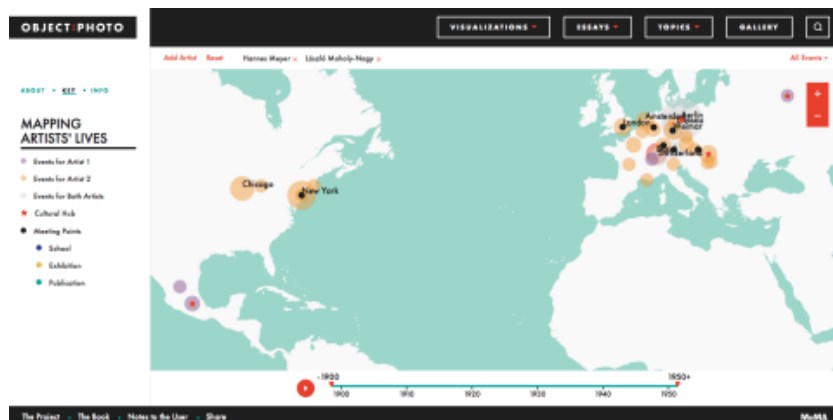# Object:Photo

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In 2001, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) acquired the Thomas Walther Collection, comprised of 341 photographs by 148 artists, which chiefly represents avant-garde European photography. Enabled by a Mellon Foundation grant, a team of conservators, curators, scholars and scientists spent four years examining the collection to an unprecedented degree. The result was an exhibition, a print catalog, a symposium, and the Object:Photo. Modern Photographs 1909-1959: The Thomas Walther Collection "interactive digital research platform," as it is called by MOMA director Glenn D. Lowry.

As described in the introduction to Object:Photo, photography in the 1920s and '30s developed into "a dynamic, infinitely flexible, and easily transmissible medium," which is also applicable to this elegant and robust online resource. Behind an engaging home page is an abundance of material illustrating photography of the early 20th century through networks of locations, personal relationships, exhibitions, publications, styles, and subject matter. Additionally, new conservation and technical analysis of the materiality of the photographs allows for unique examination and appreciation of the prints themselves.

In Object:Photo, the site's content is non-hierarchical and its experience is guided by the visitor's navigation decisions. Starting from the homepage, the beckoning red "explore" button reveals access to the collection through thematic visualizations: Mapping Photographs, Comparing Photographs, Connecting Artists, and Mapping Artists' Lives. Each visualization method—animated mapping, bubble maps, timelines, and dot plots—has filtering ability to create customized views. In the Comparing Photographs section, for example, a filter could be set to illustrate the question, "How did the ratio of contact prints to enlargement prints change between 1925 and 1935?" "Mapping Photographs" launches a map with a timeline (that can be manually manipulated or set into animation), and filters include elements such as "Cultural

Hubs," "Style," or "Materials."
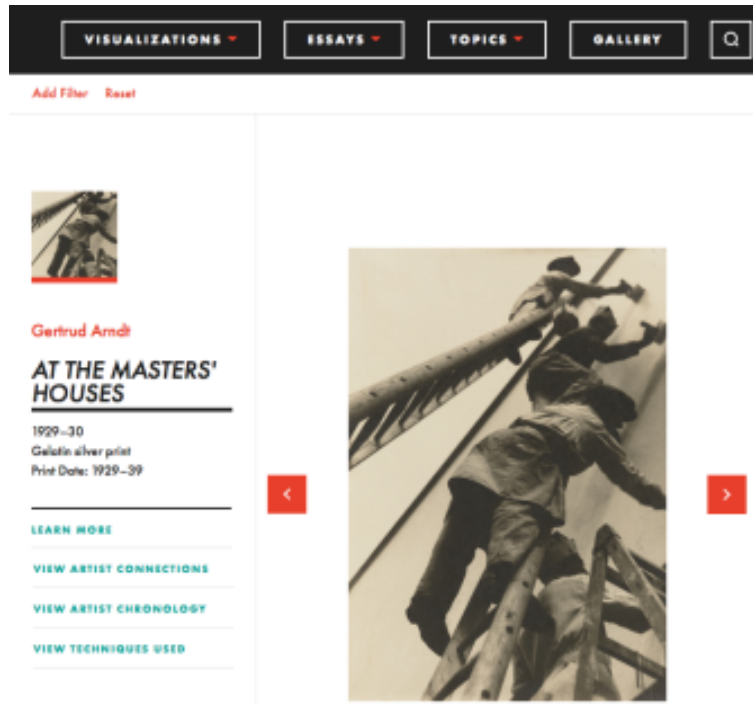
Photographs in the collection are stunningly reproduced in high resolution, both recto and verso. The surface of the photograph is given extra attention in its own section, supported by images made with imaging software and extreme close-ups, and even further examined through technical analysis in the "Paper Material" section. "In Context" presents related images, links to essays, and occasionally, video. In the case of Jean Painlevé's photograph Fish in Profile, 1930, the contextual material includes a wonderfully strange 12 minute film by Painlevé from 1927 starring an adventurous octopus.

Clicking on the artist's name takes you to a biographical entry featuring a portrait, a link to related works MOMA's collection, and the artist's chronology rich with links to people and places elsewhere in the Walther Collection.

While essays are linked throughout the site's content, there is an essay tab providing direct access to twenty-nine essays. Essays open as PDFs and the full text is integrated in the site's search function. "Notes to the User" illuminates the descriptive data headings found throughout the site and a valuable glossary is included in a section detailing the entirety of the project.

It is not surprising that a large, non-linear, exploratory site of this nature could have a few downfalls of clarity. Navigating back to known places can be confounding due to the multitude of paths. Additionally, the significance of some visualizations is hard to decipher (specifically some aspects of the artists' connections). The site is not mobile compatible at all, though it does work on tablets. These criticisms are minor when considered against the contribution Object:Photo makes to the fields of the history of photography and digital publishing.