

The Musée Unterlinden's photographic collection

The Braun archive

The lion's share of the Musée Unterlinden's photographic collections derives from a portion of the Maison Braun archive, which has now been deposited with the Departmental Archives of the Haut-Rhin. This collection made up of nearly 35,000 glass plates, albums and prints represents a crucial artistic and documentary source for photography in the second half of the nineteenth century.



Adolphe Braun, *Rome, the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine*, c. 1869, positive print on albumen paper

The collection is linked to the figure of Adolphe Braun (Besançon, 1812 – Dornach, 1877), who came from a family involved in industry in Mulhouse. He worked as a draughtsman, running a studio producing designs for textile printing factories that enjoyed rapid success. As early as 1839, he realised how important the new medium of photography could be for industry. As a natural progression, he transposed his floral designs into photography, creating three hundred photographic studies of flowers in 1854 – 1855. They were published under the title of *Fleurs photographiées* and enjoyed immediate popularity in France and across Europe, due to their technical qualities as well as their aesthetic appeal.

Paradoxically, his second photographic series took him away from designs for industry: probably influenced by the *Mission Héliographique* architectural survey of 1851, he produced a collection of 120 large-format photographs entitled

L'Alsace photographiée in 1858 – 1859.

The work brought his company a certain level of recognition and earned Adolphe Braun the Légion d'Honneur as well as the title of «Photographer to His Majesty the Emperor».

He proved to be an extremely dynamic figure and amassed a substantial body of photographic documentation: by 1862, the Maison Braun possessed 15,000 views of France, Germany, Belgium and the Tyrol

From 1866, the Ateliers Braun, which were based in Dornach, near Mulhouse, began to focus on the reproduction of artworks in European museums, a new departure that brought them great success.

In 1873, Adolphe's son Gaston married Elise Pierson, the daughter of Pierre-Louis Pierson (1822 – 1913), who joined forces with his son-in-law the following year to found the Pierson & Braun studio, which in 1876 became the Maison Adolphe Braun & Cie. As a result of this association, the Braun archive was supplemented by the Mayer and Pierson collection, which was the product of Pierson's association with two Parisian photographers, Léopold-Ernest (1817 – c. 1865) and Louis-Frédéric Mayer (1822 – c. 1874), from 1855.



Maison Mayer Frères & Pierson, *Portrait of the Imperial Prince on His Pony with Napoleon III*, c. 1859, collodion glass negative

The three men, who specialised in photographic portraits, found favour with the court of Napoleon III between 1855 and 1862 before focusing on a more bourgeois clientele from the mid – 1860s.



Maison Mayer Frères & Pierson,
Portrait of Mr and Mrs Gordon,
September 1868, Collodion
glass negative

They became the favourite photographers of the Comtesse de Castiglione, who was Pierson's neighbour in Passy (the Musée Unterlinden has some negatives images of her on glass as well as modern positive prints).



Entreprise Braun & Cie, *View of the International Colonial Exhibition in Paris. The Cambodian Pavilion*, 1931, autochrome glass plate

In 1968, the Maison Braun & Cie ceased trading and the photographic archive was split in two : the images of flowers and artworks went to the Museum of Printed Textiles in Mulhouse, whereas Pierre Braun presented the photographs of famous people and landscapes to the Société Schongauer.



Gaston Braun, *General View of the Mosque and Mausoleum of Sultan Qaytbay*, 1869, print on albumen paper from a collodion glass negative

Since 1977, the Musée Unterlinden's photographic archive has been expanded considerably thanks to the Société Schongauer's recovery of glass plates, albums and prints from the former Maison Braun.