Restaging Art History - Intervisuality in Social Media Photography

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With this presentation, I aim to introduce a popular creative practice in social media: the photographic restaging of historical artworks. My aim is to analyse the intervisual relations that these photographs establish between historical art and contemporary online photography.

Social media have become places of image exchange that also promote more active practices of art reception. Since the early 2000s, we have been able to observe appropriation strategies, especially in the context of mobile phone and self-photography, which imitate and vary art historical works and transport them into new contexts. Among these are numerous photographs that have been created using re-staging techniques, works that are commonly referred to in art history as "tableaux vivants." In these pieces, the photographer recreates an art historical work and then uploads the photograph onto social networks. This practice not only promotes the distribution of works of art on the Internet, but also their mobilization, i.e. the works are updated, activated, and made productive for a new form of creative exchange about and with art. This removes the artwork from singularity and exposure in the museum's white cube and integrates it instead into collective processes that are user-driven, usually independent of established institutions, and establish complex intervisual relations.

This form of photography has gained popularity among social media users, in particular thanks to the online contest Remake, organized by the Canadian art blog Booooooom in 2011. The submitted photographs will serve as the sample group for my analysis. These photographs seem to aim less at an independent photographic result than at an intermedial interplay that opens up a comparative space in the encounter of painting and photography as well as art history and contemporary representation. In order to substantiate this observation theoretically, I will be reviewing the state of research on intervisuality and will be examining the descriptive categories for such interspaces.

This presentation could fit in well with the Workshop on Visual Research, as it challenges my discipline in many ways. The photographs present a still under-researched area in art history and also bring with them some methodological challenges. Art historians usually focus on singular works of art, which has led to methods that are not designed for large image corpora. With my research, I try to embrace this problem and explore new approaches that have

emerged at the boundaries of the discipline,
such as theories of intervisuality.