

Call For Papers

Extending Horizons. Panoramic Vision and Photography

Centre André Chastel

EPHA

Lieven Gevaert Research Centre of Photography, Art and Visual Culture

INHA/BNF, Paris, April 09-11, 2026 (May 08-10, 2026)

Only a little time after the official announcement of photography's invention in 1839, a variety of different panoramic cameras, formats and techniques were developed to provide extended views of landscapes, cityscapes, and monuments. While most accounts mention either Joseph Puchberger or Friedrich von Mertens as inventors of the first panoramic camera, and thus situate the invention of panoramic photography in the early years of the 1840s, there is little known about precisely when, how, and under which conditions the panoramic view entered photography. Most of the sparse studies in the field of panoramic photography are focused on the development of optical devices, formats, or techniques. In this perspective, the history of panoramic photography is a history of rotating cameras, swing-lenses, curved plates, montage, and printing methods.

One aim of this conference is to give a historical overview of panoramic photography from its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century until most recent developments in photography including digital imagery and VR environments. This history is neither linear nor homogeneous. Already the commonly used composite terms "panoramic photography," "panorama photography," and "photographic panorama" evoke the genuine ambivalence and heterogeneity of the phenomenon. Panoramic photography is, in fact, part of both the history of the circular panorama, invented by Robert Barker towards the end of the 18th century as a popular mass medium, and the history of photography, presented to the public some fifty years later as the ultimate means of reproducing and multiplying the real. Due to its apparent qualities of providing authentic true-to-life documents, photography has, from the start, played a decisive role as preparatory sketches for painted panoramas. Vice versa has the circular panorama not only inspired the idea to create horizontal photographs covering elongated fields of view of 140 to 360 degrees; it is also at the origin of a whole series of photographic immersive environments and devices, ranging from the Lumière brothers Photorama of 1900 to recent developments of digital technologies such as Google Street View and Photosynth.

Intermedial Resonances

Yet, the "intermedial resonances" (William Uricchio) of panoramic photography go far beyond the dual relationship between the panorama and photography. Jonathan Crary, Vanessa R. Schwarz, Alison Griffiths, Peter Otto, Anne Friedberg and others have explored the interactions and resonances of the painted panorama with other media such as the eidophysikon, the diorama, the phantasmagoria, the planetarium, theater, cinema, the wax museum, and multi-media exhibitions. This conference aims to take up these threads in order to examine the place(s) that panoramic photography occupies throughout the 19th to the 21th century within a dynamic and ever evolving intermedia culture. Panoramic photography is a hybrid, heterogeneous object that is in constant interaction, dialogue, and competition with other media such as stereoscopy, painted (stationary or moving) panoramas, dioramas, drawings, books and other print media, cinema, multi-media installations, smartphone and Internet applications, etc.

For example, the close connection between panoramic photography and cinematographic techniques becomes obvious in the already mentioned Photorama, introduced in 1900 by the Lumière brothers, which is a complex illusionistic machine halfway between photographic recording device and cinematic projection. As Martha A. Sandweiss further stated, daguerreotypists of the 1850s presented their photographs in exhibitions that mimicked the narrative storytelling and the public character of the moving panorama, itself often regarded as a forerunner of cinema. At the beginning of the 21st century, artists such as David Claerbout and John Gerrard explored the relationship between photographic stillness and cinematic movement, using panoramic special effects similar to the bullet time known from the 1999 Hollywood blockbuster *The Matrix*. From this follows that the entanglements between panorama, photography, and cinema have to be discussed at the level of perception, technology, discourse, narration, aesthetics, and presentation.

The heterogeneity of panoramic photography further reveals itself in the choice of subject matter and the purpose of such images. While the depicted subjects are almost identical with those of painted panoramas (landscapes, cityscapes, encampments and battle-fields, collective group settings), the functions and contextual applications are quite different. In contrast to the painted panorama, panoramic photography's use is not restricted to spectacular culture's need for amusement, distraction, patriotic identification, and arm-chair travelling to remote places. Panoramic photographs were, and are, employed in very different fields such as photogrammetry, military survey, documentation of architectural patrimony, overland exploration, scientific research, propaganda and commercial photography, forensic studies, and even the illustration of lunar surface conditions. From this point of view, panoramic photography is not *a* "way of seeing" or *a* "form of vision" (Angela Miller), but provides *multiple* ways of seeing and forms of vision. These depend, on the one hand, on the various techniques and forms employed (wide-angle, rotating lenses and/or cameras, projection, horizontally arranged sequences and montages, foldouts in magazines, accordion books, digital imagery, projected 360 degree environments). On the other hand, they differ according to changing functions (optical toys, propagandistic and commercial imagery, travel documents, scientific proofs, art works, military and topographical survey), and ideological dimensions (control, surveillance, domination of a place or a territory, entertainment and consumption, colonial expansion). This raises the following questions: How, and with which, other media panoramic photographs interact? Under what conditions and within which historical, socio-political, and economic contexts does this happen?

"Special Photographs" for "Special Tasks"

As early as 1881, German photochemist Erich Stenger, began his article "Panoramenaufnahmen und Panoramenapparate" with the observation that the history of panorama photography is, first and foremost, a history of "special photographs" for "special tasks." This leads to the question of which techniques were used for what purposes? Since the 1840s, photographers used wide-angles, swing lenses and montage to produce extended 150 to 360 degree views of cities and remote landscapes. Soon, polytechniciens and engineers such as Aimé Civiale and Auguste Chevallier designed panorama cameras less for documentary or touristic purposes than as instruments for topographic and geodetic survey. The panoramic montages created by Baldus, Le Gray and Le Secq have to be situated, for their part, within both government-organized surveys of architectural patrimony in mid-19th century France and the aesthetic discussions about the artistic character of photography in the context of exhibitions organized by photographic societies and world exhibitions. Other European and American photographers used panoramic photography as a means of information and visual appropriation of regions being colonized, or as commercial objects that pictorialize progress and expansion. In the 1920s, American photographer Eugene O. Goldbeck employed the rotating panorama camera

Cirkut to produce mass compositions promoting national identity and patriotism. In the end of the 1960s, Dan Graham and Victor Burgin produced and arranged photographs panoramically as an aesthetic response to phenomenological and psychological theories of perception. More recently, virtual panoramas stitched together from multiple photographs flood the Internet to market real estate, promote cultural heritage sites, or to provide virtual access to urban environments and spectacular landscapes.

Presentation, Public, Viewer

In which contexts panoramic photographs were and are shown? For what public are they made, who has access to these images, and under what conditions? Panoramic photographs are exhibited in various contexts: in historical exhibitions where they appear as documents, in art exhibitions where they are appreciated for their aesthetic value, in world exhibitions in which they are part of a narrative of scientific progress and colonial expansion. The signification of these images may change according to the specific spatial and institutional context and the attitude of the exhibition visitors. For example, Ernest Lacan, in his report on the universal exhibition in Paris, described Roger Fenton's panoramic views of the Crimean War as both information about the theater of war, including topographical specificities and the positions and maneuvers of the Allies, and magnificent compositions of color and light worthy of the attention of historians and artists alike. As this example demonstrates, panoramic photographs – like all photographs – have to be examined in relation to their presentation within specific institutional settings, their intended audiences, and the way they are perceived and described by individual viewers (who have their own interests and agendas).

Other aspects that may be addressed concern:

- The questions of mobility and time
- Story-telling and narration in the service of myths of control, domination, and expansion
- Photo-panoramic art as critical lens through which perceptual, cultural, socio-political, and aesthetic conventions and traditions are investigated
- The appropriation and remediation of older photo-panoramic practices and techniques within digital imagery, post-photographic procedures, and social media

The working languages of the symposium are English and French

Abstract submission deadline: 24 November 2025

Response: 19 December 2026

Please send your abstract (300 words max) with your complete contact information and a short bio to the following addresses:

alex.streitberger@uclouvain.be and guillaume.erwan.legall@gmail.com

Organisation :

Arno Gisinger, Université Paris 8

Guillaume Le Gall, Sorbonne Université

Alexander Streitberger, UCLouvain

Hilde Van Gelder, KU Leuven