

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

PHOTOGRAPHY: TRAVEL, COLLECTING AND EDUCATION. THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA, ITS PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION AND MURCIA

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Archer Milton Huntington is a key figure in the extension and knowledge of Spanish culture in North America, as he is one of the great art collectors and philanthropists of the United States. This becomes evident when one contemplates the imposing Spanish art collection of the Hispanic Society of America, a compilation which has no equal in quality or scope with any other outside of Spain. We are, therefore, looking at a researcher who, with an altruistic interest, would go on to gather, between 1890 and 1920, one of the great collections of Spanish art in the world. From 1892 he made different visits to the peninsula, which helped Huntington to form a precise image of Spain, a conceptualized image that would be crucial in composing his model of the ideal museum. That is, a reflective space which houses representative examples of the main periods, schools and authors of Spanish art. Thus, after a journey of collecting artistic material, on March 18, 1904, the Hispanic Society of America was founded in New York City. Conceived as a library, a museum and, of course, as a free public educational institution which would open its doors to visitors (and researchers) in the year 1908, the following year holding, as an example of its policy, an important exhibition of the painter Joaquín Sorolla, a fact that would mark, symptomatically, the construction of its Photographic archive.

In this global context, photography as a document and an essential source of knowledge would play a leading role from the end of the 19th century. Huntington's desire to disseminate Spanish culture led him to design a comprehensive strategic plan with which he could decode and understand all the heritage deposited in his museum. From the first moment, this plan looks at the creation of a photographic documentary collection that, given its nature, becomes an effective tool for the researcher. To achieve the project's completion, the collector decided that his institution would need to have a considerable photographic archive, hosting different topics related to Spanish customs and, of course, about its art. That is, a collection that gathers images of artistic works but also a deep documentation of ethnographic aspects, registering dresses, trades and local traditions. Therefore it is a group of representations that follows a program orchestrated by the scholar, having as a derivation, being composed of pieces by different authors, presenting a thematic-conceptual unit. Thus, compiled of a set of approximately 176,000 pieces, which are divided

into two parts: the first of them shows images of works of art from both Spain and Latin America, while the second contains snapshots that document the life and customs of both territories. Directing his glance to the spaces far from the great capitals, a fact determined because Huntington himself considered that the real and authentic Spain was to be found outside the urban nuclei of large cities. As a result, not only art (architecture, painting or sculpture) is photographed, but everything that can decipher the coding of the body to be analyzed (for example costumes, popular festivals, trades), which come to determine the local differences or peculiarities. It was under these personal principles when, in 1913, it was established that the foundation must have a specific place for photography, being in 1928 freed from the organization of the collections of the library and the museum when it created the Department of Iconography, in which photographs and prints share space. To gather the images that would make up this space Huntington established a strategy for the acquisition of work, based on both the purchase of material and the production of it. It was a key system that the institution used for the consolidation and rapid growth of its archive, materializing in three evident formulas. The first of these was determined by the contributions he made both from his personal work, as well as from the images acquired on his travels or facilitated by dealers, such as the works, for example, of Charles Clifford or Jean Laurent. The second modality, and one of the most interesting, was established by their own production system. This being a group of images made by the institution itself through its important subsidized expeditions to autonomous agents and to the personnel of the Hispanic, those carried out since 1923 were remarkable, since they were executed exclusively by the conservators and photographers of the center, and Huntington completed his archive by sending these professionals throughout the country. The third and last method was conditioned by the donations, thus the repertoire grew thanks to the gifts that the Hispanic received like, for example, the collection of the Marquess of Vega-Inclán.

In this sense, within the general set we find more than three hundred photographs related to the region of Murcia, which represent territories such as Murcia, Cartagena, Lorca, Cieza, Fortuna, Archena or Montegudo. *A priori* they might seem insignificant in number, taking into account the volume of such a vast collection, but the historical-artistic quality of them places them at a high expressive level, personalizing them as referential works of our particular history of photography. It is, in short, a circumscribed photographic archive, in this case, to the years between 1862 and 1930, made by European and North American authors professionals and amateurs, that is, by a highly significant number of producers, defined by quality photographers such as the British Charles Clifford or the French Jean Laurent and the commercial firm Léon et Lévy; to which the interesting Germans Kurt Hielscher and Kurt Schindler were part of. Also American authors such as Arthur Byne and Anna Christian, as well as the impressive team of directors of the institution, including Margaret Jackson and Ruth Matilda Anderson whose pictures undoubtedly give this group a very particular vision from the perspective of gender studies.

If we take into account the regulated process (acquisition, production and donation) with which the photographic collection was constructed, we can establish a coherent historical-chronological plot line that begins, logically, in the 19th century. The first of its sections, the acquisition, takes shape around nature and is structured with the work of the English photographer Clifford; a work that, although not the first author which

Huntington collected, it does represent the oldest image of Spain within the collection, as far as photography of the Murcia region is concerned. Behind this traveler we place the figure of Jean Laurent, who was also a photographer, he has the honor of being one of the first photographers who this collector took an interest in. In fact, Laurent's works are among the first acquired by Huntington, also we must take into account that he obtained so much material from this author that today the Hispanic is one of the world's leading examples in terms of possession of originals by Laurent. Closing the nineteenth century, is the collection of works from the commercial firm Léon et Lévy, also being French, they give us another revealing sample of the end of the century. After these three excellent producers we find a series of twentieth century authors who, in the same way, contribute to the theoretical and visual enrichment of the photographic collection. Kurt Hielscher and Anna Christian are the two photographers who, with characteristics different from their predecessors, culminate this section of photographic acquisitions related to Murcia by the Hispanic. And, unlike Clifford, Laurent and Léon et Lévy, Hielscher and Christian were amateur photographers, producers who with their own particular nature experience the concept of travel through the national territory.

The second of the sections, their own production, was one of the most interesting modalities through which the documentary archive was increased, since all the work was ruled directly by the ideology of its benefactor. In this sense, and under the halo of patronage philanthropy, Huntington made the decision to sponsor this type of training activities, motivated by a deep conviction to believe that they are strictly necessary for the acquisition of knowledge. A determination that has as a background the goal of giving its workers the possibility of gaining firsthand experience and getting with it knowledge in the field itself or study medium. Initially, these were carried out by independent researchers but over time they were executed exclusively by the staff of the Hispanic itself, that is, by the workers that Huntington chose and hired, for their professional qualities, to configure the institution's team. One of the first financings was destined for the North American architect Arthur Byne, next to whom we situate, for being a free scholar, the work executed by the German Kurt Schindler. These two actions were followed by expeditions that the center promoted since 1923; a moment in which Huntington decided to complete his archive, sending his own conservators and photographers to perform such work (since sometimes it was certainly complex to acquire images from remote areas of the country). The formula for this purpose was the investigative trip to Spain. The philanthropist thought that the knowledge of Spanish culture would be more effective thanks to the publications of his collaborators, hence the importance of sending them to make a pedagogical trip.

The first visit became, due to its primacy, a trial itinerary, a rehearsal on how investigations should be formulated and a contact with the country. So, we were facing the inaugural movement organized for the staff of the institution, composed of the team of Catherine Allyn, Anna Pursche and Ruth Matilda Anderson, the only professional photographer of the three. Although from this moment on other incursions were made to Spain, it was not until the expedition of 1929 that the workers of this institution once again visited our region. On this occasion, it was a study trip composed by Adelaide Marie Meyer and Ada Marshall Johnson, accompanied by Margaret Jackson, the only professional photographer of that team and another one of the collaborators responsible for the increase and

consolidation of this collection. Along with this one, also in 1929, another trip was made, the last one in which we can find photographic works related to the Murcia region. It is an anomalous expedition, because although it was carried out by personnel of the Hispanic, it had the peculiarity of being executed exclusively by Ruth Matilda Anderson. All of them leave a revealing and significant mark of the life and culture of the region of Murcia.

Last, but not least, we place the third method of enlarging the photographic collection, which, as we have already indicated, is determined by the donation system. A procedure that, although it is reduced to a very specific sample, is equally significant, since these collections enrich the institution's archive as a whole. One of the most outstanding cases, in which we find images related to this area of great historical narrative value, is the contribution of Benigno Mariano Pedro Casto de la Vega-Inclán and Flaquer.

All this process of documentary collection results in the formation of an important set of testimonial images transcribing different sociocultural aspects of the Murcia region, which is why they are very valuable for the history of photography in this territory. Under the compositional nuance of the foreigner's viewpoint. Thus in them different aspects of our history are subjectively represented, firstly, through the characteristics of our monuments and cities (in general). Secondly, through the representation of our landscapes and geography, absolutely conditioned by the particular interests of the time. And, finally, and occupying a very prominent place, freely reproducing various aspects of society that inhabit these spaces: their jobs, parties or clothing.

A conceptual (and creative) context that makes this collection a fundamental and direct source for the knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of this area of Eastern Spain, being an essential document of anthropological and artistic characters.