

No. 36, 2021, EUR 18

ESHPh. EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR
THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY

PhotoResearcher

Private Photo Collecting

Edited by Uwe Schögl

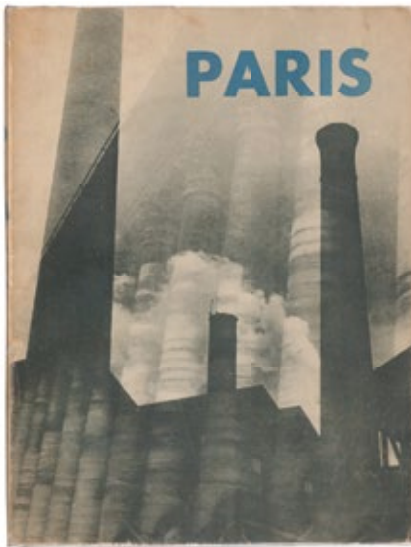




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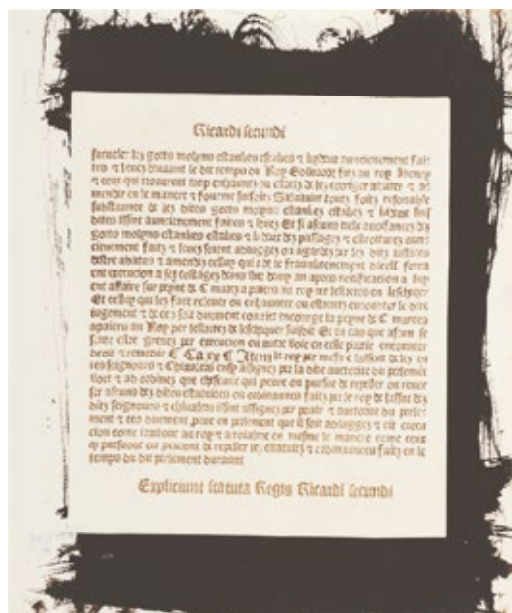
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Editorial

Today, cultural and socio-political communications are more intricately linked than ever before. These mainly take place through the digital networks and function as a multifaceted system of productive and creative interests, with cyber-attacks as the downside. In the global world, old systems of order are successively losing their canonical status, and political and economic interactions are becoming less transparent. Unexpected occurrences, such as the current pandemic, or changes like global warming, are seen as burdens – although both have been caused by human activity – and considered paradoxical and as not fitting in with the global model of a linear optimistic future-oriented mindset in any way at all. Today's world is faced with numerous challenges that will become even greater in the future.

The concept for *PhotoResearcher* no. 36 was developed during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and against the backdrop of these volatile perspectives for the future. The premise was to document the effects of this traumatic turning point from the personal perspective of those persons who are so decisively involved in this cultural context. We are talking about the private photo collectors who use the holdings of their important collections to both initiate and participate in international exhibitions and research projects, as well as promote the discipline, and are also a significant factor on the art market and in cultural politics.

Nine internationally renowned photo collectors – *Frédérique Destribats, Manfred Heiting, Judy Hochberg & Michael G. Mattis, Serge Kakou, Michael Loulakis, Anna Morelli, Christian Skrein*, and last but not least *Michael G. Wilson* – accepted our invitation to be interviewed for this edition of our journal and pass on their knowledge and experience, as well as describe their successful projects. All of the interviews are included in this extensive volume.

The interviews took place in the form of e-mail correspondence or as tele-conferences in the period between January and July 2021. The results of the conversations held with the (photo)-historians *Roberto Caccialanza, Delphine Desveaux, Vreni Hockenjos, Simone Klein, Kristina Lemke Moritz Neumüller, Thorsten Sadowsky, Miriam Szwest and Katrin Unterreiner*, are a series of distinctive statements made at the interface between the private and public sphere that provide us with previously unknown insights into the individual concepts of collecting and its genesis, structures, and strategies.

A fundamental question dealt with the understanding of “private collecting”, which was often described as an attempt to bring order into a chaotic world. On the one hand, collecting can represent self-reflection and, on the other, be more of a game, or a path to communication.

Each interview begins with an entrée – a personal statement, of varying length, by the interviewer. An exception was made in connection with the “photo collector” Empress Elisabeth of Austria (1837–1898). For the first time, the personal photo albums she assembled in the brief period between 1860 and ca. 1865 are investigated going beyond the photo-historical perspective to include a study of the development of her personality that occurred during the same period.

Uwe Schögl

Vienna, October 2021



“Now I am Collecting Photographs”

Miriam Szwast in Conversation with Katrin Unterreiner about Elisabeth of Austria’s carte-de-visite collection

A great deal has been written about Empress Elisabeth; by her contemporaries as well. But where are the direct sources that can give us an insight into the historical person behind the myth? A small sensation was made when her poems were published as a ‘poetic diary’ in the 1980s. The public was not aware of how lyrical, morbid, sharp-tongued, and cynical she could be until that time. And now it is time to throw light onto the photo albums that Empress Elisabeth put together in the 1860s. Are they simply the insignificant products of a bored monarch? Or is it time to take a closer look at Elisabeth, the photo collector?

Miriam Szwast: *Dear Mrs Unterreiner, I am very happy to be able to talk to you about Elisabeth of Austria as a photo collector. As you know, the Museum Ludwig in Cologne has had eighteen photo albums, with around 2000 carte-de-visite photographs, which were personally collected and sorted by the Empress, in its holdings since the 1990s. Fourteen, easy to handle, albums in horizontal format have brown full-leather bindings with blind embossing, while four are individually decorated with brass trimmings and semiprecious stones (— fig. 1). All can be locked – some of the small keys still exist – and were produced by various court bookbinders including August Klein. This makes them stand apart from the Empress’ later representative ‘travel albums’ that were larger in size, were titled with place names, and did without a lock.¹ On the occasion of the presentation of *Sisi privat. Die Fotoalben der Kaiserin*,² I took a closer look at these albums and attempted to understand the significance they had for the collector. The provenance provided a first answer. It was not until 1978 that these albums “from the family estate” and, as part of the “Library of Empress Elisabeth of Austria” – as the auction catalogue states – were auctioned.³ At the time, they were purchased by the Hamburg photographer and collector Werner Bokelberg, who later passed them on to Robert Lebeck whose photo collection came to the Museum Ludwig in the year 1994. However, the albums had remained private and unpublished until 1978.⁴ Who had she given them to? Who found them important? Unfortunately, we were not able to discover who had come into possession of albums after*

fig. 1

Album of Elisabeth of Austria, c. 1862, leather, amethyst, metal mounting 15.5 × 23.9 cm. © Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

1 — See Marlies Dörning, “Durch die ganze Welt will ich ziehen.” *Die Reisealben der Kaiserin Elisabeth, 1890-1893*, <<https://www.onb.ac.at/forschung/forschungsblog/artikel/durch-die-ganze-welt-will-ich-ziehen>> (28.08.21).

2 — *Sisi privat. Die Fotoalben der Kaiserin*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 24 October 2020 – 19 September 2021, publication: Miriam Szwast (ed.), *Sisi privat. Die Fotoalben der Kaiserin*, Cologne 2020.

3 — Hartung & Karl, München, Auction 27, 14–16 November 1978.

4 — Among those who acquired other photo albums from the auction was the Costume Library of the Munich City Museum. The first to write about the hold-

ings of the Museum Ludwig was Brigitte Hamann in the volumes she published together Werner Bokelberg: *Sisis Familienalbum* (1980), *Sisis Schönheitenalbum* (1980), *Sisis Fürstenalbum* (1981) and *Sisis Künstleralbum* (1981). These were followed in 1994 by Bodo von Dewitz, “Ich lege mir ein Album an und sammle nun Photographien”. *Kaiserin Elisabeth von Österreich und die Carte-de-visite-Photographie*, in: idem and Roland Scotti (eds.), *Alles Wahrheit! Alles Lüge! Photographie und Wirklichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, exhibition catalogue Museum Ludwig, Köln, Cologne: Verlag der Kunst 1996, 94–105.

Elisabeth's death, but the answer could provide some indication of the genesis and significance of the albums. That naturally leads to my first question for you: Do you know any more?

Katrin Unterreiner: I have an idea, but I don't know exactly. Where were they auctioned?

At Hartung & Karl in Munich.

Most of the articles that reach the market come from the descendants of Marie Valerie, Elisabeth's youngest daughter, some of them directly from Wallsee. This branch of the family is very cautious and explicitly rejects any contact with historians; we have to accept that. We can only guess about what still exists. But there are some indications that there are diaries and a great deal from the private library. It seems probable that the albums come from this direction, but we don't know for sure. The descendants of Elisabeth's second daughter, Gisela,⁵ often put textiles on the market – and, much less frequently, private collections. That's why I feel that it is more likely that the albums come from Wallsee.⁶

If we can't get any closer here, maybe we should approach the albums from another angle: over a photograph (— figs. 2a–d). This carte-de-visite in a montage technique is based on individual pictures taken by the Court Photographer Ludwig Angerer and shows the imperial family: Elisabeth in the middle, Franz Joseph, the two children Gisela and Rudolf, and Franz' brothers Ludwig Viktor, as well as Maximilian and Karl Ludwig with their respective wives Charlotte and Maria, and their parents.⁷ It is noteworthy that Elisabeth is holding an open photo album in her hands. The collage was most probably created at the time when she was assembling the albums; namely, in the early 1860s. These years are always described as a period of upheaval in her biography – a period of crisis. How would you describe the phase in which Elisabeth collected these photographs? Is it possible to get an idea about why she collected so excessively, what this meant to her?

This period is actually the time after the major crisis. There was actually a great crisis after the birth of Crown Prince Rudolf in 1858 caused by the excessive demands placed on this young woman who had come to the Viennese court where she was unable to find her bearings and was continually forced to play a role she did not want to fulfil. The only way for her to escape was, more or less, through an illness. That is why she pretended to have a chronic cough. It was not a dangerous lung disease, as it is often described; that can be stated with assurance. But it was the only way for her to escape and take something of a timeout. And it is also no coincidence that she

5___ Gisela, Archduchess of Austria, Princess of Bavaria, 1856–1921, the second daughter of Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth, married to Leopold of Bavaria, lived in Munich; four children Elisabeth, Auguste, Georg and Konrad, numerous descendants.

6___ Marie Valerie (1868–1924), the youngest daughter of Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth lived at Wallsee Castle in Lower Austria together with her husband Franz Salvator (a distant cousin from the Tuscan

line of the Habsburg family) and their nine children. Today, the castle is in the possession of the Habsburg-Lothringen family and is the home of direct descendants of Valerie.

7___ About the collages see: Ulla Fischer-Westhauser, Gerda Mraz, *Elisabeth. Prinzessin in Bayern, Kaiserin von Österreich, Königin von Ungarn. Wunschbilder oder die Kunst der Retouche*, Vienna 1898/2008.

fig. 2a

Unknown Artist, Elisabeth of Austria with her Family, after 1863, water-colour collage from photographs by Ludwig Angerer, carte-de-visite photograph 8.5 × 5.5 cm.

© Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

figs. 2b–d

Ludwig Angerer, *Empress Elisabeth*, Vienna, autumn 1860; *Emperor Franz Joseph*, Vienna 1863; *Archduke Carl Franz Joseph*, Vienna 1860, albumen, carte-de-visite photographs. © Austrian National Library. Picture Archives and Graphics Collection.



travelled to the most distant place, to Madeira. She prolonged her absence from the Viennese court artificially and was – de facto – away for two years. After these two years during which she found herself, she returned as a self-confident young woman and not the timid girl she had been when she left Vienna. In this period, she developed into a beautiful woman who was more assured of herself and, above all, realised that men found her attractive and desirable.

For the first time, she spent a great deal of time with people of her own age on Madeira – also with young, usually married, men who had been sent as cavaliers of honour so that the Empress would not only have her young ladies-in-waiting around her. And, of course, she came into contact with the local population. She returned with the awareness that beauty is power. And, from that time on, beauty played an essential role in her life. By consciously putting her attractiveness into action, she could achieve anything she wanted – that gave her her power. And we know from a letter that she wrote to her brother-in-law Archduke Ludwig Viktor in 1862 that she began collecting in the course of her journey from Madeira to Corfu, and Venice – including the photographs of “beautiful women”. In this letter, she wrote: “I am putting an album of beauties together and am now collecting photographs; and only of women. I would like to ask you to send me any pretty faces you can get hold of from Angerer and other photographers ...”⁸ You see, she commissioned Ludwig Viktor with finding photographs for her and started to occupy herself intensively with the subject of beauty because it represented a source of power for her. It was an act of liberation and that makes it a real turning point in her life; this occupation with beauty became her meaning of life for many years. What is beautiful? How can I make use of it? And how can I preserve it? It was not by chance that she began with her beauty cult in this period, but it was not a matter of imitating the ideal of beauty of the day. That is what makes it interesting. At the time, a beautiful woman was a completely different type: curvaceous, and not slender as she emphasised. That means that she actually would not have been thought of as a beautiful woman. She had her own ideal of beauty; an image of woman that would have been considered almost androgynous at the time. However, she cultivated it and also pulled it off. For example, she oriented her entire wardrobe on it. That is why it plays a role in the photographs she had taken of herself; how she presented herself, how she had herself photographed. Everything revolved egocentrically around the subject of beauty. And that makes these photographs that she collected, and these albums she put together, part of the whole.

In 1934, Egon Conte Corti wrote the following about her collecting photographs in his biography with the telltale title of Elisabeth. Die Seltsame Frau (Elisabeth. The Peculiar Woman): “Elisabeth was looking for a new kind of pleasure in her idleness on Madeira.”⁹ If I understand you correctly – and that was also my impression – that, based on the abundance of material and the period in between not being real noticed, or feeling like she was in a “dungeon”,¹⁰ as she described it, and then – all of a sudden – being seen and

8____ Cited after Egon Caesar Conte Corti, *Elisabeth. 'Die seltsame Frau'*, Vienna, et al., n. d., 111.

9____ Corti n.d. (reference 8), 111.

10____ Corti n.d. (reference 8), 54.

given power, that she needed photography for more than just compensation for her “in-occupation” in this transitional period. Could there possibly be more of a psychological aspect behind it?

I’m convinced that there was. And this is indicated by the fact that she continued with it when she returned to Vienna in 1862. It was not only to combat her boredom on Madeira. That falls within this period, but she carried on with it for some time.

That’s interesting. So far, I would have dated the albums with the period from 1862, when she wrote the letter to Ludwig Viktor, to 1864/1865 – in any case, that’s what the dating of the photographs would suggest.

Precisely.

And 1865 was not only the year when the famous official portrait was created by Franz Xaver Winterhalter, but also when Elisabeth penned a text that Brigitte Hamann described as her “Declaration of Independence” in her biography Elisabeth. Kaiserin wider Willen.¹¹ In it, she had her husband authorise that, in future, she could spend her time wherever she wanted to, with whoever she chose, and that she could have an influence on the upbringing of the children. Is it a coincidence that that this concurs with the end of her passion for collecting photos, collecting photographs of beautiful women, and her “resurrection” from her illness as a woman who was regarded as being beautiful? Would that be a logical assumption?

Absolutely. It was definitely a high point – or turning point. And you should not forget that the first negotiations on the Compromise with Hungary began at this time. This all gathered speed in 1866 with the defeat at Königgrätz, and that is when she realised for the first time – and, by the way, the only time – that she could also have some political influence. De facto, the initiative did not originate with her, but it was the only time that she willingly allowed herself to be roped into something by the Viennese court – because it happened to fit in with her own interests. If she had just taken it to her head to start negotiations with the Hungarians, which would lead to a political agreement, a political change, as Empress ... of course, she did not have this political power. She was consciously sent to Hungary by the Viennese court to create a positive feeling – something she did with great talent. In this case, clever use was made of her charm – and her beauty. But that was the first time that she found self-affirmation of this kind and this power, which she enjoyed to the full and was able to link concretely to a political event. But it was an isolated, unique occurrence. She was not as concerned with Hungary as with her self-assertion. But you are right; this emancipation began when she got her way to be able to go to Madeira, for an indefinite period, repeatedly extended it, did not return to Vienna in the meantime but only once to Venice, where she met the children before travelling back to Corfu. And when she returned to Vienna in 1862, she resolutely made use of this newly-discovered power that reached its peak when she was allowed to decide on the education of the Crown Prince in particular – that was not so important with her daughters. And,

11 — Brigitte Hamann, *Elisabeth. Kaiserin wider Willen*, Munich 2019, 176.

in this way, she had acquired a piece of freedom that allowed her to simply decide on how to live her life. Naturally, that then became obvious; you have already mentioned the portrait by Franz Xaver Winterhalter; that was the pinnacle of her newly-discovered power through beauty. This assumption was absolutely well chosen.

You have mentioned three very important keywords that I would like to repeat: beauty, power, and emancipation. And it is fascinating because I can observe a rediscovery of Elisabeth by the public; namely from a feminist perspective. Elisabeth is no longer interpreted as the oppressed, but as a woman who rebelled and – to the extent possible – was able to assert herself and follow her own path in a way that was surprisingly independent. I am thinking here of the forthcoming film Sisi und Ich by Frauke Finsterwalder, and the Netflix series The Empress.

I have a much more critical view of that. Because it goes well with our time, I believe that a great deal, which is not at all appropriate, has been read into that. In my eyes, Elisabeth was not an emancipated woman at all because she was only interested in looking for, or creating, a free space for herself, for her interests. She was not so concerned with emancipation in the socio-political sense that she took a stand for a cause. If one compares her with other women who played an active role in the socio-political life of the time, such as George Sand – she was not at all interested. Of all people, she made fun of women who were involved in social politics, who went public with ideas of self-determination, and contemptuously described them as “bluestockings”.¹² I think it’s necessary to be a bit careful about this. My God, she wasn’t a feminist. She was of the opinion that women should not become involved – and especially not in politics. That was something for men. Women should take care of their beauty and be pretty, but they should not get involved in things that were in the “male domain”. You see, you should be careful although it might seem to present itself and be tempting. But she was only interested in creating a pleasant life for herself and, fundamentally, not of bringing socio-political subjects to the attention of the public. She would have had thousands of opportunities – even in those days – and, especially, as Empress. She would have had the possibility of championing a cause, of giving her support to bring it to the public’s attention. It is possible to do that subtly and skilfully, but that didn’t interest her at all.

Thank you for differentiating that; I can follow you. But it is always a question of what one emancipates oneself from. Maybe you could say that Elisabeth succeeded a little in emancipating herself from the role and image of an Empress, as expected of her, by creating her own image of herself. An image? She was born in 1837 and photography came to the attention of the public at large in 1839; they are more-or-less the same age. That means that Elisabeth grew up with photography and developed an awareness of the medium.

Excuse me for interrupting you. But that is exactly what she did not do. She didn’t draw attention to herself and perform, she did not create an image of herself

fig. 3

Ludwig Angerer, top: Empress Elisabeth, Vienna 1862, bottom: Empress Elisabeth, Emperor Franz Joseph I on horseback, Vienna ca 1862, albumen, carte-de-visite photographs, from an album of Elisabeth of Austria, ca. 1862/64, 27.1 × 21.6 cm. © Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

12 — Constantin Christomanos, *Tagebuchblätter, Erinnerungen des Hauslehrers von Kaiserin Elisabeth*, Vienna 2007, 38–39.



Kaiserin Elisabeth



Kaiserin Elisabeth



Kaiser Franz Joseph I



fig. 4
Unknown artist, carte-de-visite portraits, albumen, photographs made from graphic reproductions, doublepage from an album of Elisabeth of Austria. © Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

for the public as she would have liked; she withdrew completely from the public and, much more, forced the Viennese court to create an image of her. She was not in control of that; the court made a virtue of necessity by having – and wanting – to portray the Empress as an active mother of her country and monarch although she was, de facto, not present. That means that she placed absolutely no value on promoting a specific image of herself in public; she didn't even want to exist in the public sphere. That was the real goal. That is even more radical.

Yes, she refused to be photographed; she hid herself behind umbrellas, fans, and so on ... even in the albums, she only appears five times: with a cape, with a veil in front of her face and wearing a hat, on horseback, with her dog – never dressed festively, but in the open air or on her way outside, as it seems (— fig. 3). I also understood it in the way that, after a certain time, she shielded herself from the image. However, the theory behind the presentation in the Museum Ludwig – and it was proposed by Olivia Gruber Florek¹³ and not by me – is that she actually had strong control over her image, and that she formed it extraordinarily independently, if you make a comparison between the three famous Winterhalter portraits and the three “albums of beauties”, albums that

13—Olivia Gruber Florek, 'Kaiserin Elisabeth und die Moderne im Bild', in: Miriam Szewast 2020 (reference 2), 16–38. First appeared in English in Maura E. Hamez, Heidi Schlipphacke, *Sissi's World. The Empress Elisabeth in Memory and Myth* (= New Directions in German Studies, vol. 22), New York et al., 2018, 131–154.



only have portraits of women, that we have in the museum. The theory is that Elisabeth possibly showed one of the albums – the so-called Amethyst Album (see figure 1) – to Winterhalter in preparation for the official portrait (— fig. 4). If you compare the pictures, you have the impression that, in this official portrait by Winterhalter – which is untypical of the genre in several aspects, including that it does not show the insignia of an Empress as she looks at the viewer – she introduced a final controlled, prepared, carefully considered image to the world before withdrawing from it, thereby leaving the power she had behind her. She remained distant from photographers; she even refused to have her lung X-rayed because she did not permit photographs to be made. What do you have to say about this theory?

The painting by Winterhalter is not the end. Today, it is the most famous because it is an “extremely beautiful” portrait of her. But there are two other portraits; the private ones with open hair – they have become icons. And there was a series of official portraits after that. I am referring to the Hungarian coronation. Several portraits were created there and that continues up to the silver anniversary in 1879. That is more-or-less the final point. Until then, she frequently made herself available for portraits on important occasions. The Winterhalter portrait of her in the white ballgown with the diamond stars in her hair is not the crowning glory – and, above all, it is not an official state portrait!



fig. 5
Ludwig Angerer, unidentified woman (left), anonymous cartoon of Napoleon III and Eugenie de Montijo, 1860-1865 (center); Ernst Rudolph Neubauer, *Plato* (right), 1862-65, albumen, carte-de-visite photographs, from an album of Elisabeth of Austria. © Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

Does that mean that she posed for later portraits?

Yes. The portrait for the silver anniversary by Georg Raab is considered the last one she condescended to having painted.

Before devoting ourselves to the “albums of beauties” once again, I would like to show you a page from another album on which – as is often the case – Eugénie of France can be seen. However, here, she is shown in the photographic reproduction of a caricature (—fig. 5), the origin of which we have, so far, been unable to determine. In this comic illustration, she is shown wearing a simple dress and hands Napoléon III, who is standing next to her, a rose. Napoléon seems embarrassed. Here, Eugénie is the more powerful. This page shows us how Elisabeth curated her photographs in her albums. And that is what needs to be discovered now; namely, the albums not as a collection of individual photographs, but with respect to the question of the social spaces she created in them and the statements she makes through the combination of pictures. On this page, she places a photo by Ludwig Angerer – the portrait of an anonymous young woman in a magnificent white dress and with a hairstyle similar to Eugénie’s dark, shoulder-length locks – next to the caricature on the left. And she has pasted a picture of a black royal poodle – possibly her own dog, Plato with whom she had also been photographed – to the right of the caricature. In this picture, he sits “enthroned” and well trained on a small table; his face was even visibly retouched. It almost looks like that Elisabeth is looking at Eugénie in the albums and making fun of her relationship with Napoléon III by comparing the French Emperor with a trained poodle, while his wife finds her echo as a dignified lady in the portrait of the unknown woman. What do we know about the relationship between Elisabeth and Eugénie?

Eugénie was considered to be an incredibly beautiful woman and, naturally, that interested Elisabeth. The met each other on several occasions; there was a meeting between the Emperors in Salzburg in 1867 and, much later, they saw each oth-



fig. 6
Ludwig Angerer, Elisabeth of
Austria's dogs Lady and Horseguard,
ca 1862–65, albumen, carte-de-
visite photographs, from an album
of Elisabeth of Austria. © Museum
Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches
Bildarchiv Cologne.

er frequently on the Côte d'Azur that Elisabeth visited, together with Franz Joseph, once a year after the 1890s. And Count Wilczek reports that he saw the two Empresses measuring and comparing their calves. Elisabeth was always measuring herself; her beauty cult had developed into a cult of the body. However, I find this album page marvellous. And it reminds us of the malicious, sharp-tongued poems she later wrote about her family. This combination of pictures reveals a great deal about her humorous, wickedly comical, character.

She also wrote a poem about her “gapers” that we also bring in the presentation and in which she expresses her annoyance about being watched; for example, in the opera: “It almost gets on my goat / When they stare at me like that / I would like to hide myself in a snail shell / and explode out of rage.”¹⁴ My impression is that, there, we experience her at close quarters in a way that is rarely possible behind the mythos of Elisabeth.

But she also staged herself as a martyr-like victim in these poems. What do you say about that? She was an Empress after all. It's possible that she didn't like what that entailed. But nobody meant any harm. People were interested in the Empress – especially when she only showed herself in public on rare occasions. She hardly ever went to the opera – and the opening of the Court Opera on the Ringstrasse in May 1869 was postponed several times on account of her because she felt indisposed – and then, she still didn't come. By withdrawing to such an extent, she had made herself an attraction. And the fact that people were curious is understandable in those days when there were no media – especially social media – as we know them today. Photographs were shot in studios; they were posed and staged theatrically and that means that it was necessary to try to see the Empress ad personam to see her at all. Of course, portraying that as a drama was rather – well – typical of her. Elisabeth naturally took advantage of all of those aspects of her role as Empress that she found pleasant and made the

14 ____ Brigitte Hamann (ed.), *Elisabeth von Österreich. Das poetische Tagebuch*, Vienna 1984, 238.

most of them; and there I am not only speaking about the financial advantages, but about her expensive and extravagant lifestyle in general. She didn't lead a modest life and was only interested in poetry. She spent incredible sums of money and found it all quite normal. As one example: train connections throughout Europe had to be adjusted to suit her travel plans. If you just take a look at how many people worked in the background so that she could travel incognito, only in private trains, only this, only that, hotels had to be rebuilt to guarantee that she was screened from view – unbelievable efforts were made in order for her to appear. She gladly claimed her right to that. But she also craftily portrayed herself as a victim; something she was not in any way. *Talking about "staging". I still haven't mentioned that the 2000 photographs mainly show people; the exception is her dogs including Lady and Horseguard (— fig. 6). In addition to the aristocracy, we find a surprising number of actresses, dancers, and stage performers such as those in the already mentioned "album of beauties" with violet amethysts on the cover. What was Elisabeth's relationship to the stage? Why was she so interested in stage performers?*

That's a good question. She was not a theatre fan. It's not a matter of her having an attachment to the world of the theatre. One of the albums mainly shows Parisian dancers, variété artists, and circus performers, the demimonde. That was somewhat scandalous and that excited her. She also like to provoke. And collecting those photographs ... if the public had seen that, it was absolutely outrageous for those times. There is a picture of a dancer with spread legs – an ankle was already madness, but the dancer sits there in an unusually revealing pose. She was obviously fascinated by the demimonde. She had little contact with actresses and none to dancers. Only to circus artists, such as those from the Renz family, who she engaged as trainers. I'm not so sure that these women represent leading a free, self-determined life or whether that interpretation goes a little too far. It is also a matter of costuming seeing that these are not private portraits of these dancers and actresses but often show them in their stage costumes. I believe that she found the subject of frivolity fascinating in itself.

That's interesting because she was sometimes described as being almost asexual; that her relationship to her husband had almost completely dissolved, and that the affairs she was reported to have had were simply rumours. That is why I am trying to understand why she collected "frivolous" pictures in the albums – not only the poses are frivolous, but also the way the opposite is looked directly in the eye, self-consciously. That makes me also think about women in trouser roles (— fig. 7).

This asexuality is definitely a theme to be considered. She wanted to be adored and worshiped and, to the extent possible, flirted on isolated occasions. The stories are well-known. She always had admirers, and she always enjoyed it if they did not know who she was, such as in the famous story of the Domino at the masked ball. She enjoyed that, but you could not get too close to her. And you mustn't forget one thing; that was a great misfortune for an Empress, but not for aristocrats who had un-



fig. 7

Ulric Grob, Mademoiselle Clothilde, ca 1862 (left), Alexandre Ken, Louise Lepage (?), ca 1862 (right), albumen, carte-de-visite photographs, from an album of Elisabeth of Austria. © Museum Ludwig, Köln. Photo: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne.

believable liberties. The social rules were absolutely clear. Young aristocratic women had to be untouched when they wed and, as soon as they were married, they had the same rights as the men. Naturally, women had their lovers because marriages were arranged for dynastic reasons. As long as everything remained discrete, nobody said anything. An empress did not have this freedom. After all, she was the Empress and her most important duty was to bring successors into the world. If an aristocrat became pregnant from a lover, she went on a journey, gave birth to the child, and often handed it over to the family of the natural father where it was discretely accepted as a playmate for the legitimate children. But, once again, an empress did not have this freedom. And that is why she was never alone. An empress was in an extraordinarily thankless position. And if she was unfortunate enough to be married to a man with whom things didn't work out well, who she did not find sexually attractive, we have an explanation for why physicality was avoided. She could be admired from afar. And it is not a matter of her being homosexual and loving women. We enter into the realm of fantasy if we think that she lived eroticism over the pictures. We should also be careful about the trousers roles. That was fashionable at the time. There were also countless stage photos of Katharina Schratt, who was *the* star of the Court Theatre at the time – independent of what her relationship to Franz Joseph was – some of them in trousers. Men playing women was just as fascinating. The biggest theatre hit in Vienna was the “Lecture by the Caretaker” that was performed by Hans Moser and all the other stars until well into the 1930s. Johann Nestroy also played

the role. There were only female parts in the play, and they were all performed by men. Ludwig Viktor also acted in the play and had himself photographed in women's clothes. Calling him a transvestite because of that – something that is often done – is an absolutely false interpretation. It is a stage photo. The piquancy of men in women's clothing and women in men's dress was, quite simply, very popular.

On the subject of the "role", it might have interested Elisabeth to see how the women presented themselves; as aristocrats, as figures in a play – just as she spoke about having to appear in "masquerade",¹⁵ that stage actresses were her "sisters",¹⁶ and repeatedly distanced herself from her role as empress, whereas Eugénie is said to have celebrated her life as an empress.

That's quite clear. She had no idea how to play her role and then refused it completely before leading a totally private life in the last decades.

Let's go back to the subject of costume. Elisabeth explicitly asked for pictures of beautiful women – from Ludwig Viktor, as well as the ambassadors and consuls in Constantinople, London, Paris, Berlin, and Saint Petersburg – pictures of beautifully dressed women. You mentioned Wallsee Castle; some letters are still not accessible including the one from Venice in which she asks her brother-in-law for pictures. Unfortunately, we lack the context for these sentences in the correspondence. But you did a lot of research for your biography of Ludwig Viktor: Why did Elisabeth write to him requesting photographs of this kind?

That's very easy. Ludwig Viktor was originally her closest confidante at court. They were almost the same age, they were more-or-less the two teenagers at the Viennese court, and they got along very well with each other. With the exception of one photograph of the imperial family on the terrace of Schönbrunn Palace, she never had her photo taken with her own family, only with her Bavarian one, with her siblings. He was the only Habsburg who was allowed to be there. The two formed a closely-knit team. And when she went to Madeira, she only ever wrote to Ludwig Viktor. Franz Joseph then wrote to her that she should not do that and that she would have to write to her mother-in-law Archduchess Sophie as well. And then she writes that Ludwig Viktor should tell her what he considered important and that he should excuse her. From the few fragments of letters that we know, we cannot – and there you are right – discover the bigger picture. But at least these few known passages make it clear to us that Ludwig Viktor was originally her closest confidante. What happened then that caused the two to become bitter enemies remains in the dark. There are only hints about that. Ludwig Viktor was always what the Viennese call a "Tratschen" – something of a gossip monger, meaning he was not very discrete. This makes it seem likely that he passed on something she had confided in him to someone else. She was very strict in that connection and was so

15____ Marie Louise von Wallersee-Larisch, *Meine Vergangenheit. Wahrheit über Kaiser Franz Josef, Schratt, Kaiserin Elisabeth, Andrassy, Kronprinz Rudolf, Vetsera*, Berlin 1913, 83.

16____ Beth Muellner, see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzuy8l1xr-4>> (03.09.21); Muellner already inspected the albums in 2010 in connection with their relationships, see Beth Muellner, 'The Empress Elisabeth of Austria and her "Untidy" Collection', in: *Women's Studies*, vol. 39, 2010, 536–561.



fig. 8
Man Ray, 'The Marchesa Casati as Elisabeth of Austria, with "Flick" and "Flock" in the background', from: *The Tatler*, no 1788, 2 October 1935, 19.

offended and hurt that she broke off contact. However, originally, they had a very close relationship.

Was Elisabeth the only member of the Habsburg family you know of who collected photographs at that time?

Family albums were absolutely common, and so were albums of the nobility. Large photo collections in the most varied of compositions show up at auctions. There was nothing unusual about collecting photographs. But that these were photographs of unknown women and not of relatives, acquaintances, or celebrities, of strangers makes them special.

Finally, I would like to show you a photo that Michael R. Taylor, curator at the Virginia of Fine Arts, recently sent me: a portrait by Man Ray showing Countess Casati – an eccentric Italian aristocrat who lived in Venice and other places (— fig. 8). In this picture taken in 1935, she re-enacted two portraits of Elisabeth, and then the picture of her two grey horses Flick and Flock. She re-enacted a public image of Elisabeth. And my intuition tells me that, if we take a closer look at these albums with their 2000 photographs and identify what is depicted, we will have something before us that helps us to rediscover Elisabeth behind the myth that Casati performs here, behind the public Elisabeth who – as you said at the beginning – could be vicious as we see in the page

about Eugénie and Napoléon or in her later poems. And here, I tie in with Brigitte Hamann, who called the verses a "poetic diary", and claim that, in this case, we are dealing with Elisabeth's visual diary.

Yes, it's just something of a snapshot, because it only concerns a rather brief section of her life. It is restricted to a few years. She didn't pursue it throughout her life. I think that the most fascinating thing about these photographs is that they tell us a lot about this moment in her life that was so crucial and marked a turning point. This makes the photographs exciting and meaningful, but they still only provide a snapshot.

Possibly a psychogram of a phase, seeing that any type of collecting reveals something about the collector. Were there any other areas in which Elisabeth collected just as intensively – before, after, or at the same time?

No, interestingly enough, there aren't. There are numerous portraits of her favourite horses – but, in my opinion, calling them a collection would be misleading. The only thing contemporaries repeatedly mentioned was her interest in spiritualism, and that she owned numerous amulets, talismans, etc. Whether this was a collection, however, must remain an open question; only her descendants like those living on Wallsee, can provide that information. We have now come full circle.

IMPRINT

PhotoResearcher No. 36, October 2021

The magazine of the European Society
for the History of Photography (ESHP)
A-1020 Vienna, Komödiengasse 1/1/17
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**Adolphe Terris, Caryatids from the Longchamp Palace in
Marseille, sculpted by Jules Cavalier, c. 1866, cyanotype.
Courtesy collection Serge Kakou.**

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ISSN: 0958 2606

Price: EUR 18

Printed in Austria

by Holzhausen Druck & Medien GmbH., Vienna



Preview

PhotoResearcher No. 37

Publication date: April 2022

Three-Colour Photography around 1900

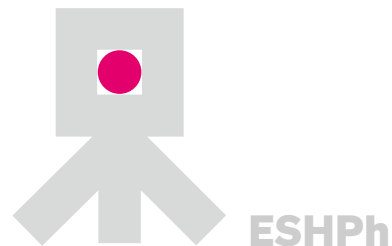
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