

doi: 10.1017/S006824622300034X

*Robert Turnbull Macpherson and his photographic vedute of Rome in comparison to works of other photographers in his time*

Robert Turnbull Macpherson (1814–72) was one of the early photographers of art and architecture in Rome and the first photographer who was allowed to take pictures in the Vatican Museums. He was very successful selling photographs of imperial Rome and *vedute* of Rome to Grand Tour travellers and others. Unlike his competitors, Macpherson did not hire other photographers to assist him because he considered photography both a personal art and a form of expression. This decision might account for his success.

The aim of my project was to discover why his *vedute* of Rome were so successful. It was not only a question of marketing and advertising. Originally a painter, Macpherson was influenced by paintings and prints of Rome which had an impact on his framing. His success was also based on his technical knowledge of photography and photographic printing. This combination of being an artist and possessing technical skills was decisive.

My stay at the BSR from April to June 2021, made possible by the Paul Mellon Centre / Yale University, had an enormous impact on my study of Robert Macpherson's photographic *vedute* of Rome. Because of the limited access to sites and archives due to the international pandemic, I concentrated on the Early Photographers Collection at the photographic archive at the BSR. In retrospect, this was an advantage, as it meant that I approached the collection differently from the start. After a second look at the prints of Macpherson's photographs, I realized that much more could be discovered from the details on them than is generally the case with photographic prints. For this purpose, I investigated the prints with a microscopic magnifier and I created my own special inventory sheets. I photographed the prints with colour charts and I made photographs of the important details. From some surface structures I took macro-photographs to be able to compare them later with surfaces of prints from other collections. First, I investigated the photographs certainly taken by Robert Macpherson and then those less certainly attributed to him. By working on the originals, I was able to attribute a larger number of photographs to Robert Macpherson than was previously thought to be the case. This was in some parts only possible by looking closely at specific details. Through microscopic analysis I was able to determine that Macpherson not only used the albumen printing technique, but also the silver salt printing process as well as a special modified albumen printing technique. I had not previously seen any instances of this latter technique and could find neither any comparable uses of it nor a description of it in any of the reference books about printing techniques. One unanticipated discovery that was uncovered over the course of my work was the presence of a thumbprint that was made by Macpherson not during the printing process but during the coating of the glass negative in the collodium wet plate process by himself on-site. No print showing Macpherson's thumbprint had previously been known.

Another aim of my research was to find the viewpoints used by Macpherson. I very quickly found out that Macpherson spared no effort to take an appropriate point of view. Some photographs I rephotographed using both digital and analogue cameras. Only by attempting to recreate the photographs myself did it become clear that he probably used the 'shift & tilt' technique in nearly every one of his photographs, although very subtly in some cases. Many of his competitors did not undertake this

work and effort. Using a large-format camera requires a different technique to that used with other cameras. For this reason, some of my reconstructions made use of a wooden camera made *c.* 1900 in order properly to understand Macpherson's way of working on-site. My own attempts made clear that he used a different working method to most other photographers of his time.

I am deeply grateful to the Paul Mellon Centre for the fellowship and to the BSR for its support, especially from the archivist Alessandra Giovenco. I would like to thank all the staff (academic, administrative, library & archive, residence & estate), the artists-in-residence and other resident scholars very much for making a wonderful time possible in an extraordinary situation.

WILFRIED E. KEIL

(*Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg*)  
[w.keil@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de](mailto:w.keil@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de)

MACQUARIE GALE ROME SCHOLARSHIP

doi: 10.1017/S0068246223000351

*Beyond the rock and the hard place: empire, landscape and connectivity in the Strait of Messina (300 BC–AD 300)*

The Strait of Messina separates Italy from Sicily by only a few kilometres of famously turbulent sea. During the Roman period, the Strait was at times described as a bridge and gateway to opportunity, a symbol of empire and little more than a river easily forded. At others, it was an insurmountable divide, the most dangerous of all passages, and a hard boundary between Romans and non-Romans. In both contexts, the Strait continued to operate as an agent of connectivity, the crossroads of varied cultural groups from across the ancient Mediterranean, situated as it was between the Tyrrhenian and Ionian seas. My research conducted at the BSR in 2020 and again in 2022 explored the tripartite nature of the Strait of Messina as bridge, division and crossroads in the Roman period, as part of my PhD project *The Strait of Messina in the Roman World: Connectivity, Space, and Identity between Italy and Sicily (300 BCE – 400 CE)*.

As the Macquarie Gale Award holder for 2020, my six-month residency began in January 2020, was interrupted at the end of February with the closure of the BSR due to the COVID-19 pandemic and recommenced in April–June 2022. As such, what was originally a single project was split into two phases.

In 2020, my research was defined by the resources of the BSR's library and the proximity to my research areas of Messina and Reggio Calabria that being in Italy afforded. As an Australian scholar, accessing key research materials such as archaeological reports and Italian-language publications can prove difficult, never mind the experience that comes with visiting a site yourself when undertaking a research project so concerned with space. Between the BSR's own library collection and those housed in nearby institutions, I was able to engage with all the materials I expected, and more. In February 2020 I spent a week in Messina and Reggio Calabria investigating sites, gathering evidence and research materials, and meeting peers I would not otherwise have had the opportunity to. This research greatly informed the