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that it is within the active networks and relationships between people, their skills and materials that artworks are being shaped - and reshaped over time.

The special exhibition [Forever Young? Impermanence in photography](#) illustrated the consequences of such processes. One example included the material history of Ger van Elk's [C'est moi qui fait la musique \(1971\)](#) where the original but severely discolored airbrushed photo-collage lay in a vitrine as circumstantial evidence for the artist's desire to have it remade, and the result hanging on the wall for comparison.



Symposium participants, including speakers Liz Wells and Pip Laurenson in the front, visiting the gallery with Ger van Elk's [C'est moi qui fait la musique \(1973\)](#). Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2018. Photo: Maarten Nauw.

Caroline von Courten underlined the value of materiality of photographic artwork though her analysis of one of Van Elk's painted photoworks, [Dutch Grey \(1984\)](#). Consisting of four photographs on foamboard partially painted and lacquered in its entirety, she linked the work's formal features to the important concept of horizon in the work of the artist.

If photographic artworks are remade, it is because people decided to do so. These processes are rarely made transparent, but this symposium helped take a closer look at the consequences of such practices for photographic artworks. The significance of their material form was convincingly highlighted by all speakers, linking their physical features to historic-cultural values, artistic-aesthetic values and even conceptual values.

Sanneke Stigter

The Materiality of Photographs

April 5-6, 2018

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, The Netherlands

The symposium [The Materiality of Photographs](#), organized by the Stedelijk Museum and Leiden University, marked the conclusion of the four-year research project [Photographs & Preservation: How to save photographic works of art for the future?](#)

The project was funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), and led by Kitty Zijlmans of Leiden University and Sandra Weerdenburg of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. The two-day symposium aimed to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue about the significance of the materiality of photographic artworks and the impact of change on the interpretation of these works. The program offered inspiring presentations, an artist panel discussion and a visit to a special exhibition devoted to the theme.

Photographic prints are complex. Technically they are images captured through optical devices transferred onto light sensitive supports and fixed by chemical processes. Materially, photographs are fragile and often chemically unstable. Conceptually, photography is both a medium to record and to communicate ideas. Taking these perspectives into account conservators can face serious dilemmas, as giving priority to one of them could compromise the other.

Clara von Waldthausen (University of Amsterdam) discussed how mechanical reproduction may not necessarily be transferrable to a print by illustrating that the printing process in fine arts is in fact handwork. She suggested the retention of vintage prints for color photography to raise awareness of their specific features and a modern interpretation of the negative existing in unison.

Monica Marchesi (Stedelijk Museum) described the complexities of reprinting when photos are part of a mixed-media work. Using Jan Dibbets' [Comet Sea 3° - 60° \(1973\)](#) as a case study she illustrated that digitization brings along opportunities for the artist to revisit the work, often multiple times. Marchesi thus concludes that photographic artworks are not reproducible, but multipliable.

In a similar vein, Liz Wells (Plymouth University) spoke about the inherent mutability of photography, suggesting that change is not only part of photography because of both instability and potential reproducibility, but also because this includes a possibility for variation.

Pip Laurenson (Tate) encouraged a better understanding of the practices around photographic printing, emphasizing