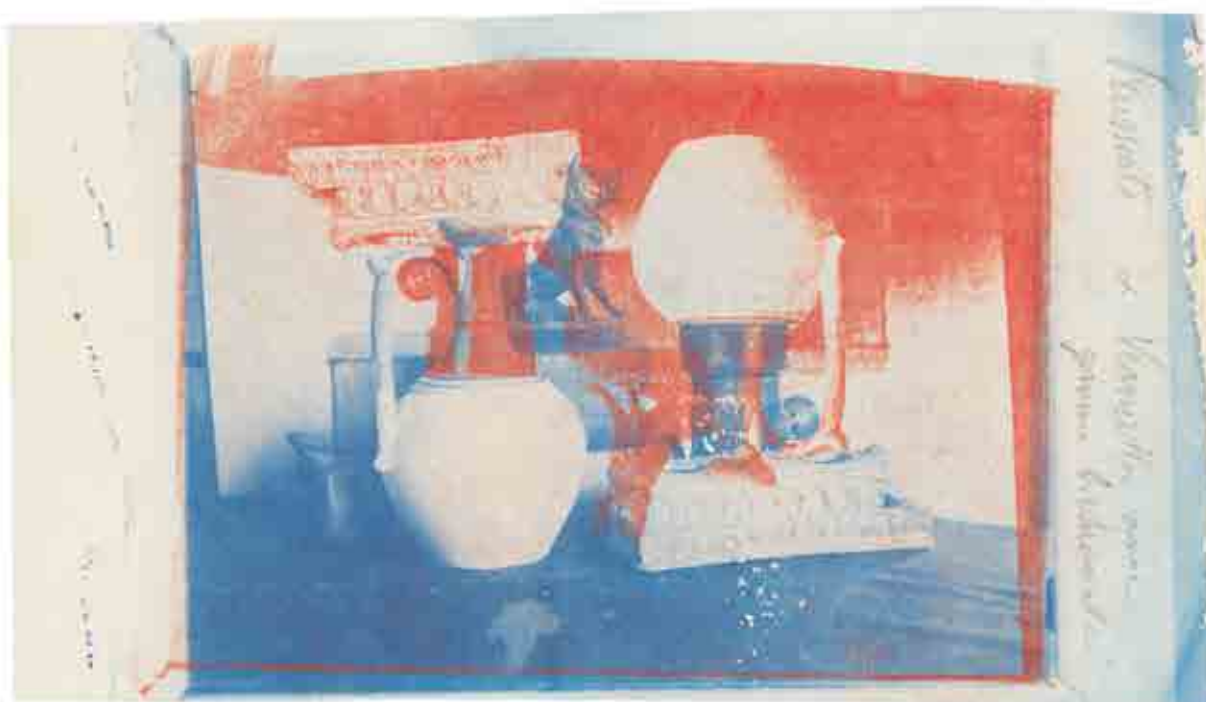


Unknown, Tomato and potato plant, 1906, cyanotype photograms mounted on cardboard, 25.4×30.1 cm (object)

> Unknown, Still life with flowers, 1933, autochrome, 11.9×8.9 cm







Charles Cros, Series of four still lifes, ca. 1874, trichromy prints, 8.8×13.3, 8.4×15.2, 8.9×15.6 and 8.6×13.4 cm



Unknown, Still life with pumpkins, 1880–1900, cyanotype mounted on cardboard, 15.6 × 21.8 cm (object)

> Unknown, Two women at a market stall in France, after 1907, autochrome, 18 × 13 cm







Unknown, Mother with baby, 1848, framed daguerreotype, 18 × 14.5 × 1 cm (object)

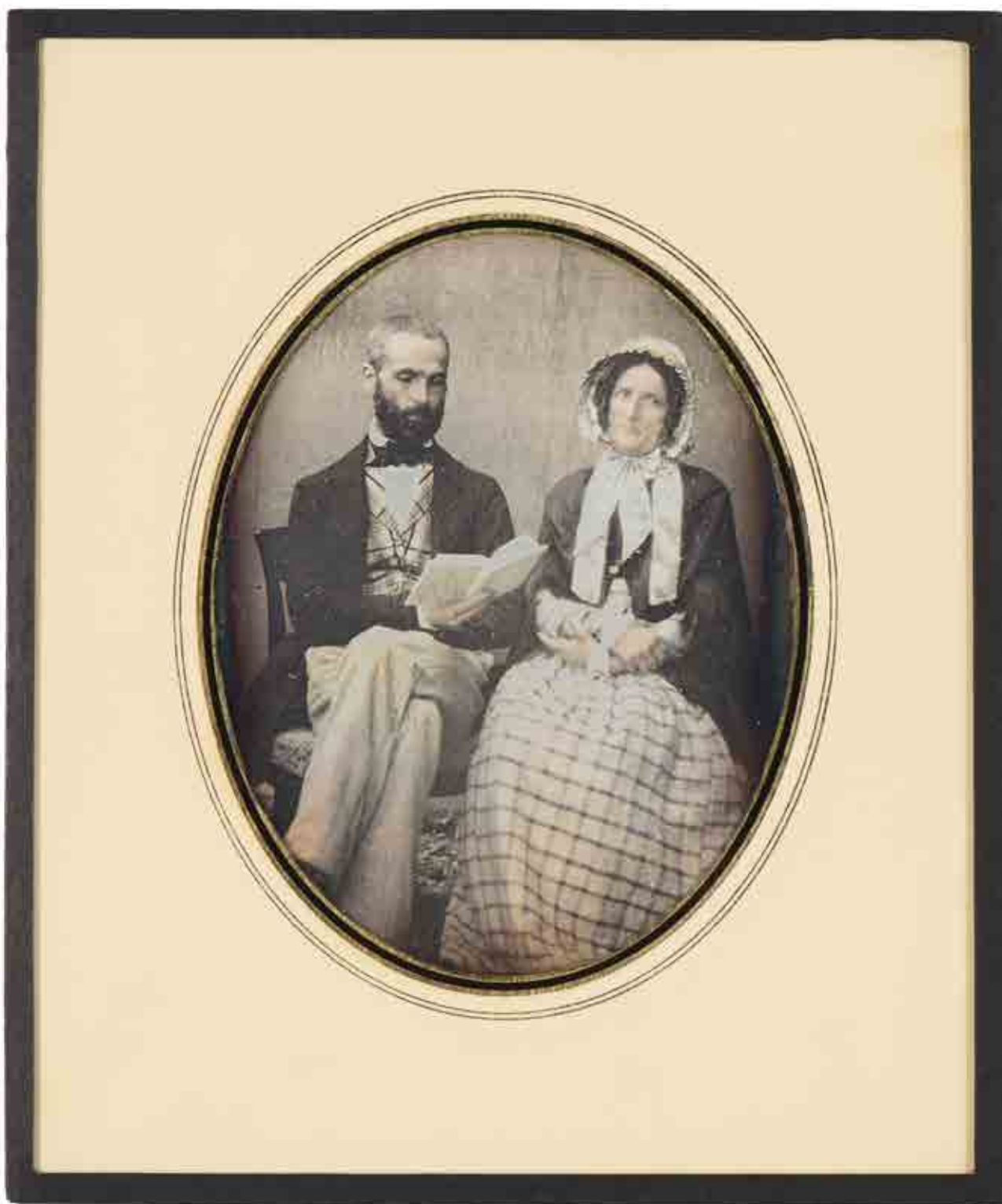


De Chazelle, Drawing room, 1870–95, albumen print mounted on cardboard, 19 × 22.4 cm (object)





William C. Dubisson, Group looking at an image, 1840–50, framed daguerreotype, 12.7 × 15.3 × 1 cm (object)



Unknown, Woman with her nephew, 1850–60, framed daguerreotype, 15.1 × 12.7 × 0.9 cm (object)



Unknown, Man sitting in front of painted backdrop, 1848, framed daguerreotype, 20.5 × 19 × 1.3 cm (object)



Unknown, Woman in a wedding dress, 1840–50, daguerreotype  
in wooden frame, 21.5 × 17.5 × 2 cm (object)