

Introduction to the Amsterdam Principles

When I started working as a photo editor, the fine art photographers I knew asked me if I was sure I wanted to leave art photography for news photography. When I, after 10 years, decided to leave the newspaper where I was working for my position in the Rijksmuseum, the news photographers with whom I worked, asked me why I was trading news photography for studio photography. I'm sharing this anecdote because it illustrates a deep-rooted division within the photography world, between first, second and lower classes. Since the early start of photography, photographers wanted to prove that they were artists. And rightly so! Unfortunately it led also to an internal separation, with photographers competing between themselves. As a non-photographer and after working within the photography field for almost 30 years, this still amazes me.

The past few years I have been invited several times to speak about standardization in fine art and heritage photography. The reactions from the audiences were at times hostile. Photographers saw me as interfering with the free interpretation of their work and actually downgrading it. But standardized heritage photography is not meaningless, or of lesser quality or dull! On the contrary!

With our photography we preserve fine art and heritage for the future, and with the technical possibilities of digital photography our biggest challenge is in the new photographic techniques and our contribution to science. Standardization is crucial to this process.

I started this conference with two photos; a salted paper print of a silver vase, in the Rijksmuseum collection, made by Antoine Vechte, photographed by Hyppolyte Bayard in 1847 and a digital photo of the same vase photographed by Frans Pegt in 2013.



Hippolyte Bayard, 1847 – Frans Pegt, 2013
Antoine Vechte, Silver vase with sea gods, 1843

RIJKS MUSEUM

The first photographers were mostly scientists and inventors. To master this medium you needed profound knowledge of the photographic techniques. Today photography is widespread and within

everyone's reach. How a photo is made is not of interest for the news photographer, the artist or the amateur. It's the impact of the image that counts.

There's only one corner within the professional photography where it's still crucial to have profound knowledge of the photographic techniques, and that is within fine art and heritage photography. High quality standardized heritage photography and meeting scientific demands is only possible by thoroughly mastering all photographic rules.

You are in the middle of the future developments where photography techniques are part of. It will distinguish you in the professional photography field as an expert and that is why I think it should make you proud to be a fine art and heritage photographer!

These past two days we have seen and discussed current and future photography techniques. For the next hour we will discuss the Amsterdam principles, with which we aim to come to a consensus on best practice in existing heritage photography. We will also look at how we can adapt existing guidelines to meet the needs that arise with new technology. Shared goals and principles will establish us a professional group within the heritage and the photography field. The Amsterdam Principles is a dynamic document, open for discussion and flexible for any changes that occur in our profession.

For the next hour we will discuss these principles and what lays ahead in the future. Alonzo Addison, our last speaker, will wrap things up. A report on the principles will be published along with the presentations of the conference. All conference participants will receive this document. We will also find a way to publish it online.

Please feel free to share your thoughts!

I will take a seat in the forum and I want to invite the members of the program committee of this conference:

Robert Gillese, Senior consultant of ICT and Cultural Heritage of the DEN Foundation

Wim Hupperetz, director Allard Pierson Museum

Tony Harris, chair of the Association of Heritage and Fine Art Photography

Tim Zaman, PhD researcher at the Technical University Delft

Our chair is Nick Poole, Chief Executive of the Collection Trust. I don't think he needs any further introduction.