

# *A Million Pictures*



## *Magic Lantern Slide Heritage as Artefacts in the Common European History of Learning*

**Newsletter # 04 | April 2016**

**Our second workshop** “Defining guidelines for description and cataloguing – discussing first results” will start next week – we are glad for the opportunity to exchange about the experiences of digitizing lantern slides with an impressive number of experts and thank the researchers of the team Girona and Salamanca for hosting this meeting! Together with representatives of various Spanish museums, researchers inside and outside of the project consortium librarians, catalogers, information specialists and artists we will assess our work to date and define the exact tasks that lay ahead. Read more on the outcomes in our next newsletter and check our website!

In March and April, two articles on *A Million Pictures* increased the visibility of the project: A richly illustrated [article in Hypothes](#), the journal of the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). The online forum Hyperallergic.com for “playful, serious, and radical perspectives on art and culture in the world today” posted the article “[From Kittens to Curling, Thousands of European Lantern Slides Are Going Online](#)”. The article features slides of the digitized collections and interviews Joe Kember about the activities of the research team Exeter. Shortly after publication, the number of inquiries increased and new people signed up for the newsletter.

The positive response, expressed interest in re-using the material and questions about meta-data and possible cooperation is very encouraging – we will take that with us for the second workshop.

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## From the Project Coordination

We welcome the Dutch Organisation of Academic Heritage, **Stichting Academisch Erfgoed (SAE)** to the research consortium. SAE is a network of Dutch university collections. Currently, SAE is developing a research proposal for a project on material used in education, among that lantern slides. We look forward to the collaboration! <http://www.academischerfgoed.nl/>

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Short notes, images, articles, questions, requests, comments on this newsletter and more are highly welcomed! Please send them per e-mail to

Sarah Dellmann: s.dellmann [at] uu.nl

Any items for the next newsletter should be submitted by

**31 May 2016**

## From the Archive: Small Magic Lanterns in the Vrielynck Collection – a teaching tool

*The Antwerp team has completed its survey of the Vrielynck collection. Here are some first reflections by Sabine Lenk on how this material will lead to further research.*

Many manufacturers, many forms, many colours, some light systems – that could be the quintessence when one examines the small lanterns for home use in the Robert Vrielynck collection, held by the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Antwerp, one of the partners of the project.

They are quite simple constructions: a tin body, a lens, sometimes a lens holder, a chimney, a petroleum lamp, all fixed on a piece of wooden, that's it. To make a difference they excel in external beauty. They show eye catching colours (red, golden, silver, metallic), have shiny polished lenses (copper, brass), carry ornaments at the top and/or the bottom (crowns, rims), stand on animal- or flower-like feet. Some of the manufacturers gave them an exterior representing (almost) realistically buildings (a house, Eiffel tower), others choose a more common form (cube, barrel, drum, bloc), sometimes without a knob or a hold. Most of them are small enough to fit the hand of a child.



Nevertheless, the distinctiveness can also be in the size of the lantern and the slides – and thus the price.

These small lanterns were supposed to be toys to entertain children at home on days when they couldn't play outside. But in fact, they were much more than toys, they were didactic instruments. They stimulated the children's fantasy, creativity, eloquence: their owners invented stories around each image on a slide, transformed them into a coherent narration, told them to their friends. They learned the difference between a leopard and a tiger, between an Indian and a Chinese costume, between the snowy mountains of Switzerland and the icy

plains of Greenland, the Tower Bridge and the Pont d'Avignon. The slides taught them the same subjects as in school: geography, biology, zoology, history, literature etc. With the lantern, however, there was a difference: the children were in control of when, where, what they were learning, they decided why, how and in which pace they transferred their knowledge to others. Playful and interactive learning *avant la lettre*.



Did it matter to the children that their lanterns were different as long as their parents could afford to buy one? A research into the use of these projection devices, their acceptance among pedagogues, the sales strategies of the toymaker industry could give an answer to this question.



*Sabine Lenk is PostDoc Researcher for the Research team Antwerp. Email: [S.lenk@uu.nl](mailto:S.lenk@uu.nl)*

*All four images used in this article depict objects from the Robert Vrielynck Collection @ MuHKA (Antwerp).*

## **From the working groups**

*Working Group “Scanning Catalogues” (ScanCats):*

While editing this newsletter, the last questions about metadata for the **cooperation with the Media History Digital Library** are sorted out. Catalogs of lantern slide manufacturers will be digitized and uploaded to that fantastic online resource on media history. If you have (digitized) catalog that you wish to make publicly available on the MHDL, please contact Sarah Dellmann for details and procedures. We hope to hear from you soon!

<http://mediahistoryproject.org/>

## From the working groups (continued)

### *Working Group “Best Practices of Digitization”*

The Working group “Best Practices in Digitization” prepared a handout for discussion during the second workshop in our workshop series. After discussion at the workshop, a preliminary guideline will be made available on the website. If you are interested in discussing these guidelines, please contact us.

## Project News

On the occasion of the “Science in the City” festivities that celebrated Utrecht University’s 380<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Frank Kessler and Sarah Dellmann, with



assistance at the lantern by Anja Goldschmidt, gave a “**mini-lecture**” to the general public on lantern slides and their research.

Liselotte Westerterp, MA student at Utrecht Conservatory, wrote the **composition “The Journey”** to accompany the projection of slides in the collection of the University Museum Utrecht. The 8-minute long piece was performed live at the “Science in the City” festival. A video registration will soon

be available on the project website.



## Series: Favorite Slides

In every newsletter, members of the research team share their fascination with lantern slides by pointing to (one of) their favorite source. In this newsletter, the word is to Joe Kember.



This was one of the first slides I encountered many years ago, when I was undertaking my PhD research. I had travelled from Sheffield to see the collection at the [Bill Douglas Cinema Museum](#) at the University of Exeter for the first time. In and of itself, I guess that the slide is not exceptional. Far from it. It's part of an incomplete life model series still held at the Museum, whose labelling indicates the title *Sarah's Christmas Pudding*, and which is accompanied there by three other slides, also staged around the family dinner table. The notes appearing on the slide edges indicate that these images have been reordered several times, and I was immediately fascinated by the history of usage this suggested. What stories had been told about this family at different times, perhaps by different people, and for which purposes?

Perhaps because I have never found a reading to accompany this series, this has remained an open question for me, up to the present day. In the past, I

have used the image to explain what I mean by an ‘undemonstrative performance style’ in photographic media, and when I lecture to students about traditions of life model staging, I often use it to point to the use of (rather poor) flats, 2D props like the fire, and dress as a shorthand for class identification. I also ask them to consider the potential ways in which an image such as this might contribute to a greater narrative: a question sharpened, as I also tell them, because I still don’t know for sure what narrative it belongs to!

That question might be answered, I suspect, not least by several of the readers of this newsletter! (Richard Crangle has suggested to me a typical temperance theme, with a *Christmas Carol*-like redemptive theme, in which the father’s new-found abstinence allows the purchase of the titular pudding on behalf of his daughter). But what I still love about the slide and what keeps me returning to it years later, I think, is a far less tangible concern, which it is possible to set aside from the story and the chintzy dressing of the set. This resides in the moment of intimacy we seem to have interrupted between mother, father and daughter. The father is leaning in, offering the pudding to his smiling daughter. Actually, all three are smiling, and we are invited to witness a snapshot-like moment of mutual amusement between them. Presumably the moment is triggered by the tale of which it is a part, but I can’t help but think instead about the models performing this sequence, who seem to be having fun. I like to speculate that these models, most likely amateurs, perhaps even a real family, are enjoying their day at the studio together. Regardless of my idle speculations, though, what always pops out for me from the evidently artificial flats and rough colouring is a moment of gentle, genuine and reciprocal good humour, and for that reason I continue to find this slide both poignant and moving.

Let me add a footnote: I sent this to Richard, whose careful comparisons with other slide sets on Lucerna have led to a positive identification! The slide is by minor producer, T.T. Wing of Chatteris, Cambridgeshire, probably 1890s or early 1900s. As Richard puts it, “Once the record is added to Lucerna, the search for more information will go on...”

*Joe Kember is Associate Professor in Film Studies at Exeter University (UK).*

## News

From March 16-18, the **international seminar “Plaques photographiques, fabrication et diffusion du Savoir”** took place in Strasbourg, France. Many presentations also referred to slides for projection and photographic magic

lantern slides.

Among the participants were curators of museums and libraries, archivists and scholars – mostly with a background in art history or the history of photography. Various research designs were presented: descriptions of collections and the identification of the institutional history surrounding slides; the use of lantern slides with reproductions of art work to promote the objects to buyers of auctions; organisations and institutions that used lantern slides for their education; the study of magic lantern slides and written comments to reconstruct the word-



image relation and the various *dispositifs* that were used.

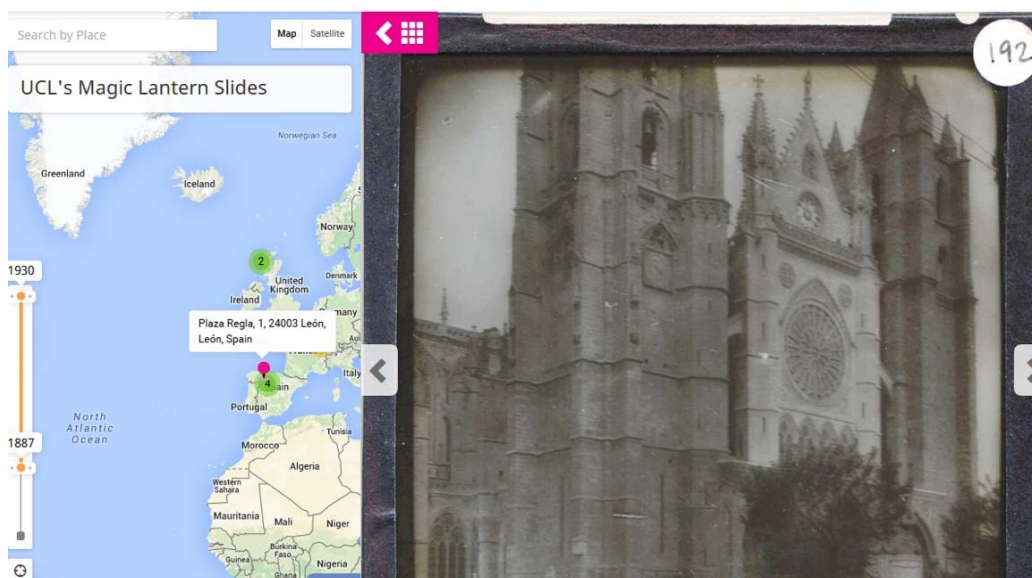
Among the discussed topics were the use of lantern slides in art history teaching and the impact of slides in comparative methods of that field; the place of projected slides in lantern presentations (during a scientific report or at the end) and the relation between photographs on paper and photographs on glass. *A Million Pictures* and the Lucerna database were met with great interest and there are promising new connections with researchers, curators, archivists and librarians in the French-speaking research community.

The organizers plan to publish the conference papers – contact Hervé Doucet [hdoucet@unistra.fr](mailto:hdoucet@unistra.fr) or Dénise Borlée [borlee@unistra.fr](mailto:borlee@unistra.fr) for news about the publication. À la bonne collaboration!



## News (continued)

Museum Studies MA Student Bethany Gugliemino wrote a **blog on her work cataloguing the magic lantern collection** of the university college London. - <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/museums/2016/03/14/some-favourite-magic-lantern-slides/>. She has also been adding some digitized slides to the website “History Pin”, that maps visual material in time and space. Search for UCL Museums and Collections and you will find them.

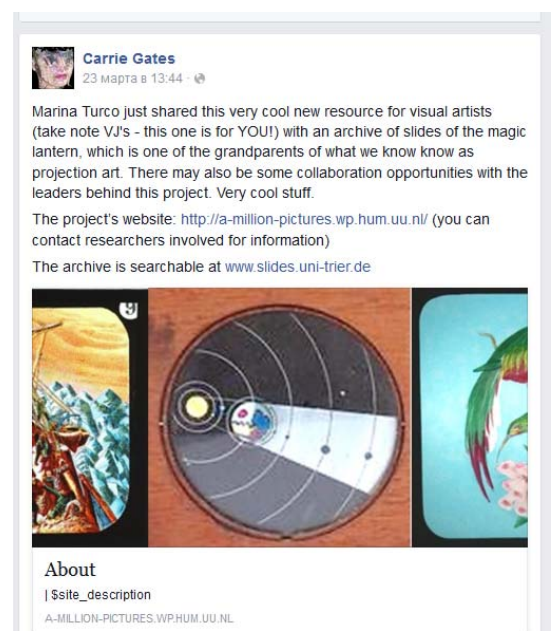


Screen shot (detail) of <http://www.historypin.org/en/>.

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Lantern slides prepare to go clubbing! The public Facebook websites of the **video artist networks** “VJ Women’s Union Global” and “The VJ Node” referred the newly available images of lantern slides as “very cool new resource” for their digital visual art work productions.

We will share any information about digitized lantern slide images being remixed and performed in clubs that reaches us. We are curious...



## News (continued)

The Honorary Secretary of the Magic Lantern Society, Mike Smith, is working on an illustrated book of **figurines that depict magic lantern and peepshow performers** and other optical amusements. These figurines could be made from brass, porcelain, ivory, wood etc. He is looking for people who have such figurines in their collection to make the publication as complete as possible. If you have something that could be of interest and you are happy to be involved please email Mike Smith at [lmh.smith@magiclanternsocy.demon.co.uk](mailto:lmh.smith@magiclanternsocy.demon.co.uk)



Figurine of a lantern performer. Image taken from <http://www.magiclantern.org.uk/westlicht.html>

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Het Limburgs Museum in Venlo (NL) will show the exhibition “Een eeuw thuisbioscoop – Van projector naar smartphone” (“A century of home cinema: from projector to smartphone”). The exhibition is dedicated to more self-documentation on family life in all kinds of visual and audiovisual media – including lantern slides. The exhibition will open on 27<sup>th</sup> of May and runs until October 2016. [See the museum’s website](#) for more information.



FROM 27 MAY 2016

### A century of home cinema

From projector to smartphone

## Upcoming Events

The **second workshop in our workshop series** will take place from 14-16 April in Girona (ES). The focus will lie on an exchange of experiences with digitization and cataloguing of lantern slides. Notes of the discussion will be made available via our website.



Next to the workshop program, a public activity will take place on Thursday 14 April at 19:30 at Caixaforum, Girona. Cello player Björt Rúnarsdóttir and visual artist Alba G. Corral will perform their show “A taste of Nature” in which live projected images and live

sound merge into an intense experience of video art. See also <http://a-million-pictures.wp.hum.uu.nl/taste-of-nature/>

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On 25 April, Sabine Lenk and Nele Wynants will give a joint **lecture at the Platform Digital Humanities Lecture at Antwerp (BE)**. First, Sabine Lenk discusses the challenging task to digitize a collection of magic lantern slides. The digitization and preservation of these slides poses some specific problems. Ensuing, Nele Wynants takes the digitization of magic lantern slides as a starting point for creative re-use of lantern slides for both artistic and educational purposes. See for more details.

<http://a-million-pictures.wp.hum.uu.nl/dh-antwerp/>

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## About & Editorial

This newsletter informs about the activities of the project A Million Pictures: Magic Lantern Slide Heritage as Artefact in the Common European History of Learning.

The magic lantern was the most important visual entertainment and means of instruction across nineteenth-century Europe. However, despite its pervasiveness across multiple scientific, educational and popular contexts, magic lantern slides remain under-researched. Although many libraries and museums across Europe hold tens of thousands of lantern slides in their collections, a lack of standards for documentation and preservation limits the impact of existing initiatives, hinders the recognition of the object's heritage value and potential exploitation. *A Million Pictures* addresses the sustainable preservation of this massive, untapped heritage resource.

*A Million Pictures* is a collaborative research project between researchers from Utrecht University (NL), University of Exeter (UK), University of Antwerp (BE), University of Girona (ES), University of Salamanca (ES) as well as twenty Associated Partners.

*A Million Pictures* runs from June 2015 until May 2018.

More information about past and present activities are available on our project website: [www.uu.nl/a-million-pictures](http://www.uu.nl/a-million-pictures)



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This newsletter is edited by Sarah Dellmann; additional contributions are written by Joe Kember and Sabine Lenk.