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The secret life of sculpture: notes from Giovanni Mariacher's fototeca at Padua

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Giovanni Mariacher, the esteemed museum director and professor of art history, left his collection of photographs to the Civic Museums of Padua at his death. My survey of this archive last summer underlined the breadth of his expertise and the extent of his scholarship, which spanned all aspects of the arts of the Veneto. Even when the visitor doesn't find what he had hoped to, the photo archive can provide new perspectives on familiar objects and issues, offering as it does a look through the lens—or through the shoebox—of another. While I did not find the trove of photographs of unpublished sculpture from Veneto private collections that I might have hoped for, the photographs of sculpture that I did find, mostly of familiar objects in the museums of Venice and Padua, provided new insight to issues of condition, attribution, and display. The paper will outline some fresh starts suggested by photographs of sculpture in the Mariacher archive, and reexamine the scholar's writings on sculpture in light of his collection of images

Biographical Note

Peter Jonathan Bell holds degrees from Oberlin College and the Courtauld Institute of Art and is currently writing a dissertation at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, on the reinvention of the bronze statuette in Renaissance Italy. As part of a team of authors, he is cataloguing the Italian bronze sculptures in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. His broad interests in Early Modern sculpture and replication technologies focus in particular on cast sculpture and printmaking in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.