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Photographic reproductions of sculpture: Archipenko and cultural exchange

Introduction

Since its beginning in the first third of the nineteenth century photography has been including sculpture as a subject.[1] Artists used photographic images of sculptures not only as a visual aid and reference, but also to document, publicise and circulate their artwork. The discourse on the symbiotic relationship between photography and sculpture is ongoing. The Hermann Obrist exhibition and symposium at the Henry Moore Institute adds to this discussion, bringing to light new aspects of Obrist's practice, including the role of photography from 1896 until 1914.[2] The Swiss-born artist used photography not only for documentation and publication of his work but he also included large photographic prints in his exhibitions to present objects and sculptures, in particular outdoor sculpture, which could not be displayed.

My paper discusses a contemporary of Obrist, Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964), who employed photography in a similar way. Early in his career Archipenko was widely recognized for his innovations in sculpture: he experimented with concave and convex shapes as well as with new materials; he re-introduced polychrome into three-dimensional art; and he employed the use of negative space and movement in his attempt to dematerialise the human figure. Where Obrist's endeavours in abstraction were applied mainly in Jugendstil design and in architecture, the human figure and its abstraction remained at the core of Archipenko's artistic exploration.

Like Obrist, and many of their contemporaries, Archipenko was concerned with the documentation of his work. Archipenko's archives include scrapbooks, press clippings, correspondence, books and approximately 2000 photographs of his life, of family and friends, but most interestingly of his sculptures, paintings and drawings.[3] The significance of these photographic reproductions of Archipenko's work, collected and preserved by the artist, has not been addressed yet. These photographic reproductions were so important to his practice that the artist took them along whenever he moved.

[1] Some of the earliest photographs made by pioneers in this medium, including William Henry Fox Talbot and Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, depicted plaster casts and marble statues.
[2] See Viola Weigel's essay 'Hermann Obrist and Photography Between 1900 and 1914' in the current Obrist exhibition catalogue as well as Matthias Vogel's contribution to this symposium.
[3] The Archipenko estate donated most of the contents of the artist's archives to the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. However, most of the photographs of art works are still preserved at the Archipenko Foundation in Bearsville, New York.

These images survived Archipenko's relocation from Paris to Berlin in 1921, as well as his subsequent emigration to the USA in 1923, and his numerous travels and relocations in the United States until his death in 1964. Today, the artist's image archive allows us to trace history and to follow his career and creative development. Staying close to the timeframe of Obrist's practice, the focus of my investigation is on the early photographic reproductions of Archipenko's sculptures made c. 1910 - 1920. Notably the artist's photographs produced during this period depict finished sculptures, mostly plaster, cement and terracotta works and a few bronze casts. The photographs do not illustrate production stages and did not function like sketches or working drawings, but were printed for documentation, exhibition, publication and promotion. The photographers of these images are yet unknown. Throughout his practice Archipenko employed professional photographers and collaborated closely with them by directing the degree of close-up, angle of view and lighting.[4] Archipenko's photographs do not have an added pictorial narrative as one can see in some of the images of Rodin's sculpture (for example Edward Steichen's series of *Balzac* or Steichen's image of *Rodin and The Thinker*) nor do they show the artist's direct hand as one can find in Brancusi's photographs (for example Brancusi's photograph of *Golden Bird*, 1919, with a distinct reflection captured). Instead, Archipenko's photographs focus solely on the clear presentation of the sculpture, forming a homogenous body of images.

My paper traces the different functions of these photographic reproductions within Archipenko's practice, including the notion of these images acting as substitutes for the three-dimensional object and of softening the conceptual intersections between the original and its reproduction (both sculptural and photographic). This study illustrates the significance of Archipenko's photographs as a tool which broadened access to his work and as a mechanism, among others, to build a successful position within an international network of cultural exchange. I hope that this investigation of Archipenko's modernist practice contributes to the Obrist discussion as well as to the wider debate on the complex sculpture/photography relationship.

[4] Frances Archipenko Gray confirmed, in a conversation on 18 August 2010, that her late husband rarely took his own images, but preferred hiring photographers and that he was then very much involved in the set up and the lighting of the work. Since the 1920s Archipenko's photographs often have a photographer's imprint (e. g. Wasmuth, Erfurth, Flaxon, Sunami).

1. Recording/documenting/archiving

The Ukrainian born Archipenko arrived in Paris in 1909 where he set up a studio. The following year several sculptures were included in his first public exhibition in the French capital, the 1910 Salon des Indépendants. Many of these early works have subsequently been lost or destroyed. However, exhibition checklists and catalogues, as well as reviews, record their existence. Furthermore, due to the photographic reproductions the artist preserved, we also have invaluable visual references for some of these lost works. For instance, a photograph of the plaster cast *Vintagers*, checklist number 161 ('*Vendangeurs*, plâtre') of the 1910 Salon des Indépendants, has been preserved in the artist's archives. (fig.) The image depicts three nude figures that are involved in a symbolist narrative action, being grouped around a vine, picking grapes and gathering them in a basket. On the verso of the photographic print, which is glued onto cardboard, the artist wrote the date 1909, indicating the date of conception. It is likely that the image was taken in Paris c.1909 in the artist's studio, before its exhibition at the Salon as the makeshift setting indicates: a white sheet is draped over a pedestal on which the sculpture is placed and another sheet serves as a bright and clean background for the sculpture.

The photographic reproduction of a second lost work from 1909, of the plaster *Group*, shows three nude figures allegorising a narrative symbolist action as well. (fig.) Yet, here the figures are presented in a relief and are grouped around a central image of a bird. In this example of another early photograph Archipenko edited the image by retouching the background with black ink and thereby cropping and accentuating the white plaster. The verso of this photograph carries the annotation '26me exposition/ Salon des Artistes/ Indépendants/1910, Paris/ [?]/[?] N 163/ croupe [sic]'. Indeed the work can be found as number 163 on the checklist for the 1910 Salon des Indépendants ('*Groupe*, bas-relief, plâtre').

Archipenko used photographic reproductions to document his work, to keep a visual record and to have a memory aid for archival purposes. He often annotated on the verso of the prints when and where the depicted work was exhibited, in particular its first exhibition. In some examples he recorded references to publications and collections and in many cases he noted the work's title(s), the date of conception and sometimes the medium and the name of collectors who purchased the work. He made these notations often in French and German, indicating the art markets in which his photographic reproductions were mainly disseminated.

2. Photographic substitution

Walter Benjamin observed that '[photography] can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself.'[5] And, in his essay on the history and function of nineteenth-century photographic reproductions of sculptures, Joel Snyder noted a uniformity of sculptural images, a visual code that 'made it agreeable to conceive of a photograph of statuary as being a dependable surrogate for viewing the thing itself.'[6] By the end of the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for sculptors to include photographic reproductions of work difficult to exhibit for a variety of reasons, including problems of transportation.[7] The photographic reproduction acted as an accepted substitute for the original sculpture. Archipenko, having a homogenous body of images and being comfortable with the photographic reproductions of his sculptures, included them as placeholders for the originals. The earliest occurrence of this practice in Archipenko's career was in 1912, when German patron Karl Ernst Osthaus invited the artist to exhibit at the Folkwang Museum in Hagen. The exhibition included 28 sculptures, 31 drawings and 11 photographs, listed as numbers 60-70 'photographs of some works that are not exhibited' on the checklist.[8] This was Archipenko's first exhibition in Germany and it was seminal in that it laid the foundation for his long-lasting contacts with other German promoters of modernism such as Herwarth Walden in Berlin, Hans Goltz in Munich, and Herbert von Garvens-Garvensburg in Hannover.

Archipenko used photographic reproductions as substitutes in exhibitions throughout his career to make his work accessible. In some instances he would arrange two views of the work to counteract the limitations of the photographic medium. In other examples he edited the photographic reproductions by applying processes beyond retouching and cropping, as the poster-like reproduction of *Family Life* illustrates. (fig.) *Family Life* (1912), a large plaster (H 182 cm), was first exhibited in 1912 at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. The Armory Show included it the following year in New York. Archipenko later recorded that the plaster had been destroyed during the First World War and he used an enlarged photographic reproduction of it for display in successive exhibitions. Moreover,

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[5] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. H. Ardent (London: Jonathan Crape, 1968), p. 222.

[6] Joel Snyder. 'Nineteenth-Century Photography of Sculpture and the Rhetoric of Substitution', in Geraldine A. Johnson (ed.). *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 29.

[7] Medardo Rosso and Auguste Rodin for example included photographic reproductions in their exhibitions. For further reference on Rodin and photography see Natasha Ruiz-Gómez's contribution to this symposium.

[8] 'Photographien von einigen nicht ausgestellten Werken.' All translations by this author, unless noted otherwise.

in addition to enlarging the image, he gave it a stronger and more permanent backing by gluing it onto a piece of cardboard and he added a handwritten reference to the Armory Show as well as a printed quotation from *Springer's Kunstgeschichte*[9] on the cardboard's margin. Archipenko made this photographic reproduction as a substitute for the original, and the added applied processes of image editing and annotation played with the boundaries between documentary and artistic representation. In other examples such as the photograph of *Venus*, 1912, the artist blurred these boundaries even more by applying his signature of approval to the retouched print. By appearing not only as the author of the original sculpture, but also of its photographic reproduction, he thereby pointed to the photograph's status as an art object itself.

Archipenko was trained as a sculptor in the early twentieth century and he was accustomed to the practices of the previous century with its traditions of multiple casts and sculpture productions. Sculptors were used to the idea of the mechanical processes of reproduction not being executed by the artist himself. Instead, by order of the artist, marble carvers, wood carvers, bronze casters and other technical workers would reproduce the original in different materials and sometimes even in different sizes. Walter Benjamin discussed reproduction, 'uniqueness' and the idea of 'aura' in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction':

> The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition. Of course, this tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for instance, existed in a traditional context for the Greeks (who made it an object of worship) that was different from the context in which it existed for medieval clerics (who viewed it as a sinister idol). But what was equally evident to both was its uniqueness - that is, its aura.[10]

Benjamin, referring to photography, argued that 'mechanical reproduction' would democratise the artwork and dismantle its 'aura', which he explained as something that creates admiration and awe in the spectator - making the artwork seem a work of wonder. Anthony Hughes has examined the application of Benjamin's argument for

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[9] 'Springer's Kunstgeschichte: Archipenko's influence has proven to be extremely captivating for the younger sculptors'. This is a quotation from Anton Springer's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (*Handbook for Art History*), 1920, of which Archipenko had a copy in his library.

[10] Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,' Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty and Thomas Y. Levin (eds.). *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, p. 24.

sculptural reproductions and has concluded that in the case of Michelangelo, 'reproduction' in its widest sense of the word actually increased the 'value' of the artwork instead of taking something away, thus contradicting Benjamin.[11] Hughes then argued that repetition and paraphrase do not weaken an artwork and the value of its 'unrepeatable presence' but collaborate with other factors in broadening its accessibility, and in the case of Michelangelo's sculpture, in amplifying the status of authorship.[12] In Archipenko's practice repetition in form of sculptural reproduction as well as photographic reproduction was common. Recognizing the importance of their value as 'exhibition commodities', a term used by Benjamin, Archipenko included the photographs as placeholders in exhibitions, making the sculptures accessible to audience demands and augmenting his artistic status.

3. A tool of cultural exchange

While living in Paris, Archipenko was an integral part of the different artistic and cultural circles of the European avant-gardes. He exhibited at the Salons des Indépendants and the Salons d'Automne and he was engaged with the Section d'Or. At the same time he held numerous influential exhibitions in Germany, where his art was considered groundbreaking, and where he enjoyed commercial success. Moreover, the Italian Futurists invited him to exhibit with them in Rome and he showed with several new art organizations including the Moderne Kunstkring in Amsterdam, Müvesház in Budapest, the Manes Fine Art Association in Prague as well as with the Société Anonyme in New York. By 1923, when he immigrated to the United States, Archipenko had established himself as a progressive sculptor in the centre of an international cultural network of artists, writers, dealers and collectors that formed Western modernism. Archipenko employed photographic reproductions as an important tool to publicise and disseminate his art work. Photographs could be sent easily to interested parties, thus augmenting the artist's presence and availability in the cultural network. Naturally, these images became even more important when they were reproduced in exhibition catalogues, books, journals and magazines as an even larger audience could be reached. In Paris, Guillaume Apollinaire was a notable advocate of Archipenko from 1911 and discussed

[11] Anthony Hughes. 'Authority, Authenticity and Aura: Walter Benjamin and the case of Michelangelo,' in Anthony Hughes and Erich Ranfft. *Sculpture and Its Reproductions*, London: Reaktion Books, 2007, pp. 29-45.
[12] Hughes, p. 45.

his sculpture in *Les Soirées de Paris* and other publications. The French press placed Archipenko's contributions to new sculpture in the context of Cubism, yet, the artist received an even larger reception outside of France as well as different interpretations of his work and affiliations with Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism.

Recently Maria Elena Versari has convincingly discussed the relationship between Archipenko and the Italian Futurists c. 1910 - 1920.[13] During this period, Archipenko was engaged in a significant dialogue with the Italian avant-garde. His stylistic developments attracted the interest of several Futurists, including Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Gino Severini. The Italian magazines *Lacerba, Noi* and *Valori Plastici* reproduced images of Archipenko's work and discussed his artistic contribution. Conceptually Archipenko, like so many of his contemporaries, was fascinated with science and new technology as well as with vitalist philosophies, in particular Bergsonian thought. Influenced by these new developments and ideas Archipenko explored movement in sculpture as well as the concept of the fourth dimension. This led him not only to sculptures such as *Dance*, *Boxing*, *Medrano* and *Carrousel Pierrot*, but also to experiments in film, performance and photography.[14] (fig.)

Archipenko's closeness to the Futurists was referenced early by the British magazine *The Sketch*. In October 1913 it had on its cover an image of Archipenko's *Dance* (1913), describing the work in a subtitle as a bold artwork, a 'Futurist' sculpture.[15] (fig.) In this work two abstracted figures are engaged in a dynamic dance movement. The photographic reproduction displayed the light coloured plaster before a darker greyish background. Light and shadow emphasised the abstraction and reduction of the two human figures and the rhythmic up and down and twirling of their dance movement. Moreover, the chiaroscuro accentuated the artist's multi-faceted use of positive and negative space as a compositional element to create dynamic movement, in both the fragmentation of the dancers' bodies as well as in the void created between their bodies. In the photographic reproduction the sculpture is set off at an angle reinforcing the idea of dynamism and creating the illusion that the sculpture is propelled through space. The

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[13] Maria Elena Versari, 'The Style and Status of the Modern Artist: Archipenko in the Eyes of the Italian Futurists,' in: Deborah Goldberg and Alexandra Keiser (eds.). *Alexander Archipenko Revisited: An International Perspective*. Bearsville, New York: The Archipenko Foundation, 2008, pp. 13-33.

[14] Archipenko's archives contain several photographs of the artist performing with Mario Broglio on stage and recording their movement through space and time in the two dimensional medium. Moreover, in c. 1917 Archipenko collaborated in the multimedia production of a play, 'La vie humaine'.

[15] The Sketch, 29 October 1913, vol. 84, no. 1083.

sculpture *Dance* itself as well as the style of its reproduction played strongly to the generalized notions of Futurism and to the idea that sculpture could be conceived as a specifically modern medium.

At the same time, in Germany, numerous publications, including *Der Ararat*, *Das Kunstblatt* and *Der Sturm* also reproduced Archipenko's art regularly. In particular Herwarth Walden's Berlin-based enterprise Der Sturm[16] provided a strong support system for vanguard artists and supported Archipenko from 1913 in exhibitions and publications. By employing successful publicist strategies Walden promoted a new artistic language as well as intellectual and cultural renewal. He operated from an influential position in the network of artistic alliances that allowed him to build artist's reputations and to foster cultural exchange. Walden described Archipenko as 'the most important sculptor of our time'[17] and he understood the artist's work as 'new sculpture' that perfectly translated the life of the twentieth century. He also promoted the artist as the foremost Expressionist sculptor. Shulamith Behr has illustrated that the term 'Expressionism' encompasses a variety of definitions and artistic concepts.[18] Before the First World War, Walden used the word to describe modern art movements, including Cubism and Futurism. When a second generation of Expressionists emerged after the war, in the early years of the Weimar Republic, the term was identified with utopian and socialist beliefs for the spiritual regeneration of society and the conviction that spiritual art could transform society. In 1919 Walden defined Expressionism not as a style, but as a world-view and an outlook expressing a philosophy of the senses and not of

[16] Walden organized exhibitions in his gallery Der Sturm as well as traveling shows for international venues. In addition, he published the periodical *Der Sturm*, an important outlet for German Expressionist poetry, music and theatre as well as for other international progressive arts. He also published the monograph series *Sturm-Bilderbuch* as well as prints and postcards. Furthermore, he organised symposia and lectures, and sponsored a theatre and an art school. For further reference see Shulamith Behr. 'Supporters and Collectors of Expressionism,' in Stephanie Barron and Wolf-Dieter Duber (eds.). *German Expressionsim: Art and Society*. Rizzoli: New York, 1997, pp. 45-58. Freya Mülhaupt (ed.). *Herwarth Walden, 1878-1941: Wegbereiter der Moderne*. Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur im Martin-Gropius-Bau, 1991. Maurice Godé. *Der Sturm de Herwarth Walden: l'utopie d'un art autonome*. Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990.

[17] Herwarth Walden. *Einblick in Kunst: Expressionismus, Futurismus, Kubismus*. Berlin: Der Sturm, 1917. Reprinted in Mühlhaupt, p. 65. 'Der bedeutendste Bildhauer unserer Zeit heißt Alexander Archipenko.'

[18] See Shulamith Behr. *Movements in Modern Art: Expressionism*. London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999, pp. 6-17. And, Shulamith Behr, David Fanning and Douglas Jarman (eds.). *Expressionism Reassessed*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993.

terminologies.[19] Walden saw this quality epitomised in Archipenko's sculptures and promoted it as such.

One of Der Sturm's postcards illustrates Archipenko's *Dance*. (fig.) In comparison to the British cover illustration of *The Sketch*, the German reproduction of *Dance* did not employ grey tones but placed the plaster, here bright and white, before a deep black background. The photographer also chose a different point of view, and in the final editing, even though there is a heavy distinction between the white foreground and black background, the contrast between light and shadow on the sculpture itself has been softened. The self-base of the sculpture parallels the lower edge of the photographic print. No pedestal is visible and the sculpture suspends itself in space. This model of display, with a bright sculpture placed before a deep black background and the sculpture sort of floating in space, was the preferred Der Sturm visual code for Archipenko images. Photographic reproductions, including those of Archipenko's sculptures, played a central role in Walden's efforts to successfully promote his enterprise, as well as in cultural exchange within the progressive arts.

For Archipenko photographs were an important mechanism to disseminate his work on an international level, not only in France, Italy, England and Germany, but also in the Dutch *De Stijl* journal and Eastern European avant-garde publications including *Ma* and *Zenit*, as well as in progressive circles in the United States (Société Anonyme). My study brought to light though that his visual code changed within the different cultural contexts in which the images were placed and interpreted. Even though Archipenko's photographs seem visually uniform as they share similar degrees of close-up and similar angles of view, one can clearly distinguish images taken in Paris from those taken in Berlin. Geraldine Johnson noted that '(…) photographs of sculpture are inevitably affected by the personal agendas of photographers and the lager cultural and historical circumstances in which they are working and in which such images are received and interpreted.'[20] The illustrations of Archipenko's *Medrano I* and *Carrousel Pierrot* (fig.) for example, were photographed in Paris and reproduced in French and in Italian publications. They share the same setting and mode of display: Both sculptures are photographed against a bright background. They are displayed on a pedestal that has been covered with an oriental patterned cloth or rug. In each case the sculpture is set off at a similar angle from a frontal view. The base of both works is not aligned parallel to

[19] Herwarth Walden. *Die neue Malerei*. Berlin, 1919, p. 5: 'Der Expressionismus ist keine Mode. Er ist eine Weltanschauung. Und zwar eine Anschauung der Sinne, nicht der Begriffe.'
[20] Johnson, p. 3.

the pedestal but is also set off in an angle and actually overlaps the pedestal. In contrast, images taken for Der Sturm publications are more 'dramatic', applying a strong black and white contrast between the object in the foreground and its background. Even though the sculptures seem elevated, all signs of a pedestal have been erased, and they float weightlessly in a dark space. Other German publications, including Hans Hildebrandt's Archipenko monograph of 1923, mainly reproduced the Der Sturm images and followed its style as well. [21]

4. A visual memory aide for re-creation

In closing I would like to mention another, later, use of these photographs, as a visual reference to recreate works. Before Archipenko left Europe in 1923, he had sold many works to private and public collections. In addition, he had stored works with friends in France and Germany for safekeeping. However, in the USA he learned that the audience demand there was still mainly for his early 'Cubist' sculptures. When the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., invited Archipenko in 1935 to participate in the seminal exhibition 'Cubism and Abstract Art' the following year, Barr asked for specific early works. However, Archipenko did not have access to the requested works as they were in Europe and he created new versions of them instead.[22] For Archipenko both versions were originals and had the same 'aura'. After the 1936 MoMA exhibition, Archipenko continued this practice and he re-created several works that were not accessible to him, in second and sometimes third versions, from memory and with the help of photographic reproductions. He also continued to include early photographic reproductions in exhibitions. Thereby making his early art newly accessible and thus increasing his status and presence in the United States.[23]

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[21] Exceptions to this mode of display are images of bronzes (where the object itself is dark) that have been placed before a lighter background. Other exceptions are images made for Herbert von Garvens-Garvensburg in Hannover, where the images display a pedestal covered in some kind of jute canvas. Among the Garvensburg images are two examples in which the sculptures have been placed outdoors. One of the images, of *Hero*, was found in Nell Walden's Archipenko photo album.

[22] This practice along with misunderstandings of the term 'replica' and the occasional dating error on Archipenko's part led to a ten-year long dispute with Barr.

[23] Archipenko acknowledged the power of photography throughout his career. In 1960, he self-published his monograph *Fifty Creative Years* and included 292 plates, many in colour. He not only grouped the reproductions in different 'curatorial' categories, but he also included self-made collages 'Multiple Interpretations of Heads', in which he combined cut-outs of photographs of his sculpture heads. It might be interesting to examine this book further in the context of André

Conclusion

Between 1909 and the early 1920s Archipenko's contributions to new sculpture and the fluidity of his sculptural code found wide acceptance in different vanguard circles, including in France, Italy and Germany. The artist used photographic reproductions not only to document his work and to keep a visual record, they also became an important mechanism for allowing multivalent contemporaneous reading of his production, and of giving access to his art. Significantly, the photographs were edited and interpreted for the diverse cultural contexts they were received in. Routinely Archipenko included photographs in exhibitions, where they acted as substitute for the original. Moreover, the reproduction of the photographs in the diverse publications of the different European avant-gardes made his work known internationally, augmenting Archipenko's presence and artistic status. Archipenko's photographs became an important tool, among others, to build his prominent position in an international network of creative exchange.

Malraux's publication of *Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale* (1952–54) (*The Imaginary Museum of World Sculpture*).