

PHAROS opens its online portal

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The PHAROS online search platform is now open and free to use by researchers of all types. The online portal at artresearch.net has been developed using ResearchSpace software and funded through grants from the Andrew W. Mellon and the Samuel H. Kress Foundations. This initial version of the portal includes the holdings of seven Pharos institutions, numbering over 2.8 million images. In the coming months, additional PHAROS members will add their holdings to the online portal, bringing the number of images represented to over 25 million.

Introduction

An historic tool for researching works of art has just moved one giant step closer to reinvention as a twenty-first century resource. The opening of the PHAROS online platform of photo archive collections brings together 2.8 million images from seven PHAROS members and offers free access to reproductive photos documenting works of art, architecture, and historical sites from around the world. PHAROS is the name of the *International Photo Archives Association*, a non-profit corporation whose current roster includes member institutions from the United States, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. Eventually, the photo archive image holdings of all 14 members of PHAROS will be represented in the online portal bringing the number of images beyond 25 million. The url to access these holdings and more and varied holdings in the future is: www.artresearch.net (login: **demo**; password: **pharosdemo**).

Photo archives

Photo archive collections documenting works of art were a staple of art historical research from the advent of photography until the late twentieth century when digital images of museum art collections began to flourish on the Internet. For a century, these black and white photos were the only accessible facsimiles of millions of works of art and were used religiously by art historians, dealers, conservators, and art professionals.

These photos, often mounted on heavy card stock and carrying marginalia from past scholars, documented a place and time for a work of art – many of the works depicted are in public collections, but also many were relatively hidden in private collections, or sold into obscurity at auction. Some were subsequently destroyed by bombs and natural disaster, displaced by war and inheritance, and changed by conservators and time, but the images in these photo archives froze an object in a moment in time and provide invaluable information for provenance research, conservation, and all other forms of art historical research. Costanza Caraffa, Head of the Photo Archives at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, and an early and vocal proponent of photo archive collections, refers to photo archives as *ecosystems* – ‘photographic archives are open, dynamic and complex systems formed by organisms of different kinds which have a reciprocal action among each other and with their surrounding environment...’ While languishing in relative disuse over the past decades (though never forgotten by methodical art historians, diligent art dealers, and steadfast librarians), these ecosystems are now enjoying new exposure and much broader access in the PHAROS project.

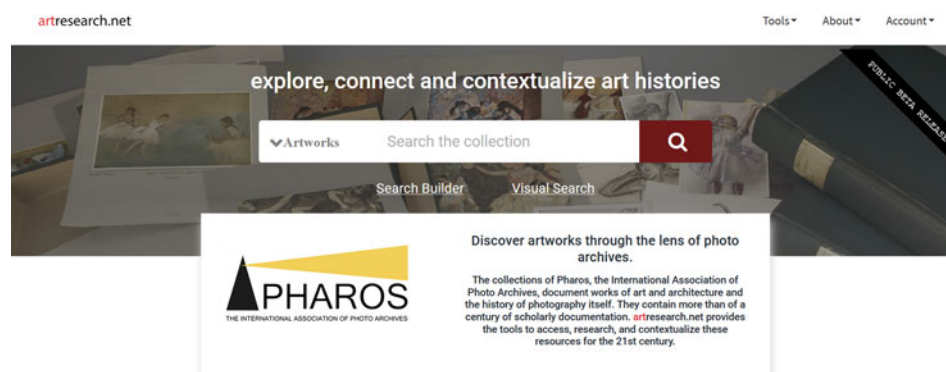


Fig. 1. Search screen, PHAROS platform. Screen capture by the author.



Fig. 2. Photo archive box, Yale Center for British Art. Photo by the author.

PHAROS

Established in 2013, PHAROS is a pilot project that brings together a group of 14 photo archive collections from Europe and North America whose combined photo archive holdings total over 25 million images. The goal of PHAROS is to provide free and open access to the photo archive holdings of all 14 institutions through the online platform ResearchSpace. PHAROS responds to the need for the rich visual and textual material held in art historical photo archives to be made accessible to a global community of researchers. Through digitisation and linked open data, PHAROS seeks to open access to all member collections and to create meaningful connections between them. In this way, PHAROS and photo archives would be the conduit for new art historical research as well as for research in other disciplines.

The primary scope of the original 14 institutions' photo archive holdings concentrates on the cultural heritage of Europe and North America and represents the formation of the discipline of art history in these geographical regions. PHAROS plans to expand its membership to include photo archive collections based in other regions of the world, as well as additional European and North American institutions with photo archive collections documenting cultures from

around the globe. The original 14 members of PHAROS are: Biblioteca Hertziana, Rome; Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, Courtauld Institute of Art, London; University of Marburg; Fondazione Federico Zeri, Bologna; Frick Art Reference Library, New York; Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris; Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London; RKD - Netherlands Institute of Art History, The Hague; I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence; Warburg Institute, London; Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

Contextualized & connected histories



We are committed to creating an open and freely accessible digital research platform allowing for comprehensive consolidated access to photo archive images and their associated scholarly documentation.

The PHAROS collections collectively contain an estimated 25 million images documenting works of art and architecture and the history of photography itself. Please visit our statistics page to view the number of records that are currently available online.

Fig. 3. PHAROS Philosophy. Screen capture by the author.

Pilot project

In Spring of 2019, the PHAROS association received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to fund a 30-month pilot project to create a research platform using the ResearchSpace software to make available over 1.5 million images of works of art with accompanying scholarly documentation from five of the fourteen PHAROS member institutions.

ResearchSpace is the portal that provides access to the image and metadata holdings of the PHAROS institutions. The Mellon grant for the PHAROS pilot project provided for the development and customization of the ResearchSpace platform to utilize the built-in ontologies and linked data to facilitate discovery, access, and contextualization of photo archive resources.

By the end of the grant period, seven PHAROS members would be a part of the initial Pilot Project contributing 2,800,000 images and metadata to the Beta system. This represents over 1,500,000 unique artworks from the efforts of about 130,000 photographers and 29,000 artists. The pilot project is both a testing ground and model for the desired goal of the PHAROS member institutions: to create a freely available common platform for research on works of art in all media through comprehensive consolidated access.

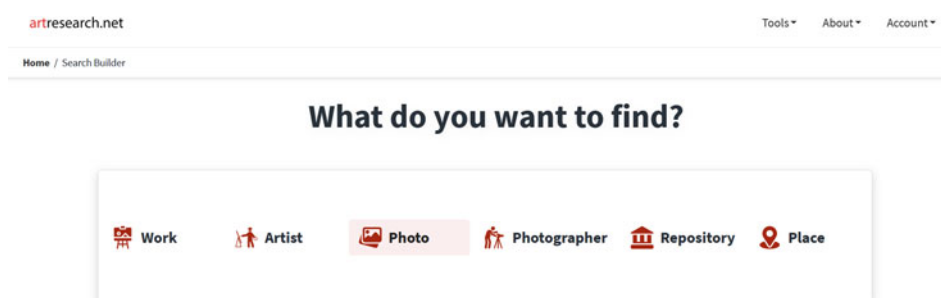


Fig. 4. Search Builder screen, PHAROS Platform. Screen capture by the author.

Features

Some of the most innovative features of the PHAROS search portal are the ways in which art works and artists can be discovered. There are *Search* and *Browse* functions as is expected – one can search by artworks, artists, photographers, and photographs and browse a series of categories: artists, photographers, repositories, and partners. The *Collection Spotlights* brings together sets of pre-coordinated results across all the repositories: A. C. Cooper photographs, Red Chalk Drawings, Built Works in the Middle East, 1839–1900 19th Century Photographs, Bronze Sculptures, Self Portraits, Women Artists.

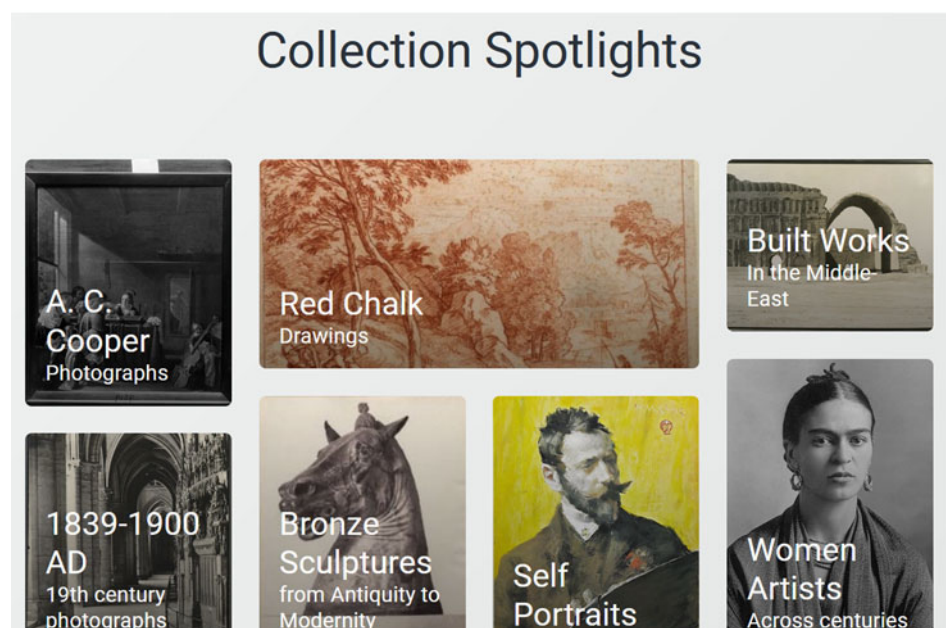


Fig. 5. Collection Spotlights, PHAROS platform. Screen capture by the author.

The advanced search, *Search Builder*, is a powerful search tool. The interconnected nature of the metadata corresponding to each photograph allows for an unprecedented amount of discoverability – artists lead to their teachers and their pupils; artist's records show influences and influencers, groups and collectives belonged to, known family members, in addition to birth and death dates, geographic location worked, and nationality.

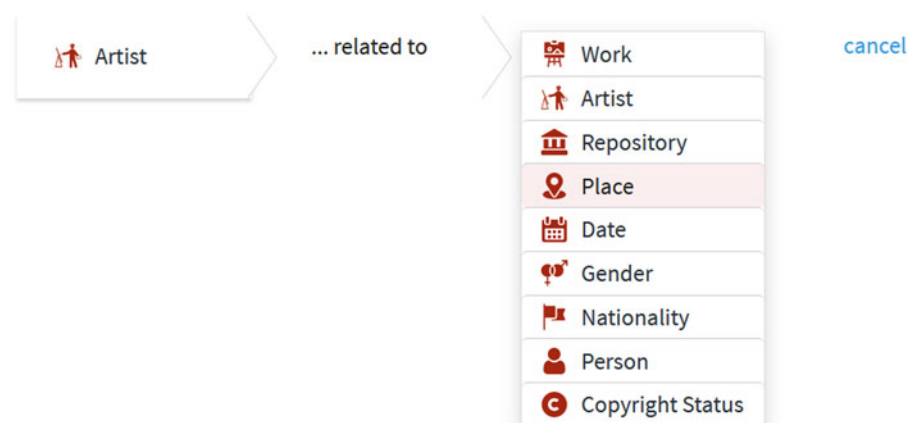


Fig. 6. Search Builder, PHAROS platform. Screen capture by the author.

The *Visual Search* allows users to search and capture images with similar visual elements – bringing together similar compositions, copies, and images of the same work of art photographed at different times in its history.

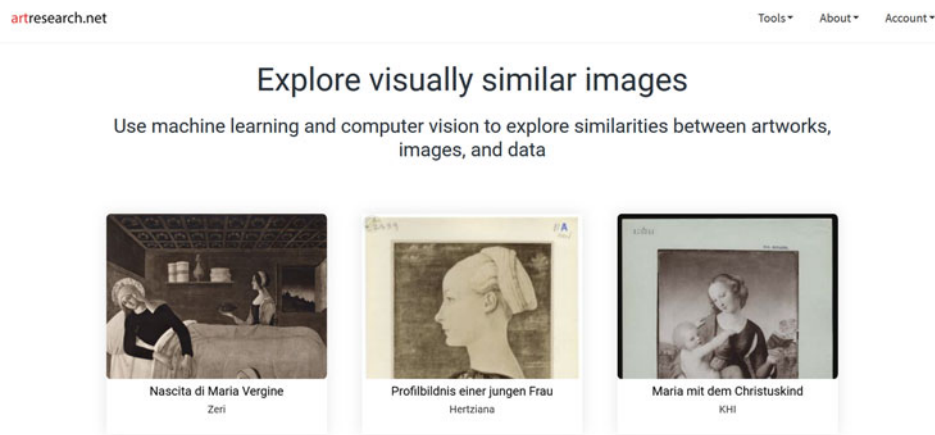


Fig. 7. Visual Search, PHAROS platform. Screen capture by the author.

The image record presents the work of art and its verso – complete with the marginalia of scholars' notes. The image metadata provides subjects, last known location, the photo archive repository, as well as access to the iiif viewer that allows a close-up, almost microscopic, view of the artwork as well as the ability to capture multiple images for comparisons and annotations.

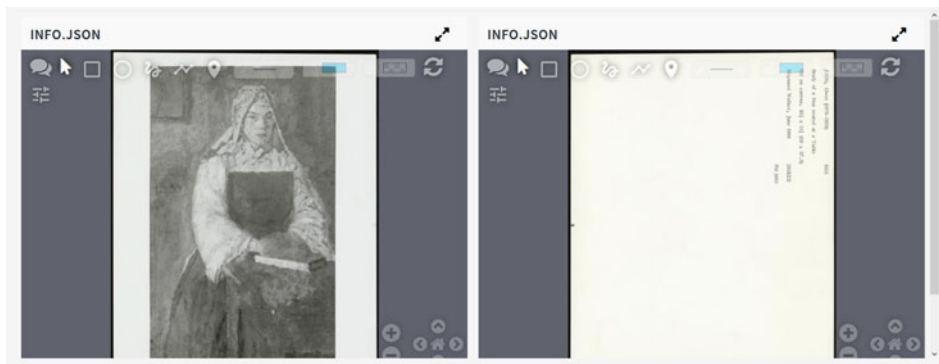


Fig. 8. iiif Image viewer, PHAROS platform. Screen capture by the author.

Future of PHAROS

In the coming months and years, PHAROS plans to import the images and metadata of the remaining PHAROS institutions, growing the Beta version of the platform to over 25 million images. Plans for the near future include adding members from under- or non-represented geographic regions to expand the scope of the photo collections to document cultures from around the world.

By bringing these photographs together with twenty-first century data harmonization and image matching technologies, the PHAROS research platform provides to a global audience a resource far greater than any individual member institution can provide on its own. It is hoped that by opening access to their collections and data, the PHAROS platform will reinvigorate and reinvent art historical research using photo archives as well as become the catalyst for new research methodologies.

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