


A Pastime for the Emotions. Different Approaches to Interpreting Private Photo Albums

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Abstract: From the 1980s onward, with the rise of feminist art history, a new type of discourse emerged in art history that enabled the exploration of family and private imagery while legitimizing research on topics within a broader socio-historical context. Although these concepts had surfaced earlier, feminist art historians were pivotal in highlighting the links between gender constructs and artistic works, including their interpretation and legacy. Consequently, research into the social aspects of art and creation began to gain momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, and the practical application of these findings expanded in the twenty-first century. By the 2000s, museum, archiving, and collecting practices increasingly began to focus on female artists and art related to women. My interest in feminist art history research led me to engage with its concepts and perspectives, making their use essential for me.

Keywords: album research; feminist art; photography; Transylvania.

Rezumat: Începând cu anii 1980, odată cu apariția istoriei artei feministe, a apărut un nou tip de discurs în istoria artei, care a permis explorarea imaginii familiei și a vieții private, legitimând în același timp cercetarea unor teme într-un context socio-istoric mai larg. Deși aceste concepte apăruseră mai devreme, istoricii feministi de artă au jucat un rol esențial în evidențierea legăturilor dintre construcțiile de gen și operele artistice, inclusiv interpretarea și moștenirea acestora. În consecință, cercetarea aspectelor sociale ale artei și creației a început să câștige avânt în anii 1980 și 1990, iar aplicarea practică a acestor descoperiri s-a extins în secolul XXI. Până în anii 2000, practicile muzeale, de arhivare și colecționare au început să se concentreze din ce în ce mai mult pe artiste și pe arta legată de femei. Interesul meu pentru cercetarea istoriei artei feministe m-a determinat să mă implic în conceptele și perspectivele sale, făcând utilizarea lor esențială pentru mine.

Cuvinte cheie: analiză de album; artă feminisă; fotografie; Transilvania.

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Introduction

My interest in photography dates back to my childhood, and it was also during this time that my love for handicrafts grew stronger. Although it wasn't a conscious decision, these early influences have certainly shaped my professional interests as well. As an art historian, I specialised in the history of photography, and in my PhD thesis,¹ I explored the history and use of private photo albums from Transylvania. Assembling the source material was not easy, as institutions do not have large collections of photo albums, and it is also challenging to locate these albums in private collections. Still, I aimed to create a representative selection that included a wide social range. I sought out and analysed albums created from their first occurrence, the second half of the nineteenth century till the 1950s by individuals not only from the nobility and bourgeoisie, but also from the working class and the peasantry. Although I couldn't find an example for the last social class, the collection includes an album from a young girl living in a village, which adds diversity to the material studied. While the selection may not be representative in a sociological sense, I believe it successfully reflects how photography as a technology was used in general. This study contains a summary of the theoretical section of my doctoral thesis—which focuses on the intersection of photographic album research and feminist art history—as well as a case study. I believe that illustrating the theoretical argument is essential; therefore, the second part of my study introduces and analyses a two-volume scrapbook album created by baroness Vilma Kemény, the widow of the Transylvanian Hungarian aristocrat Géza Kuun, during her widowhood.

Feminist art history: establishing the theoretical foundation and research subject

Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*² is one of the key guiding texts in feminist art historical research. In

¹ Dorottya Újvári, *Privát fényképalbumok erdélyi hagyatékokban: történet, gyakorlat, használat az 1950-es évekig* [Private photo albums in Transylvanian collections: history, practice, use until the 1950s], PhD dissertation, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, 2024.

² Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,' in *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays*, 1st ed, Icon editions, 145–178 (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

this work, she pointed out that dominant male-centric institutions, rooted in societal structures, hindered women's ability to succeed. Since the oppression of women is systemic, she argued that it is pointless to analyse women's artistic activities within the same dominant, elitist and male-oriented framework. Therefore, Nochlin asserted that it is far more important to uncover the workings of social systems and create new theoretical frameworks that are inclusive and do not consider the duality of high art or the creative genius as the primary standard in the field of art.³

From the perspective of traditional art history writing, art is hierarchical, with painting and sculpture (preferably in the form of works with monumental internal and/or external characteristics) occupying the top of this hierarchy. Works related to everyday life, which may even consider usability as a criterion, are placed on a lower level in this framework. This is reinforced by terms such as applied arts, decorative arts, and industrial arts, which also serve to separate them from fine arts or visual arts. This perspective, developed during the Renaissance, is connected to the establishment of art academies, which elevated certain art forms into the realm of intellectual professions. The division between fine arts and applied arts deepened in subsequent centuries and even acquired social implications—craftsmen and artists belonged to different social classes. Gender-based categorization soon followed, leading to the emergence of specifically female subjects and techniques. By the late eighteenth century, for example, embroidery and sewing had become distinctly female crafts, and flower painting had become a specifically female subject. This separation also allowed for the exclusion of women and their works from the field of fine arts: women and the flowers they painted became “reflections of each other.” The activity of painting flowers was often seen as stemming from the nature of women, rather than from any cultural or intellectual pursuit.⁴

When distinguishing between branches of arts and establishing a hierarchical system, the space of creation and the target audience also played a role. It is self-evident that works created within the space of the home and for one's own family could not be included in the world of fine arts. Family

³ Nochlin, 152.

⁴ Rozsika Parker, Griselda Pollock, *Old mistresses: women, art and ideology*, New edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 58.

photographs and albums, on the other hand, are precisely products of this environment. Classical art history and the traditional concept of art, which is based on aesthetic criteria and strives for the exclusion or at least the marginalization of alternatives with its hierarchical system, do not offer opportunities for the research and interpretation of such artefacts.

As a result of the Marxist perspective, some representatives of feminist art history incorporated theories of consumption and production into their artistic investigations. According to Griselda Pollock's observations, this approach eliminates the narrative that the genius artist creates while driven by personal needs. Artworks are also products, and a characteristic of such products is that they generate an audience, in this case, one that appreciates art. Following this line of thought, art-related production is dual in nature: it consists of the creation of objects and the creation of an audience.

One of the fundamental principles of art interpretation, which states that the interpretation of a work can only be realised by considering its social environment and the context of its creation, also contradicts the myth of the genius. In an effort to obviate the extremities, we cannot but point to one of Pollock's other remarks, namely that interpreting art solely through the logic of consumption and production is also incomplete: it is more effective to approach artistic works as practices rather than as objects.⁵ Despite the diversification of the topics of art history and research itself since the publication of her essay in 1988, her findings remain relevant to this day. Caution is still characteristic of Eastern European and especially Hungarian art history: feminist analyses of visual arts are rare, and when such approaches appear, they are often categorised as social-historical investigations.⁶

⁵ Griselda Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories,' *Kritische Berichte-Zeitschrift Für Kunst- Und Kulturwissenschaften*, nr. 1. (1988): 5–14, 6–7.

⁶ In the last years different publicans appeared about women in the art field and women's art in Hungarian, for example: Bordács Andrea, *Múzsák lázadása. Válogatott írások nőművészekről és női művészekről* [Muses in revolt. Selected writings on women artists] (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2021), Martos Gábor, *Önarckép nyakláncal. Női alkotók a műkereskedelemben* [Self-portrait with necklace. Women artists in the art market] (Budapest: Typotex, 2021.). Griselda Pollock's important essays were translated to Romanian and published in 2024: Griselda Pollock, *Modernitatea și spațiile feminității* [Modernity and the spaces of femininity]. (Cluj-Napoca: IDEA, 2024.)

Feminist art history (or, as Pollock calls it, feminist intervention within art history)⁷ not only provides theoretical frameworks but also offers guidelines for the study of private albums and photographs, among which the understanding of creation as a practice is one of the most essential. Pollock suggests two analytical perspectives: firstly, it must be recognized that artistic practice, like other areas of representation, is part of social struggle (between races, classes, and genders); secondly, discussing an artistic practice, one must take into account the meaning this has produced together with the target audience and the means of creation.⁸

Researching private photo albums – short conclusions instead of a short introduction

The first significant art historical study on women's albums was published in 1987 by American art historian Anne Higonnet.⁹ Higonnet found that creating albums containing watercolours, drawings, and photographs was common among middle- and upper-class women in Western Europe. However, these works are among the least recognized forms of female self-expression. This is partly because such creations do not fit into the mainstream concept of high art. The albums serve as tools for women's self-representation shaped by gender conventions, meeting what could be called other or alternative criteria: elements of amateur painting or album-making stem from femininity and the female experience.¹⁰ Everything has its own unique set of relationships and rules that create a women's visual culture. The study presents the nineteenth-century forms and transformations of this female visual culture, emphasising that the women creating these albums considered

⁷ Pollock, 'Feminist Interventions in Art's Histories', 14.

⁸ Pollock, 9.

⁹ Anne Higonnet, 'Secluded Vision: Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe,' *Radical History Review*, nr. 38. (1 May 1987): 17–36, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1987-38-16>. Her research later appeared in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, a collection of essays published in 1992, highlighting that this topic is part of the expanding discourse in art history.

¹⁰ Anne Higonnet, 'Secluded Vision. Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe,' in *The Expanding Discourse. Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, 171–185 (New York: IconEditions, 1992), 171.

their works to be secondary compared to those displayed in galleries and museums. Nonetheless, they deemed it important to express their experiences in visual form, even though this marginality influenced both their work and its reception. There are also differences in the materials used in objects created by women: these are generally less durable, typically made with watercolour on paper, and much smaller in scale than the high art intended for museums and exhibitions. High art, in contrast, tends to use more enduring materials, such as oil on canvas. “High art is ‘high’—that is, dominant—precisely because it so completely denies alternatives that it becomes normative even for those it excludes,” observes Higonnet.¹¹

Since Anne Higonnet’s 1987 publication, research has expanded beyond a purely gender-based focus, aiming to uncover objects and practices that, within the framework of classical art, have traditionally been defined in opposition to high art. Since the format of this study does not allow me to present and analyse all the studies on private albums included in my PhD thesis, I will only summarise my conclusions and I’ll focus solely on the results connected to the research dedicated to scrapbook albums and handicraft.¹² It can be stated that primarily British, American, and Canadian researchers have focused on photo albums over the past three decades, and almost without exception, these studies have been authored by women. Jennifer M. Black also noted this phenomenon, and in her 2018 study, she attempted to analyse the underlying reasons, exploring how the fact that the authors are women may have influenced the research. Her observation is, that despite the diverse and rich body of literature, research on albums has

¹¹ Higonnet, 183.

¹² The methodology for my PhD research was primarily based on and inspired by the studies of Anne Higonnet, Martha Langford, and Patrizia Di Bello. The two most comprehensive monographs to date were authored by Martha Langford and Patrizia Di Bello. Both Langford and Di Bello focus their research on albums made in the 19th and the first half of the 20th Century, now being in the collection of museums or other public institutions. When categorizing albums, Langford emphasizes that the creator’s intent is as important to consider as the technical execution, and she focuses on unraveling and understanding how albums narrate and convey the memories of their creators. Patrizia Di Bello exclusively presents and analyzes Victorian-era collage albums created by women. Her central thesis is that albums are both tactile and visual objects, and understanding them requires insight into the period’s culture of touch and physical interaction. See: Patrizia Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England: “Ladies, Mothers and Flirts”* (Ashgate, 2007), Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums*. (McGill-Queen’s Press – MQUP, 2001).

been pushed to the margins of historical studies due to gender-based hierarchies within academia and the sidelining of activities associated with amateurs.¹³ In the 1980s and 1990s, research on albums focused on photographs and their connection to autobiography, on telling one's life story through images. Thus, the parallel between albums and diaries, or the idea that albums serve as visual representations of life stories, is a recurring theme in these articles.

For example, Marilyn F. Motz, who's article appeared in the late 1980s, treated albums created by women as a form of visual autobiography through which women could express and articulate their views on their environment, past, and personal choices. Motz regarded these qualities as distinguishing women's albums from family photo albums, which aimed to portray family cohesion.¹⁴ But there is another important aspect in her study: she established a connection between album-making and quilting—the creation of patchwork quilts. Irregular-pattern quilts became fashionable in the late nineteenth century, using fabric pieces from familiar or no-longer-worn garments from friends and family. This design was similar to collage-like albums filled with photographs. Beyond the external similarity, there was also a thematic connection: albums often contained images referencing people close to the creator, evoking emotions and memories, just as fabric pieces from a favourite skirt on a quilt could do.¹⁵

A shift in the album-research came in the 2000s: albums began to be seen as complex objects—mediums—whose study requires considering historical, social, and technical contexts. Thus, the new research also began to examine the role these albums play in memory, what narrative tools they use, how they become identity-forming in the lives of their creators, and so on. For example, the history and various forms of the scrapbook (the arrangement of various paper-based ephemera into albums) is discussed in the book *The Scrapbook in American Life*, which was created through the collaborative work of three editors—Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia B. Buckler. The book, which includes numerous essays, also covers the history and use of nineteenth-century photo albums. Case study-like writings in the volume illustrate the diverse American album-making practices, touching upon their

¹³ Jennifer M. Black, 'Gender in the Academy,' *Material Culture*, vol. 50., nr. 2.(2018): 38–52, 47.

¹⁴ Marilyn F Motz, 'Visual Autobiography: Photograph Albums of Turn-of-the-Century Midwestern Women,' *American Quarterly*, vol. 41, nr. 1. (1989): 63–92, 63.

¹⁵ Motz, 75.

early modern predecessors and discussing scrapbooks made by both well-known and everyday individuals. Additionally, the book explores the albums of various social and ethnic groups, as well as personal collecting activities.

Kuun Gézáné Kemény Vilma's commemorative scrapbook albums

The phenomenon and history of scrapbooking has a rich body of English-language scholarship, yet a more extensive exploration of collections containing illustrations, clippings, and other paper-based materials, ephemera has yet to be conducted in a Hungarian or Romanian context. Although studies on collections of clippings have been published, they primarily focus on those associated with famous individuals, especially writers. Vilma Kemény (1837–1917), created two large albums in which she collected photographs, illustrations, letters, clippings, and various typed and handwritten notes. Although it is not a photo album in the strict sense—since it contains more written documents than photographs—it serves as an excellent source that I consider essential to address. This example highlights an alternative form of album-making and photography use, which was also present in the practices of the 1800s and the turn of the century. Scrapbooks can also be considered a transitional form between the early photo albums, which contained mainly studio photographs (usually the *carte de visite* type) and those that became widespread after photography became more accessible—namely, those with plain pages and pasted-in images. Here, in addition to portraits, photographs on other themes begin to appear. Alongside lineage-based organisation, a personal life story emerges, shifting the focus away from a narrative of “these are the ancestors, and this is me/us” and instead foregrounding the self and its personal experiences as the central message of the albums.

Both scrapbooks and *carte de visite* albums are fundamentally based on collecting, and in both cases, the contents are most often composed of images or materials not created by the compiler. The collector simply arranges these into a personal collage—making it interpretable as a “paper museum.”¹⁶ The selection and arrangement of these ephemera provide a space for self-

¹⁶ Martha Langford uses this expression in her monograph, Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP, 2001).

expression in a far more visually striking form than traditional *carte de visite* albums. Scrapbooking, a practice also typically associated with women, became fashionable in the mid-nineteenth century, around the same time as the creation of photo albums.

Kemény Vilma set a well-defined theme for her scrapbooks and paid great attention to arranging the clippings on each page, also incorporating photographs. This careful composition aligns with Vilma Kemény's broader artistic interests, as her name appeared several times in connection with various arts and crafts exhibitions. There has not yet been a contemporary analysis or evaluation of her activities. She is generally mentioned alongside her husband, the linguist and scholar Géza Kuun (1838–1905),¹⁷ and is also discussed in two ego-documents—János Kemény writes about her at length in his memoir *Kakukkfőókák*, and Lajos Kelemen mentions her in his diary. Géza Kuun and Vilma Kemény had known each other since their youth, but both were nearly 50 years old when they married in 1885.¹⁸ By this time, her husband was already well-known in both academic and public circles, but Vilma also had a sort of career behind her. From the late 1870s, she appeared as a participant in various industrial exhibitions in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár) and Budapest. In 1877, she displayed her woodcarvings at the applied arts exhibition organized by the Kolozsvári Nőegylet (Cluj Women's Association)—specifically, a decorated cabinet and two chairs.¹⁹ A few years later, at a Budapest exhibition, her "flower-wreathed plates" were displayed alongside her carvings.²⁰ Her interest in porcelain painting may have been sparked by Vilmos Farkasházi Fischer, who had a porcelain manufactory in Cluj at the time. Sándor Teleki notes that Fischer "practically founded a school" in the city, as several people—such as Aubin Róza, Vilma Bethlen, Ádám Bánffy, and Béláné Wesselényi, in addition to Vilma—learned from him.²¹

¹⁷ Géza Kuun was a Hungarian aristocrat, a linguist and orientalist, he travelled intensively in Europe, wrote several articles and books mainly about linguistics and history.

¹⁸ 'Hymen' [Weddings], *Pesti hírlap*, 7, nr. 4 (29 December 1885): 357.

¹⁹ H. L., 'A kolozsvári iparművészeti tárlaton' [The arts and crafts exhibition in Kolozsvár], *Fővárosi Lapok*, 14, nr. 287 (16 December 1877): 1373.

²⁰ 'A nőipari kiállításnak...' [The women's arts and crafts exhibition...], *Fővárosi Lapok*, 18, nr. 193. (26 August 1881): 1139.

²¹ Sándor Teleki, *Egyről-másról. Újabb emlékeim* [About this and that. My latest memories] (Budapest: Révai Testvérek Kiadása, 1882) 199.

Lajos Kelemen also recounts an anecdote about her porcelain-painting activities, as told by Polixénia Bethlen, the wife of János Nemes. It reveals that she and Karolina Bethlen used a room in her home kept empty for her brother as a makeshift studio, so that only one space would be filled with the smell of turpentine.²² Some of the artefacts created by Vilma have survived; they were transferred from the Gyulay Castle in Mintia (Marosnémeti) to the collection of the Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület (Transylvanian Museum Society), and eventually to the Transylvanian National History Museum. The museum currently preserves a carved chair and a hand painted drinking glass attributed to her.²³

János Kemény provides a longer account of the relationship between Géza Kuun and Vilma Kemény in his memoirs, describing their marriage as characterized by “perfect harmony and undisturbed happiness.”²⁴ After Kuun’s death, his wife dedicated her remaining years to rituals of remembrance: every Saturday, dressed in “full widow’s attire,”²⁵ she would visit his grave for a few hours, arrange his papers and estate, publish parts of his manuscripts,²⁶ and even assembled two scrapbooks. “I want to remember every object, picture, and piece of furniture in our beautiful home...”²⁷ Vilma Kemény expresses in her subjective inventory of the Mintia (Marosnémeti) castle. This sentiment equally applies to her motivation for creating the scrapbooks, which served as the most personal expressions of her grief alongside her hours at the cemetery, giving tangible form to her emotions.

²² Lajos Kelemen, *Napló. 1: (1890-1920)* [Diary I. 1890–1920] ed. Péter Sas (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2017) 648.

²³ Some artefacts attributed to Kemény Vilma are available in the Culturalia database: <https://culturalia.ro/search;q=%22kem%C3%A9ny%20vilma%22;mode=FUZZY> (2024. 01. 30.)

²⁴ János Kemény, *Kakukkfőőkák* [Cuckoo chicks] (Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1972), 172.

²⁵ Kemény, 174–176.

²⁶ Kuun Gézáné Kemény Vilma, *Marosnémetiben. Emlékezés Gróf Kuun Géza otthonára* [In Mintia. Remembering the home of Count Géza Kuun] (Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. A., 1909); ed. Kuun Gézáné Kemény Vilma, *Gróf Kuun Géza görögországi jegyzetei 1881* [The letters from Greece of count Géza Kuun] (Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. A., 1911); ed. Kuun Gézáné Kemény Vilma, *Gróf Kuun Géza és neje marosnémeti vendégeinek emlékkölteményei 1870–1905* [Commemorative poems by the guests of Count Géza Kuun and his wife in Mintia] (Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. A., 1907).

²⁷ Vilma Kemény published a book about their home, the Mintia (Marosnémeti) Castle, located today in Hunedoara county, Romania. This contains her description of the ensemble and also some texts written by their friends and visitors. Kuun Gézáné Kemény Vilma, *Marosnémetiben. Emlékezés Gróf Kuun Géza otthonára* [In Mintia. Remembering the home of Count Géza Kuun] (Kolozsvár: Ajtai K. A., 1909).

The two identical albums are bound in fabric (46×31 cm), contain blank pages, and were originally designed for collecting calling cards. On one cover, the title “Visiting Cards” is visible, though it was covered over, but the accompanying illustration has since fallen off. This volume became a collection of various texts related to Kuun’s death and his remembrance. The other album still has its cover illustration intact, a printed graphic that hints at the collection’s theme: it depicts a romanticized, ancient-inspired sacrificial altar on a tripod adorned with a ram’s skull, with flames and swirling smoke. In this scrapbook, the widow pasted clippings that commemorate Kuun Géza’s professional achievements. In the more detailed analysis and presentation of the albums, I will focus on their design and the use of photographs and other illustrations, omitting an in-depth content analysis of the clippings.

The scrapbook adorned with the altar graphic begins with three pages featuring only photographs, printed graphics, and a poem in German. The first page originally held three illustrations, of which one has been removed, leaving a printed graphic and a photograph depicting the Mintia (Marosnémeti) Castle. Between the photos, there is a poem by a friend and visitor, Mrs. Amelie Flotow, which is a clipping from the Mintia (Marosnémeti) Castle’s commemorative book.²⁸ Vilma added individual frames for each pasted element and decorated the page with flower illustrations, shading some with graphite pencil. These embellishments likely come from a publication dedicated to decorative elements, as similar frames and floral ornaments appear frequently on the following pages.

On the second page, there are fourteen photographs of Géza Kuun and Vilma Kemény, including studio portraits, with Géza’s cabinet card size photograph positioned in the center, below which is her bridal portrait. A few candid shots of the couple and their friends taken around Marosnémeti Castle are also included, along with three photos clipped from a publication, presumably a magazine—two depicting Géza and the third his bust sculpture. Since the photographs cover the entire page, only a few decorative elements were added.

The third photo page combines elements of the previous two, featuring a frontal image of Mintia (Marosnémeti) Castle and an interior scene, alongside three group photos, likely of guests at the castle. Here, frames and illustrations reappear, filling the available space with intricate details.

²⁸ Kemény, 48.

Following the introductory pages with images, the scrapbook continues with pages filled with newspaper clippings. These are from a wide range of sources, including articles from daily and weekly papers as well as German and French academic publications. This collection of clippings can be viewed as an archive, containing all writings that report on Kuun's activities. There are no added comments on the articles, only occasional notations of the year or the title if it wasn't included in the clipping. However, Vilma took care to underline her husband's name in longer articles that did not exclusively discuss Géza Kuun.

Here and there, a few pencil notes appear, interspersed among the pasted articles. These notes indicate where she planned to place certain photographs or illustrations. Some clippings are more broadly connected to her husband's work, such as several articles about the Hunyad County Historical and Archaeological Society (Hunyad Megyei Történeti és Régészeti Társulat), next to which she placed photographs and postcards of Deva (Déva). There are also clippings about their relatives and friends; for instance, the album includes the obituary of Géza Jósika, written by Kuun, along with a studio photograph of him. This arrangement remains unfinished, as she penciled in "Géza Jósika's picture and his residence in Brănișca (Branyicska)," but nothing beyond the portrait appears.

It is notable that the clippings are not arranged in chronological order but grouped thematically. On the initial pages, Vilma highlighted the key individuals and locations relevant to the album's theme through photographs. These are followed by Kuun Géza's publications and reviews of his articles by others, and then reports on his activities within various societies. Lastly, she included articles concerning family members and relatives, among which are contemporary news items about Gyulay Lajos's diaries.²⁹

In the middle third of the album, there is a page dedicated to the personal relationship between Géza Kuun and Vilma Kemény. Here, she included four letters sent to her by Géza during his travels abroad in the early 1880s. Instead of pasting the originals, she used the printed versions published by the *Erdélyi Múzeum* journal.³⁰ Additionally, she attached two

²⁹ Géza Kuun published some parts of Gyulay Lajos's (1800–1869) diaries, who was his relative, a writer, collector and a politically active aristocrat from the 19th century Transylvania.

³⁰ It's likely that she also handed over the original letters to the Transylvanian Museum Association (EME) along with other documents, which is why the published versions were

portraits to the page—a photo of herself that also appears at the beginning of the album, and a printed photo of Géza. She framed both with ornate floral decorations and painted the background in gold. This page can be seen as a kind of marriage commemoration.

The following clippings document her husband's travels: she pasted an article by Gábor Téglás about his scientific expedition to Romania, along with two photos of the Romanian royal couple. On the next page, there are two additional portraits, labeled as Prince Nikita of Montenegro and his wife, along with an account of their joint trip through the Balkans. It's likely that the portraits of King Nicholas I of Montenegro and his wife were given to them during their personal meeting with the monarch. In her descriptions of the rooms in the Mintia (Marosnémeti) castle, Vilma frequently mentions that various tables displayed albums—although she doesn't specify their contents,³¹ it's likely that these included *carte de visite* albums, which often held portraits of notable figures of the time. Since they visited Montenegro in 1888, the photographs received then would have needed a place to be kept until they were eventually used in the scrapbook.

The structure of the second volume of Vilma Kemény's scrapbook is quite similar to the first, though it features even more decorative elements and contains many handwritten notes alongside the usual newspaper clippings. This collection is also entirely about Géza Kuun, but here, the focus shifts more toward posthumous tributes to the scholar, rather than solely on his lifetime achievements. Like the first volume, the opening pages showcase numerous photos and illustrations. Vilma compiled a catalog of portraits of Kuun Géza, spanning from his earliest known likeness through to his later years. Alongside the portraits, she included various clippings that commented on these images. Among these is an article by Lajos Szádeczky,³² offering a detailed account of the count's life, as well as excerpts from an unidentified publication. This is likely from a volume edited or written by Vilma herself, where she had already published some of the portraits, as the opening text in the album reads: "There are no portraits of Count Kuun Géza

included here. 'Gróf Kuun Géza levelei br. Kemény Vilmához' [Count Géza Kuun's letters to baroness Vilma Kemény], *Erdélyi Múzeum*, volt. 22, nr. 8 (1905): 445–448.

³¹ Kuun, Marosnémetiben. Emlékezés Gróf Kuun Géza otthonára, 41.

³² Lajos Szádeczky, 'Dr. gróf Kuun Géza emlékezete' [In the memory of Dr. count Géza Kuun], *Erdélyi Múzeum*, 22., nr. 8 (1905): 401–431.

from his earliest childhood, but I have two letters in my possession in which the ‘little Géza’ is warmly mentioned. Let these relevant sections of the letters serve as an ‘introduction’ to the following series of portraits...”³³

In the first six pages of the album, there are sixteen portraits in total, among these are original photographs and printed images cut from publications, many of which were based on photographs—just like in the previous volume. Since no visual representations of Géza Kuun from his childhood have survived, his wife replaced this absence with an illustration depicting a group of playing children. According to the clippings in the album, the earliest known image of the scholar is a wax portrait from 1846, which was kept in the Mintia (Marosnémeti) Castle — a photograph of this wax portrait has been pasted into the album. The slightly damaged photograph still clearly shows the profile, which was the most common pose for wax portraits, as well as the fact that the wax was painted.

In his young adult years, Géza Kuun is portrayed in four photographs, one of which was taken in Venice and another in a studio in Naples. Since a sentimental inscription was added to the Neapolitan portrait’s back, referencing a place he had visited, Vilma decided to cut the photograph into two, allowing her to paste both parts separately. For images of the grown man, the accompanying clippings now focus on their relationship. These were cut from Szádeczky’s article as well as from letters Géza had written to Vilma, which she had published herself.

The border decorations and frames are also a prominent feature in this album, and Vilma uses a variety of patterns to surround the pasted material. For example, one of Géza Kuun’s later life photographs is framed with a design in which two hands hold the image from the left and right sides. This visual effect breaks up the flat surface, adds depth, and introduces a playful element to the “paper museum.” To make the story of the count’s life even more personal, Vilma also added two short handwritten texts next to the images, one of which includes Kuun’s signature. Additionally, she pasted in his *ex libris* as part of the collection, further personalizing the scrapbook and connecting it more directly to its subject.

³³ Scrapbook made by Vilma Kemény, 1. National Archives, Cluj County Service, Kuun family archive, 351/697.

In this album, Vilma again dedicates several pages to the Mintia (Marosnémeti) Castle, expressing her attachment to the place. Some photographs are repeated, but this time there are more images of the garden and the archaeological artifacts displayed there. Newspaper clippings—mostly poems—are used to complement the photographs, along with multi-page descriptions and various frame and edge decorations. Four interior photographs are also included, two of which are original and two cut from printed sources. These images align perfectly with the work *Marosnémetiben. Emlékezés gróf Kuun Géza otthonára* (“In Marosnémeti. A Memory of Count Kuun Géza’s Home”), written by Vilma herself, where she describes the castle’s furnishings and the use of each room in detail. However, no excerpts from this work were pasted into the album since it was published in 1909, after the scrapbooks had already been completed.

The last part of the volume contains eulogies, obituaries, and funeral announcements, followed by later commemorations of Géza Kuun. These pages are visually distinct: each column of text is separated by thick black paper strips, and some sections are adorned with black floral decorations. The longer texts, which were published as booklets, were also included, with one page pasted into the album and then secured with string to prevent it from opening. Five photographs from the funeral are included, showing the mortuary chapel in Házsongárd and the crowd accompanying the coffin. The final part of the album consists of pages dedicated to commemorations. It includes every publication related to Kuun Géza—school bulletins, prayers recited on the first anniversary of his death, Szádeczky’s already cited study, etc. At the very end of the album, there is an envelope containing sympathy cards collected by Vilma.

The scrapbooks dedicated to Géza Kuun can indeed be described as a curated “paper museum”. The curator’s work involves selecting, combining, and integrating images and texts in meaningful ways. Vilma Kemény tailors the photographs to the themes she wants to emphasize, modifying them freely: sometimes she glues them together, frames them, and even creates painted backgrounds to complement them. She does not distinguish between studio portraits and candid snapshots; she uses whatever materials she has available. The photographs are placed closely together on the pages, often framed, reflecting the atmosphere of their home in Mintia (Marosnémeti).

The walls were adorned with portraits of family ancestors, pastels, and various photographs of close relatives. There were also photos above the fireplace and on small tables: "As many as could fit, placed in ornate frames,"³⁴ as she put it.

The two scrapbooks were created with a strong personal motivation and need, with the goal of establishing the memory of her husband, Géza Kuun, as an esteemed researcher and a very special person. Beyond the deeply personal emotions that motivated their creation, and considering Vilma Kemény's later activities, these scrapbooks can also be interpreted as preparatory material for the publications that were later printed. In this sense, they served as a way of gathering content, reflecting both the private and public dimensions of her husband's legacy.

³⁴ Kuun, *Marosnémetiben. Emlékezés Gróf Kuun Géza otthonára*, 23, 34.



Figure 1. Portraits of Géza Kuun and Vilma Kemény. Scrapbook made by Vilma Kemény, 1. National Archives, Cluj County Service, Kuun family archive, 351/697.



Figure 2. A page from the section presenting Géza Kuun's life with photographs, newspaper clippings and border decorations. Scrapbook made by Vilma Kemény, 2. National Archives, Cluj County Service, Kuun family archive, 351/697.



Figure 3. Minta Castle's garden with archaeological findings. Scrapbook made by Vilma Kemény, 2. National Archives, Cluj County Service, Kuun family archive, 351/697.



Figure 4. Obituary of Géza Kuun and newspaper clippings about his death. Scrapbook made by Vilma Kemény, 2. National Archives, Cluj County Service, Kuun family archive, 351/697.