

# Franz Roh and the Art History of Photography

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By the late 1920s, art historian and critic [Franz Roh](#) had set aside his work on contemporary painting to focus on photography.<sup>1</sup> With the typographer Jan Tschichold, he published the photographic book *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* (*Photo-Eye: 76 photos of the period*) in 1929, which accompanied the influential exhibition *Film und Foto*, organized by the Deutscher Werkbund in Stuttgart. In 1931 he organized the historical section of the exhibition *Das Lichtbild* (*Photography*) in Munich and began editing *Fototek*, a series of books on avant-garde photography, the first two volumes of which were devoted to [László Moholy-Nagy](#) and [Aenne Biermann](#), respectively.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these larger projects, he published numerous exhibition and book reviews and gave lectures on the history of photography. This period of intense engagement came to an abrupt end in 1933, when Roh was interned at Dachau. His interest in photography did not continue with the same fervor after he was released later that same year, and his abandonment of his work suggests that his study of photography did not simply coincide with the interwar period but was defined by it. Roh sought to define photography's relevance to his contemporary moment, and it is likely he was unwilling to resuscitate his photographic project once this moment of experimental creativity was shattered by Nazi censorship.

In addition to writing, organizing exhibitions, and lecturing on photography prior to his imprisonment, Roh also produced hundreds of photographic prints, ten of which are now part of the Thomas Walther Collection at The Museum of Modern Art, and amassed a collection of more than three thousand negatives. He willingly drew connections between his prints and his work as a historian of modern photography. Most of his prints include a stamp on the back identifying them as made by "Dr. Franz Roh, editor of *Fotoauge* and *Fototek*." Yet Roh rarely exhibited his work during this time.<sup>3</sup> The catalogue that accompanied *Das Lichtbild* identifies Roh as a "friend to the types of photographs that today are still cast aside as 'games': [photograms](#), [negative prints](#), and [photomontage](#)."<sup>4</sup> The catalogue lists him as a contributing photographer but describes him more as an advocate of these experimental pursuits than a significant producer. The photographs Roh displayed in this exhibition are unknown, but we can assume that they were similar to the negative prints, [double exposures](#), and other "games" by him in the Walther Collection. Like *Film und Foto* two years before, *Das Lichtbild* announced a return to the true nature of the photographic



**fig. 1** Franz Roh. *Lightbulb (Photogram)* (*Glühbirne [Fotogram]*). 1928–33. Gelatin silver print, 7 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 9 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (18.2 × 23.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Willy P. Wagner and Mrs. Gerald F. Warburg, by exchange (MoMA 1830.2001). © Estate Franz Roh, Munich

medium. The catalogue proclaimed, "It has become necessary to show the best achievements from our time in immediate alignment with the best from the historical beginning of photography."<sup>5</sup> Roh's essay provided such a connection. Thus Roh contributed to the exhibition as both a photographer who was part of his contemporary moment and as a scholar who historically frames the present. His dual role in the advancement of modern photography warrants an examination of the relationship between these two practices. What did Roh, an art historian trained to ask certain questions about historical objects, intend to accomplish by making photographs? How might we understand the convergence between his historical concerns and his photographic practice? What follows is an exploration of the ways in which Roh produced photographs to think through his conception of the history of photography and the interwar era's place within a larger history of vision.

Roh most likely became interested in avant-garde photography through his contact with [László Moholy-Nagy](#) and [Lucia Moholy](#). Correspondence between Roh and the couple indicate that they met a number of times in Munich in late 1926.<sup>6</sup> In "Mechanism and Expression: The Essence and

Value of Photography,” his introduction to *Foto-Auge*, Roh alludes to Moholy’s influence when he refers to Moholy’s pronouncement that “not to be able to handle a camera will soon be looked upon as equal to illiteracy.”<sup>7</sup> Roh’s experimental approach to photography seems motivated more specifically by Moholy’s book *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (*Painting, Photography, Film*), published in 1925. Through a collection of treatises and photographs, Moholy defines photography as a productive medium, one that expands the world of the visible and leads to a “transformation of human perception.”<sup>8</sup> Photography, Moholy writes, reveals “existences, which are not perceptible or recordable with our optical instrument, the eye,” and that only “can be made visible with the help of photography.”<sup>9</sup> Better equipped to process the visual stimuli of the modern world than the human eye, photography “can complete our optical apparatus.”<sup>10</sup> Roh’s account of the importance of photography to the modern world never adopts Moholy’s technophilic tone. Instead, he seems to have understood his colleague’s point to be a particularly historical one: photography is not a direct transcription of vision or reproduction of the immediate world; ways of theorizing and understanding vision are historically specific, and photography shapes vision in uniquely modern ways.

Roh’s brief catalogue essay for *Das Lichtbild* sets out to “provide a historical foil for a specifically modern form of vision that expresses itself in bold focus and perspective, in strong contrasts in scale, in overall construction of the image, and harnesses fragments of reality into powerful compositions.”<sup>11</sup> Here, he expresses two key features of his history of photography: that the present moment of avant-garde discovery is a return to the experimental potential of the medium’s invention, and that a photographic image embodies a particular way of seeing. According to Roh, there are “two fundamentally different high points of photographic development, one at the beginning, the other at the ‘end’ of one-hundred years of development.”<sup>12</sup> His essay attempts to historicize modern photography, demonstrating that photograms, photomontage, and typophotos are “far older than modern creators believe.”<sup>13</sup> He establishes connections between the early years of photography and the contemporary moment, when early techniques were being rediscovered at the hands of the avant-garde.

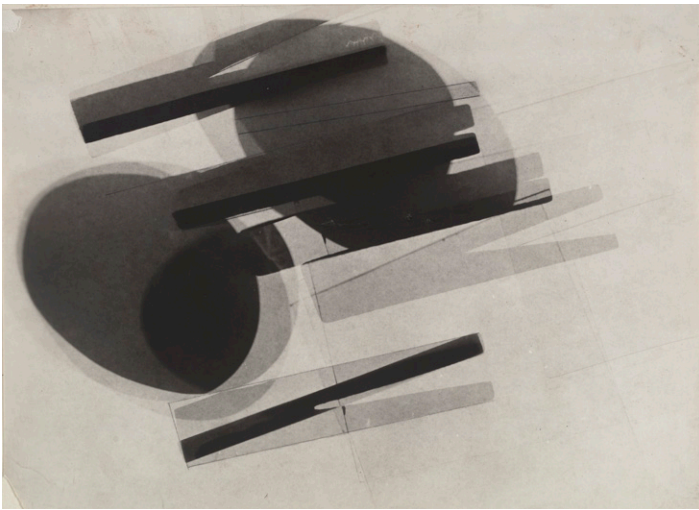
Notes from lectures Roh gave around 1930 provide a more elaborate argument for his art historical approach to photography:

*The history of photography, which only consists of some one hundred years, is complicated. I will present it very simply as a developmental history of a particular way of seeing, while at the same time making an effort to suggest the legitimacy of this approach. I want to construct a history of spirit [Geistesgeschichte], not a history of equipment and technical inventions. This basic claim challenges the fears of most Romantics—that the mechanical nature of the [photographic]*

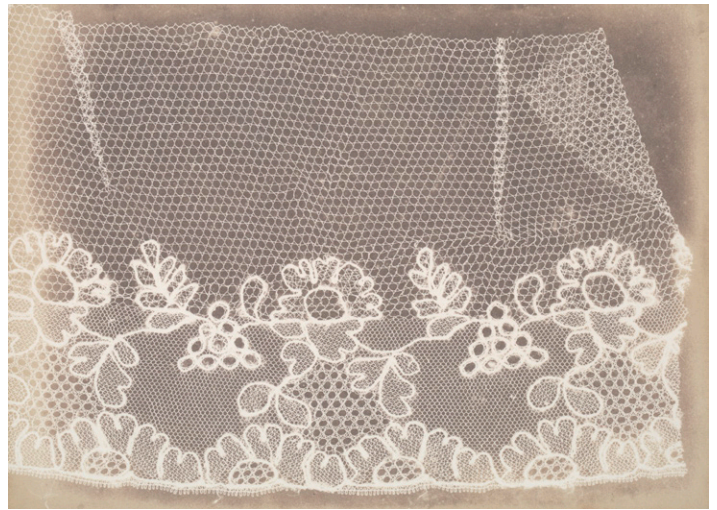
*equipment weakens and threatens its own productive impulse. In opposition to this backwards view, we will see that the sensation of life [Lebensgefühl] of various eras and photographers asserts itself time and again through the rigid apparatus of the camera.*<sup>14</sup>

Words such as *Geistesgeschichte* and *Lebensgefühl* would have rung familiar among Roh’s generation of art historians who were, in the wake of Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin, searching for ways of articulating the relationship between the work of art and the world. These words were commonly used by historians who believed in the inevitable deficiency of positivist analysis. Art historical objects were not sufficiently analyzed by an accumulation of data; an alternative historical treatment would have to acknowledge the impossibility of understanding a work of art as a direct product of its circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Mechanical forms of production such as photography were not considered legitimate subjects of such an analysis. Yet Roh contests this “Romantic” idea by suggesting that photography expresses the “sensation of life of various eras.” By asserting that mechanical images could be the result of a “particular way of seeing,” Roh found a way to legitimize photography as a subject of art historical analysis.

Roh positioned his art historical method as an alternative to approaching photography as a technological innovation. “A stylistic history of photography does not exist,” he writes in the catalogue of *Das Lichtbild*. “The author is working on such [a history].”<sup>16</sup> Roh refers his readers to Erich Stenger’s *Geschichte der Fotografie* (*The History of Photography*, 1929) as a sound accumulation of facts yet an art historically inadequate account.<sup>17</sup> Stenger was an avid collector of early photography, and his collection made up the bulk of nineteenth-century photographs displayed in both *Film und Foto* and *Das Lichtbild*. While Stenger was skeptical about the relationship between past and present that *Das Lichtbild* attempted to articulate, Roh saw an important historical link and referred frequently to Stenger’s collection in his lectures.<sup>18</sup> In his book, Stenger provides precise dates and encyclopedic information, including detailed descriptions of early processes and their inventors, as well as brief entries on the invention and development of specific applications, including microphotography, color photography, and cinematography. In contrast to Stenger, Roh’s announcement of a new approach to the history of photography claims that this mechanical medium can be an object of stylistic analysis and interpretation. Rather than constructing the history of photography through the technical development of the camera and the improvement of chemical processes, Roh proposes looking at photographic pictures as complex results of their time. To state that an image exemplifies a historically determined way of seeing implies a specific approach to art historical interpretation, in which material objects can be considered as traces of the visual practices of a culture. An art historical approach to photography would interpret the photographic image as more than an



**fig. 2** László Moholy-Nagy. *Untitled*. 1923–25. Gelatin silver print (photogram), 6 5/8 × 9 1/16" (16.8 × 23.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Anonymous gift. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



**fig. 3** William Henry Fox Talbot. *Lace*. 1845. Salted paper print (photogram), 6 1/2 × 8 3/4" (16.5 × 22.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Dr. Stefan Stein

indexical record of its surroundings. This approach did not mean an abandonment of photography as a material process, however. Instead, that material process now had a more complex historical significance.

Given Roh's devotion to the history of photography, it is not surprising to find that he experimented with historical techniques, some results of which can be found in the Walther Collection. His photogram of a lightbulb (fig. 1) suggests his interest in the revival of this technique, although no other photograms by Roh are known. Moholy and others produced photograms, cameraless images that were made by Henry Fox Talbot as early as 1834 and called "photogenic drawings." Yet Roh's work can be read as distinct from his modernist peers. By the mid-1920s, Moholy's photograms exemplified his ambitions for a productive photographic practice. While the shapes in Moholy's photograms no longer reproduce the everyday world and instead generate a world unto themselves (fig. 2), the luminescent object that Roh used to make his photogram is clearly visible. In this way, Roh's photogram more directly refers to its historical origins. His lightbulb recalls the lace and botanical specimens recorded in Talbot's photogenic drawings (fig. 3), yet it also rhymes with the sleek, mechanized forms of mass-produced objects. Hans Finsler's advertisement for the Osram Company's incandescent lightbulb (fig. 4), which Roh and Tschichold chose to reproduce in *Foto-Auge*, demonstrates a similar fascination with the object's luminescent form. Roh's photogram materializes a connection between two moments in the history of photography a century apart.

Roh also visualized such a connection between past and present in his lectures on the history of photography, stating at one point, "I will demonstrate now with ten images,



**fig. 4** Hans Finsler. *Incandescent Lamp (Glühbirne)*. 1928. Gelatin silver print, 1928–39, 14 1/2 × 9 3/4" (36.9 × 24.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA 1670.2001). © Stiftung Moritzburg, Kunstmuseum des Landes Sachsen-Anhalt





fig. 5 David Octavius Hill. *Calotypes by D. O. Hill and R. Adamson*. 1928. Calotype, 8 ½ × 6 ½" (21.7 × 16.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Study Collection

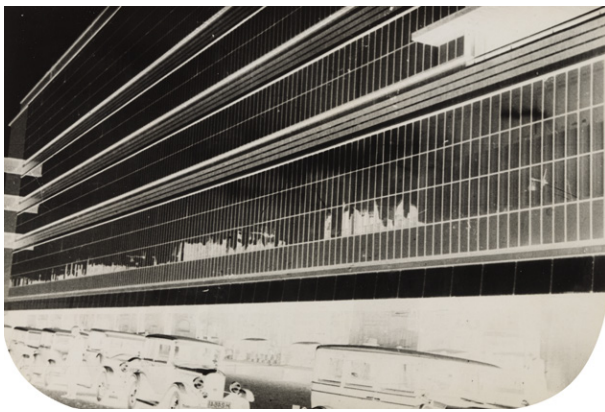


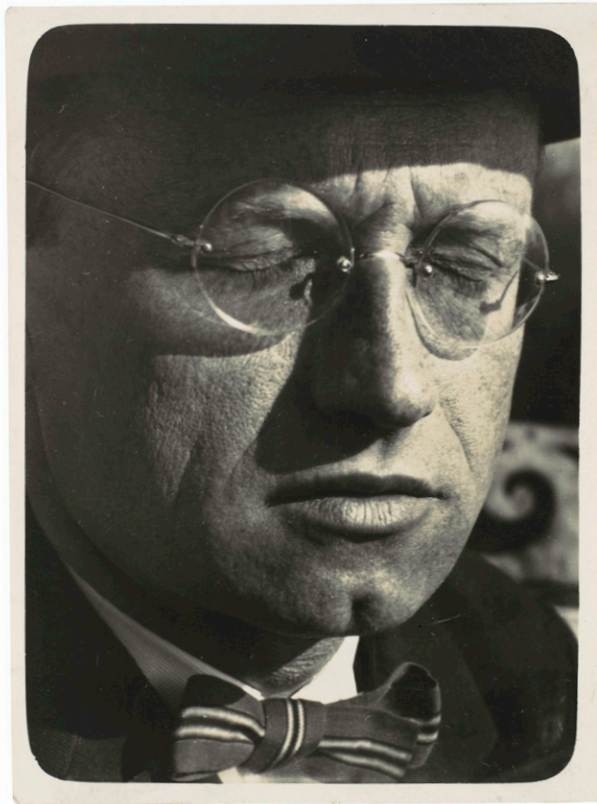
fig. 6 Franz Roh. *Architecture (Architektur)*. 1928–33. Gelatin silver print, 1928–39, 5 7/8 × 8 3/4" (14.9 × 22.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA 1831.2001). © Estate Franz Roh, Munich

with which we can connect point for point 1840 with 1933."<sup>19</sup> Although the photographs Roh displayed are not known, he employed the art historical convention of the comparison, a method introduced as a regular strategy of art historical analysis by his mentor, Heinrich Wölfflin. Roh had completed a dissertation on Dutch painting under Wölfflin's guidance in 1921, and he used his mentor's methods to frame photography as a legitimate subject of art historical study.<sup>20</sup> As Matthew Witkovsky has argued, Roh and others were

attempting to connect modern photography to its significant developments as a medium during its first decades.<sup>21</sup> I would add that Roh seems not only to want to conceptualize the relationship between past and present in writing but to materialize it, as exemplified in his photogram and in his attention to the material construction of his prints.

Roh rounded the corners of many of his prints in order to align them with nineteenth-century photographs, an association he had learned through numerous exhibitions and publications, many of them organized by other art historians. David Octavius Hill and others were being established as the masters of early photography, and rounded corners became an identifying feature of their early prints (fig. 5).<sup>22</sup> Roh practiced this technique repeatedly but inconsistently. Some photographs have four rounded corners while others have fewer in various combinations, imparting an unrefined appearance to his work, as with a negative print of a department store on which the bottom corners are shaped crudely and unevenly, obviously cut by hand (fig. 6).<sup>23</sup> The photograph shows a fully windowed facade of a modern temple of consumption with a row of cars lined up on the street in front. Roh chose to print the image as a negative, perhaps to mimic the *Lichtarchitektur* that was transforming the nocturnal skyline of Germany's metropolises, yet the image's quintessentially modern content contrasts with its crudely rounded corners, which recall an earlier moment of photographic promise.

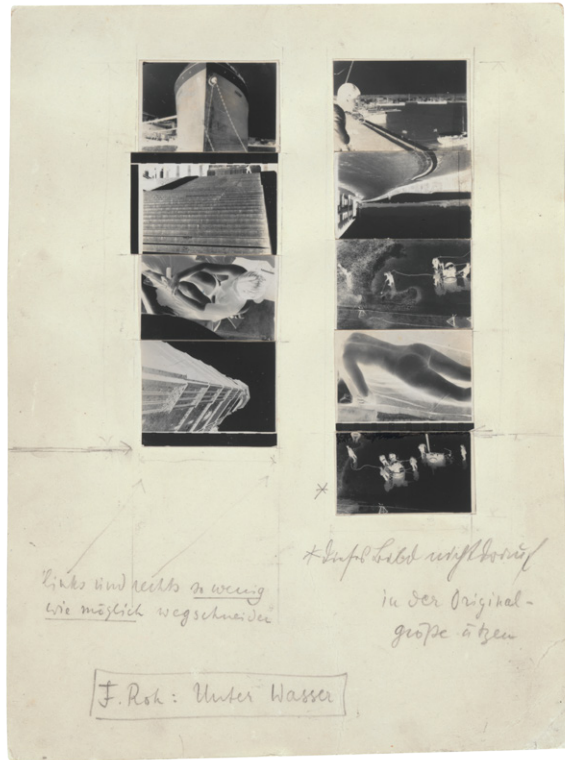
Roh was not the only photographer in the late 1920s to consider this practice a significant part of a print's material



**fig. 7** Lucia Moholy. *Franz Roh*. 1926. Gelatin silver print,  $4\frac{5}{16} \times 3\frac{1}{8}$ " (11 × 8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Ford Motor Company Collection, Gift of Ford Motor Company and John C. Waddell. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

**fig. 8** Franz Roh. Untitled contact prints on paper boards. c. 1931. Courtesy Galerie Kicken, Berlin. © Estate Franz Roh, Munich

**fig. 9** Franz Roh. *Under Water (Unter Wasser)*. 1928–29. Nine gelatin silver prints, paper, and pencil, 1929, left column:  $4\frac{3}{8} \times 1\frac{9}{16}$ " (10.5 × 4 cm); right column:  $4\frac{13}{16} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ " (12.3 × 3.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA 1838.2001). © Estate Franz Roh, Munich



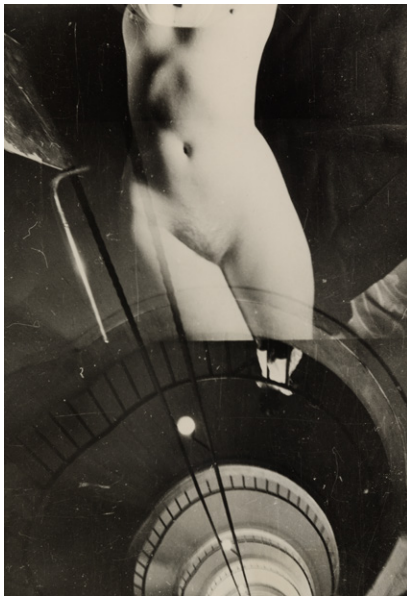
construction. One of the three prints of Lucia Moholy's portrait of Roh in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art possesses similarly rounded corners (fig. 7). In this portrait, Lucia Moholy chose to register and identify with the historical interests of her close friend and interlocutor.<sup>24</sup> But rounded corners were more than a material reference to the nineteenth century for Roh; they marked the prints as material objects and subjects of art historical analysis. Roh aspired to open his own time of photographic discovery to art historical analysis as well, and the rounded corners suggest that his photographs are deliberately constructed objects rather than immediate records of visual experience.

Roh conceived of photography as an exploratory process and emphasized the transitions and evolutions that are part of making photographs, moving from negative to contact print to larger prints that relate to one another through variations in subjects and themes. He collected his negatives in three small boxes, each divided into twenty-five

compartments, and labeled each compartment according to subject matter, such as "Paris 1931," "fireworks," "Rotterdam," "London," "Venice 1931," and "Hilde," Roh's first wife. A number of rolls of film are also preserved in a box that Roh labeled, on the underside of the cover, "Good negatives for reproduction. I-III Quality." He made hundreds of contact prints from his rolls of negative film, which allowed him to study sequences and combinations of images and to consider relationships among frames, and he arranged a large number of contact prints on gray paper boards.<sup>25</sup> Photographs of the same subject—boats sailing near a dock, a picnic lunch with friends, bird's-eye shots of children playing on the street below—are collected together on boards (fig. 8), several of which include contact prints related to photographs in the Walther Collection.

Although Roh likely used these boards to select images that he wanted to produce as larger prints, there is evidence as well that he did not distinguish between preparatory work





**fig. 10** Franz Roh. Untitled. 1928-33. Gelatin silver print,  $8\frac{15}{16} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ " (22.7 × 15.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Bequest of Arthur M. Bullowa, by exchange (MoMA 1835.2001). © Estate Franz Roh, Munich

and final product. Within this material collection, Roh's process appears less concerned with the production of exhibition-worthy prints than with the materialization of ideas and connections. The arrangement of contact prints on backgrounds resembles his sequential montage *Under Water* (*Unter Wasser*, 1928-29) (fig. 9), which he chose to reproduce in *Foto-Auge* and possibly exhibited in *Film und Foto*.<sup>26</sup> *Under Water* consists of two vertical groups of contact prints. (The version reproduced in *Foto-Auge* does not

show the bottom photograph of the right column, as per Roh's handwritten instructions on the original in the Walther Collection.) Like his boards with contact prints, *Under Water* suggests that Roh's interest in photographic meaning extended beyond the single frame to the sequential arrangement of images. The montage includes individual frames with diverse subjects; the title provides a unifying theme or narrative to an otherwise incoherent collection of images. However, Roh also created formal connections among the frames. The top two images of the vertical strip on the right are united by a curved line that begins as a path between land and water, then continues as the curved edge of the street in the upside-down frame below. In this way, *Under Water* can be understood as an experiment in the construction of photographic space. It defines photography as a constructive, material process open to historical analysis rather than as a direct record of vision.

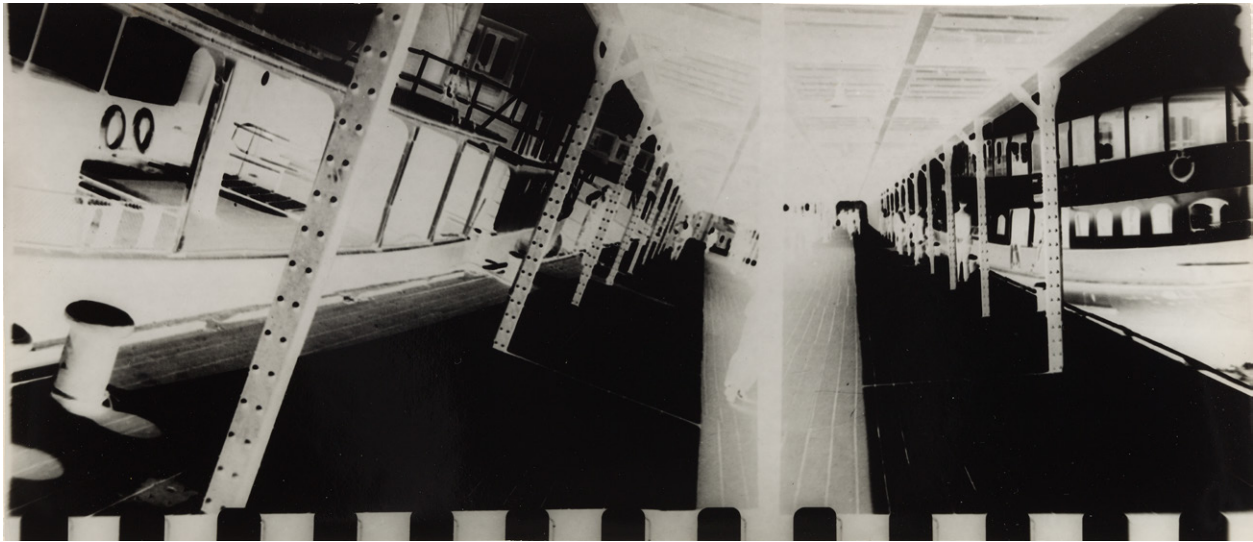
The nine other photographs by Roh in the Walther Collection likewise distinguish photography from immediate perception and demonstrate the significance of material construction to Roh's photographic practice. His production focused on printing negatives in a variety of formats and combinations, double exposures, negative prints, and sequential frames. He produced the negatives, selected the compositions and subject matter that appealed to him, and used the selected negatives repeatedly in a variety of combinations and in multiple formats. For example, the nude torso and spiral staircase overlapped and printed together in the Walther Collection (fig. 10) appear in numerous other photographs (such as figs. 11 and 12). Rather than double-exposing film in the camera, Roh seems to have been particularly interested in effects of developing and printing in the darkroom. In this way, the material construction of the image defines Roh's photographic practice. The in-camera



**fig. 11** Franz Roh. Untitled (*Reclining Nude [Liegender Frauenakt]*). c. 1922-28. Gelatin silver print,  $4\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{3}{8}$ " (11.5 × 15.7 cm). Courtesy Galerie Kicken, Berlin, and Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main. © Estate Franz Roh, Munich. Photo © Städel Museum — ARTOTHEK



**fig. 12** Franz Roh. *Farmer's Wife in the Fall (Herbstbäuerin)*. c. 1922-28. Gelatin silver print,  $4\frac{7}{8} \times 9$ " (12.4 × 22.7 cm). Courtesy Galerie Kicken, Berlin, and Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main. © Estate Franz Roh, Munich. Photo © Städel Museum — ARTOTHEK



**fig. 13** Franz Roh. Untitled. 1928–33. Gelatin silver print, 1928–35, 4 × 9 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (10.1 × 23.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA 1829.2001). © Estate Franz Roh, Munich

image, more closely aligned with the visual framework of the lens, serves as raw material for a variable process of developing, combining, and sequencing.

Roh calls attention to the materiality of his images in other ways as well. Despite his intensive production of photographs during this time, he seems to have been uninterested in refining his skills to make exhibition-quality prints. Smudges, scratches, uneven printing, and other apparent “flaws” mark his photographs in the Walther Collection and are typical of his work in general. For example, the photograph with the nude torso and staircase is riddled with technical imperfections created during development. Roh failed to align the image on the photographic paper squarely; flecks and incidental lines mark where the negative was dusty. The crude appearance of the print indicates the work of an amateur photographer in makeshift darkroom conditions. In a negative print of a boating dock (fig. 13), a smudge of chemicals appears in the upper-right corner. Roh also chose to keep the black-and-white patterning of the film roll’s sprockets along the bottom edge and thus draw attention to the materiality of the film. While these flaws could indicate his lack of interest in perfecting processes of photographic development, I suggest that such material features capture Roh’s fascination with the material construction of the image. Further, these traces of production exist in opposition to a direct transcription of vision.

Roh was not alone among the artists and intellectuals in the 1920s who turned to photography to study “a particular way of seeing.” For Roh and others, this meant an investigation of perspectival space. Of the notable artists and intellectuals addressing the relationship between vision

and representation during the interwar period—including thinkers as diverse as Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky, and Erwin Panofsky—none seems to have combined the material production of photographs with an art historical approach like Roh did. Scholars such as Leah Dickerman and Devin Fore have noted that the explication of perspective as a historical convention took on a particular sense of immediacy at this time.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the apparent restructuring of visual experience around the potential of photography seems to have put pressure on the conception of perspective as a mimetic representation of visual space. Many photographers such as Lissitzky and [Aleksandr Rodchenko](#) identified photography’s potential to provide a radically different system of organizing visual space. But unlike his avant-garde counterparts who considered their photographic practice to be an assault on the stability of linear perspective, Roh does not align photography with such radical transformation. Perhaps his closest interlocutor was Panofsky, the fellow art historian. One of the primary goals of Panofsky’s *Perspective as Symbolic Form* is to distinguish between visual, tactile space and the space of Euclidean geometry: “Exact perspectival construction is a systematic abstraction from the structure of this psychophysical space.”<sup>28</sup> While Panofsky primarily addresses Byzantine and Renaissance conceptions of space, he describes the photographic image as a construction rather than as a direct record of reality. There is a “fundamental discrepancy between ‘reality’ and its construction. This is also true, of course, for the entirely analogous operation of the camera.”<sup>29</sup> In these terms, Panofsky sees nothing radical about the potential of photography to represent space. He aligns photography with perspective but

emphasizes that perspective is a convention of representation. Roh's photographic practices can be seen in a similar way, as an exploration of perspective in the age of photography. The prevalent "flaws" of his prints—the variable focus, the misaligned spaces—draw attention to the constructed nature of such a system of visual organization. Perspective is not transparently present but consciously constructed through the material tools and processes of photographic development. In other words, photography does not validate perspective, nor does it overturn it. Rather, it makes the historically and materially constructed nature of perspective apparent. Traditionally, perspective fixes an abstract point from which sight and a "truthful" understanding of the world can be equated. Roh's photographs obscure such an equivalence.

Many of Roh's photographs, in fact, include traces of rigid systems of perspective: the gridded panes of glass on the facade of a modern building, the lines of brick and cobblestone receding into a tunnel, and the deep recession of space marked by steel pillars on a dock all suggest spatial mensuration. Even the curved line in the upper right corner of *Under Water* that unites the two frames also structures a depth of field. The sprocket marks at the bottom of the photograph of the dock register the grid of mathematically plotted space. And yet this image, like the others mentioned here, defies rational space. Since the sprockets run

continuously at the bottom, Roh must have made this print from a contact print made from the original negative film. He chose to position the negative space between two frames in the center of the print. And while this white band is aligned with what we are compelled to see as a vanishing point, it unifies two similar yet discontinuous spaces. In the frame on the left, the wood boards of the dock's surface tilt at an angle that does not conform to the perspective of the other half of the image. This distortion of perspective marks the constructed nature of such a system. The photograph emerges less as an unmediated record of visual experience and more as the product of translation of the image through various material forms—from negative to contact print to enlarged negative print. Roh's continual production of negative prints indicates his insistence on distinguishing photographs from the reproduction of visual space. By seeing perspective as a historically changing system, photography could participate in such a system and thereby become part of the history of visual representation.

Roh's repeated interest in capturing deep, perspectival views is how he worked through the relationship between photographic vision and perspective. In one print, Roh blends a photographed scene of bikes and a car passing through a series of tunnels with an image of a reclining female model, dressed in a floral-print bodice and surrounded by fabric with a similar pattern (fig. 14). The deep perspective created



**fig. 14** Franz Roh. Untitled. 1927–33. Gelatin silver print, 1928–39, 5 3/4 × 8 3/4" (14.6 × 22.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Norman F. Donant, by exchange (MoMA 1833.2001). © Estate Franz Roh, Munich



by the tunnels alternates between light and shade from the streets crossing above. Closer to the foreground, the lines of brick serve as orthogonals and emphasize the plunging sense of space. But the woman's body that looms over this urban scene distinguishes the photograph from a direct record of vision. The small triangle that appears in almost the exact center of the image, a remnant from the development process, marks a distinction between the material center of the print and the vanishing point of the tunneled perspective. While perspective traditionally aligns vision and knowledge, eye and mind, this photograph ruptures this relationship. In other words, Roh juxtaposes a system of perspective with features that disrupt it, shifting its meaning into realms of imagination, dream, and desire. If perspective persists in the modern age of photography, as Roh's work seems to insist, then it endures as one among many systems of representation and experience. Roh's photographs and his writings define modern vision as an additive process, in which multiple incongruous systems work to avoid presenting perspective as dominant.

Roh's history of photography comes to us piecemeal from various essays and lecture notes. Muddled with handwritten revisions and existing in numerous drafts, these notes are difficult to decipher.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the definitive stylistic history that he promises in his essay in *Das Lichtbild* never materialized. But I suggest that Roh's photographic practice should be considered a material formulation of that history and part of his scholarly work. Without a definitive historical text by Roh, his material explorations of the medium serve as a rich yet experimental record of his art historical approach to photography. Through his photographs, he defined the interwar period as a visually sensitive moment that was conscious of its own uniqueness as well as its historical connections. It was this sensitivity that he was unable to resuscitate once this period was over. Although he would pen several essays and lectures on photography after World War II, Roh would never define the postwar period as photographic—nor would he make photographs as a way to analyze and participate in his contemporary artistic circumstances.

## NOTES

I would like to thank two people without whom this research would not have been possible. Mitra Abbaspour supported this project at every step, from helping to formulate questions most relevant to Roh's photographic practice to facilitating research at The Museum of Modern Art and abroad. Richard Hampe, custodian of the Franz Roh Estate, opened up the Roh house and photographic collection to me with kindness and generosity. I am deeply grateful to them and for the friendship that has developed with both of these scholars. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

1. Franz Roh's study of contemporary painting culminated in *Nach-Expressionismus: Magischer Realismus, Probleme der neuesten europäischen Malerei* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925). Other scholars have dated Roh's photographic practice earlier. In the catalogue for a 1990 exhibition on Roh, Ulrich Bischoff dates Roh's photographs between 1922 and 1928. Bischoff, ed., *Franz Roh: Kritiker, Historiker, Künstler*, exh. cat. (Munich: Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, 1990). In Juliane Roh, ed.,

*Franz Roh: Retrospektive Fotografie*, exh. cat. (Düsseldorf: Edition Marzona, 1981), the photographs reproduced are dated 1922–27, yet in her introductory essay, Juliane Roh, Franz Roh's second wife, states that Roh's "photo-experiments were condensed into the short time span between 1927 and 1933" (p. 5). Given the fact that Roh himself noted that he produced many of the labels in his collection in 1931, I date his photographic practice between 1928 and 1933, before he was interned at Dachau.

2. Roh, *László Moholy-Nagy: 60 Fotos* (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1930); and *Aenne Biermann: 60 Fotos* (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1930).

3. Although Roh's images were rarely exhibited, there is evidence that he intended for some of them to circulate. In addition to the stamp ("Dr. Franz Roh, Herausgeber von Fotoauge und Fototek") Roh also signed with the pseudonyms Tim Foto and Mauritius.

4. *Das Lichtbild: Internationale Ausstellung*, exh. cat. (Munich: Münchener Bund und dem Verein Ausstellungsraum, 1930), p. 6.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

6. See Roh's correspondence with László Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy, Franz Roh Papers, ref. no. 850120, Special Collections, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

7. Roh, "Mechanismus und Ausdruck: Wesen und Wert der Fotografie," *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Fritz Wedekind, 1929), p. 14.

8. Moholy-Nagy, *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (Munich: Albert Langen, 1925), p. 22.

9. "Existenzen, die mit unserem optischen Instrument, dem Auge, nicht wahrnehmbar oder aufnehmbar sind, mit Hilfe des fotografischen Apparates sichtbar zu machen." *Ibid.*

10. "D.h. der photographischen kann unser optisches Instrument, das Auge, vervollkommen bzw. ergänzen." *Ibid.*

11. Roh, "Zur Geschichte der Fotografie," in *Das Lichtbild*, p. 38.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. Roh, untitled lecture notes (handwritten annotation "1"), n.d., Franz Roh Papers, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg. Roh's lecture notes correspond with the notes of Lucia Moholy, who was in attendance at Roh's lecture "Mechanismus und Ausdruck: Stilgeschichte der Fotografie" on January 23, 1933, at the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin. Lucia Moholy Papers, File 1, Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. My deepest gratitude goes to Robin Schuldenfrei, who discovered Lucia Moholy's notes in the Bauhaus-Archiv, for sharing them with me.

15. For a discussion of art history in Germany in the early twentieth century, see Christopher Wood's introduction to Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927; New York: Zone Books, 1997).

16. Roh, "Zur Geschichte der Fotografie," p. 38.

17. Erich Stenger, *Geschichte der Photographie* (Berlin: VDI-Verlag, 1929). See also Wilhelm Weimar, *Die Daguerreotypie in Hamburg, 1839–1860: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Photographie* (Hamburg, 1915).
18. See Bodo von Dewitz, "Sich von einer Arbeit durch eine andere erholen . . . Erich Stenger und seine Geschichte der Fotografie," *Fotogeschichte* 17, no. 64 (1997): 17–18.
19. Roh, untitled lecture notes (handwritten annotation "14"), n.d., Franz Roh Papers, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg.
20. Roh, *Holländische Landschaftsmalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1921).
21. Matthew Witkovsky, "Circa 1930: Histoire de l'art et nouvelle photographie," *Études photographiques* 23 (May 2009): 116–38.
22. See Heinrich Schwarz, *David Octavius Hill: der Meister der Photographie* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1931).
23. A photograph in the collection of the Kicken Galerie, Berlin, shows the same building with the descriptions "Architekturspolie, Warenhaus" handwritten on the back.
24. See Witkovsky, "Lucia Moholy: Photograph of Georg Muche, 1927," in *Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for Modernity* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), pp. 236–39.
25. Most of these boards are now in the collection of the Kicken Galerie.
26. See Witkovsky, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2007), p. 243.
27. Leah Dickerman, "El Lissitzky's Camera Corpus," in Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed, eds., *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003); and Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).
28. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 30.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
30. The most substantial collection of Roh's papers is housed in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg.

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