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Photography as Methodological and Pedagogical Mediation in Artistic Creation Processes in Fine Arts

La fotografía como mediación metodológica y pedagógica en procesos de creación artística de Bellas Artes

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Abstract:
This article examines photography as a methodological and pedagogical mediation in artistic creation processes developed in Fine Arts higher education. The study draws on a corpus of methodological narratives written by students of the Master's Degree in Research in Art and Creation (MIAC-UCM) over two academic years and is approached through an interpretive qualitative methodology based on reflexive thematic analysis. The aim is to understand how photography intervenes in the construction of the creative process, not only as a visual reference but also as an autobiographical archive, a device of memory, a tool for documentation, a repertoire of images, and a mediation between the digital and the material. The findings show that photography plays an active role in different stages of artistic practice, functioning as a trigger for the project, a support for visual inquiry, a resource for process tracking, and a space of translation between media such as painting, collage, and installation. The article concludes that, in the Fine Arts classroom, photography operates not only as an autonomous language but also as an expanded pedagogical tool that fosters creation, reflection, and meaning-making through the visual.

Resumen:
Este artículo analiza la fotografía como mediación metodológica y pedagógica en procesos de creación artística desarrollados en el ámbito de la educación superior en Bellas Artes. El estudio se basa en un corpus de relatos metodológicos elaborados por estudiantes del Máster Universitario en Investigación en Arte y Creación (MIAC-UCM) a lo largo de dos cursos académicos y se aborda desde una metodología cualitativa de carácter interpretativo, basada en el análisis temático reflexivo. El objetivo es comprender de qué modo la fotografía interviene en la construcción del proceso creativo, no solo como referente visual, sino también como archivo autobiográfico, dispositivo de memoria, herramienta de documentación, repertorio de imágenes y mediación entre lo digital y lo matérico. Los resultados muestran que la fotografía ocupa un lugar activo en distintas fases del trabajo artístico, actuando como detonante del proyecto, soporte de investigación visual, recurso de seguimiento del proceso y espacio de traducción entre medios como pintura, collage e instalación. Se concluye que, en el aula universitaria de Bellas Artes, la fotografía no opera únicamente como lenguaje autónomo, sino como una herramienta expandida que favorece procesos de creación, reflexión y construcción de sentido desde lo visual.

Keywords: Photography; Artistic creation; Higher education; Fine Arts; Pedagogical mediation; Research-creation.

Palabras clave: fotografía; creación artística; educación superior; Bellas Artes; mediación pedagógica; investigación-creación.

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1. Introduction

The expansion of contemporary visual culture has reinforced the role of the image in processes of learning, communication, and knowledge construction in higher education. In this context, photography has ceased to function solely as a technique or specialised discipline and has also become a transversal resource for observation, documentation, archiving, narration, and visual reflection. This broadening of functions is particularly significant in the university context, where arts education is shaped by digital environments, social media, mobile devices, and new forms of image production, circulation, and appropriation. Recent studies have emphasised, in particular, that contemporary visual culture requires pedagogical frameworks to be reconsidered and the role of images in university education to be rethought (Peña-Acuña & Alfonso-Jaramillo, 2024).

In the case of photography, its educational potential is not limited to technical literacy or to learning the language of photography. The literature has shown that it can function as a means of activating processes of critical observation, fostering readings of the surrounding environment, encouraging student participation, and articulating interdisciplinary learning experiences. In a review of the literature on photography in education, Rodríguez-Hoyos (2015) noted that photography functions in numerous studies as an educational resource, an object of study, and an agent of visual literacy, while also stressing the need to continue exploring its pedagogical uses across different levels and contexts. More recently, Chacón-Gordillo et al. (2021) have highlighted the value of conceptual photography in promoting critical learning in the visual arts in university settings, while Scott (2014) showed how photographic practice can become a tool for awareness-raising, interpretation, and decision-making through the visual.

To this pedagogical dimension must be added another that is especially relevant to artistic training: photography as methodological mediation within the creative process itself. Within artistic practice, several studies have

stressed the importance of attending to process as a space of inquiry, experimentation, decision-making, and knowledge construction, beyond the traditional centrality of the finished artwork (Nogué-Font, 2020). From this perspective, photography appears not only as an outcome or as an autonomous language, but also as an active part of the working trajectory: an autobiographical archive, a reference image, a device of memory, a tool for documenting the process, or a bridge between the digital and the material.

This dimension becomes even more significant when considered in relation to image, memory, and creativity. As García-García et al. (2021) argue, the image plays a decisive role in the cultural shaping of memory and in the activation of creative processes, so that particular visual configurations not only represent experiences but also intervene in their symbolic reorganisation and in the elaboration of new forms of meaning. In the case of photography, this relationship is intensified by its capacity to function simultaneously as trace, archive, evocation, and visual construction. Along similar lines, studies on photography, archive, and memory have shown that photographs and their archives not only preserve traces of the past, but also organise partial, fragmentary, and active ways of remembering, selecting, and interpreting experience (Cross & Peck, 2010).

At the same time, this issue must be considered within the framework of contemporary transformations of the photographic image. As Toro-Peralta and Grisales-Vargas (2021) point out, post-photography has shifted the understanding of photography from a logic of representing the world to an expanded ecology of image circulation, manipulation, and production, shaped by the digital, connectivity, and the multiplication of visual devices. In educational and artistic contexts, this shift implies that photography can no longer be understood exclusively as a stable or closed medium, but rather as a hybrid mediation that cuts across practices of archiving, capturing, editing, selecting, and translating between supports. Thus, photography becomes embedded in processes in which family images, screenshots,

internet references, records of the surrounding environment, documentation of the work, and visual repertoires from multiple contexts coexist.

All of this has particular relevance today in the Fine Arts classroom, where students' creative processes are often nourished by personal photographs, found images, domestic archives, records of context, and digital images that accompany visual inquiry and the materialisation of the work. From this perspective, photography does not act merely as an iconic support, but as a mediation that accompanies decision-making and the production of meaning within the creative process. However, despite this context, studies specifically analysing how photography intervenes in the methodological construction of Fine Arts students' creative processes in higher education remain relatively scarce. More specifically, few studies have addressed this issue through methodological narratives produced by the students themselves, that is, through narratives that make it possible to observe how photographic images participate in the initiation, development, reformulation, and materialisation of projects.

1.1. Research questions and objectives

Building on the framework outlined above, this article seeks to analyse photography as a methodological and pedagogical mediation in artistic creation processes situated within Fine Arts higher education. More specifically, the study is grounded in the experience of the Master's Degree in Research in Art and Creation at the Complutense University of Madrid (MIAC-UCM), drawing on a corpus of methodological narratives produced by the students themselves. The point of departure is that, in these narratives, photography appears not merely as a complementary visual resource or as a final outcome, but as an element that intervenes actively in the configuration of the creative process, whether as archive, trigger, reference, documentation, or a device of translation between different languages and supports.

Within this framework, the research is guided by a central question that runs through the study as a whole: how does photography intervene as a methodological and pedagogical mediation in the artistic creation processes narrated by Fine Arts students in the context of higher education? This question shifts attention away from photography understood solely as an outcome or autonomous language and towards its active presence in the development of creative work, in the decisions that shape it, and in the ways students visually articulate memory, experience, and plastic inquiry.

Accordingly, the general objective of the article is to analyse the functions photography performs in the artistic creation processes narrated by the students and the ways in which it intervenes in the relationship between memory, digital visual culture, and the materialisation of the work.

From this general objective, the research unfolds along three closely related lines of analysis. First, it seeks to identify the functions that photography adopts in the students' methodological narratives throughout the creative process. Second, it aims to examine how photography intervenes in the relationship between memory, archive, digital image, and plastic decisions; in other words, how it accompanies and guides the construction of the work. Finally, the study aims to assess the pedagogical role of photography in the Fine Arts classroom, attending to its capacity to sustain processes of creation, reflection, and recognition through the visual.

With this approach, photography ceases to be understood solely as an autonomous language or a specific technique and is instead considered a situated mediation within the creative process, in which images participate in the development of visual thinking, the methodological organisation of the work, and the production of meaning in the educational context.

2. Photography, Creative Process, and Pedagogical Mediation

In the contemporary context, photography can no longer be understood solely as a specific technique or an autonomous visual language, but rather as an expanded practice that participates in highly diverse ways in modes of seeing, remembering, documenting, selecting, relating, and producing meaning. This shift is particularly significant in the field of arts education, where creation is no longer articulated exclusively through traditional plastic materials, but also through personal archives, digital images, screenshots, visual references, records of context, and processes of editing and transfer across supports. In this scenario, photography becomes integrated into a broader visual ecology and comes to operate as a mediation within creative work, rather than merely as a final outcome. This connects with the idea of post-photography developed by Toro-Peralta and Grisales-Vargas (2021), and with the need, as noted by Fontcuberta (2016), to rethink the status of photography within a visual ecosystem shaped by circulation, appropriation, and the overproduction of images.

This shift in the position of photography also calls for pedagogical reconsideration. If for a long time its educational presence was linked primarily to technical learning, formal analysis, or visual literacy, today its formative value extends towards other dimensions related to observation, interpretation, memory, experience, and the production of knowledge through the visual. In his review of photography in education, Rodríguez-Hoyos (2015) had already noted that photography had been addressed in the literature both as a didactic resource and as an object of study, while also stressing the need to continue exploring its pedagogical possibilities across different contexts. More recently, Chacón-Gordillo et al. (2021) have shown that photography can foster critical learning in university settings, not only through its capacity to generate images, but also through its potential to activate processes of reflection, conceptualisation, and positioning in relation to visual culture.

In Fine Arts education, this pedagogical dimension is intertwined with the specificity of the creative process. Artistic creation cannot be reduced to the production of a finished work, since it involves a trajectory of exploration, trial and error, testing, selection, reformulation, and decision-making. Attending to process therefore means recognising that artistic knowledge is also constructed through the shifts, doubts, discoveries, and relations that make the work possible. From this perspective, Nogué-Font (2020) has stressed the importance of studying processes of artistic creation from practice, understanding them as spaces in which a specific form of inquiry and knowledge elaboration takes place. Within this framework, photography can perform highly diverse functions: it can initiate a search, sustain a visual memory, document a change, organise a reference archive, activate associations, or serve as a bridge between experience and its material formalisation.

This issue becomes especially fruitful when placed in relation to memory and archive. Photographic images do not simply represent past events, bodies, spaces, or times; they also participate actively in the configuration of memories, affects, and narratives. As García-García et al. (2021) point out, the relationship between memory, creativity, and image is not secondary, but constitutive of many processes of symbolic and cultural elaboration. The image does not merely reflect a previous experience, but contributes to reorganising it, interpreting it, and projecting it into new forms of creation. In the case of photography, this condition is intensified by its proximity to trace, imprint, and archive, but also by its capacity to be cropped, reinterpreted, displaced, and reinscribed in other languages. To speak of photography in artistic creation processes, therefore, is also to speak of ways of remembering, selecting, and visually transforming experience.

To this memorial and archival dimension must be added the growing presence of digital visuality. The expansion of social media, audiovisual platforms, mobile devices, and image repositories has profoundly transformed the ways in which the photographic is accessed, used, and

circulated. As Peña-Acuña and Alfonso-Jaramillo (2024) note, digital visual culture is already part of contemporary educational ecosystems and shapes both modes of learning and ways of relating to images. In this context, tools capable of generating images from text through artificial intelligence are also beginning to be incorporated, expanding the available visual repertoire and reshaping students' expectations regarding the production, referencing, and transformation of images in the artistic field (Albar Mansoa, 2023).

From a pedagogical perspective, photography can be understood not only as a visual resource, but also as a tool for supporting processes of reflection, organisation, and meaning-making within artistic practice (Feu et al., 2025), along lines close to approaches that position creation-based learning at the intersection of metacognition, experience, and the reflective elaboration of process (Caeiro-Rodríguez, 2018), as well as to educational perspectives that emphasise the value of more inclusive and diversity-sensitive frameworks in learning processes (Chavarro-Bermúdez et al., 2020).

This approach makes it possible to shift the focus away from photography as an isolated object and towards its functions within situated narratives of creation. Rather than asking what photography is in disciplinary terms, the interest here lies in observing what photography does within the processes narrated by the students: how it appears, at what moments it intervenes, what relations it activates, and what place it occupies in the methodological construction of the work. On this basis, the following section addresses the methodological design of the study and the way in which the corpus of narratives produced in the context of MIAC-UCM was analysed.

3. Methodology and Corpus of Analysis

3.1. Research Design

This study is situated within a qualitative interpretative approach and is directed towards analysing photography as a methodological and pedagogical

mediation in artistic creation processes developed in higher education. The focus is not on measuring frequencies of use or establishing closed typologies of visual production, but on understanding how photography appears in students' narratives and what functions it performs within the creative process. From this perspective, the study is located at the intersection of educational research, analysis of process narratives, and research in artistic creation, attending to the ways in which students describe, organise, and justify their methodological decisions.

The research adopts the form of a textual corpus study constructed from a selection of methodological narratives of artistic creation processes produced over two consecutive academic years. These are reflective texts in which students reconstruct and analyse their own working process, making explicit the decisions, resources, references, and operations that shape the work. In this sense, the corpus is situated within the sphere of Research-Creation, insofar as it turns artistic practice itself into a space of inquiry, reflection, and knowledge production, attending to process rather than solely to the final outcome (Nogué-Font, 2020).

In both academic years, the selected corpus derives from the same set of questions of an ontological, epistemological, and methodological nature. For the purposes of this article, only the methodological dimension of these responses has been examined, that is, the fragments in which students describe and reflect upon the methods, resources, decisions, and references that shape their artistic creation process. This instrument also had an explicit didactic purpose: to enable students to identify, develop, and articulate with greater awareness their own methodological positioning within their field of creation. In this way, the narratives function not only as material for analysis, but also as an exercise in reflective elaboration of the artistic process itself.

3.2. Context and Corpus of Analysis

On this basis, the analysed corpus was delimited through a purposive selection of fragments from two sets of responses produced within the same

educational context. In both cases, only those passages were considered in which the methodological dimension of the creative process was sufficiently developed to allow analysis of the functions of photography in the construction of the work.

The selection did not respond to a criterion of statistical representativeness, but rather to the relevance of the materials for the analysis. For this reason, the corpus was not treated as a whole in block form, but instead through those narratives and fragments in which photography, the photographic image, or, more broadly, digital visuality linked to the photographic, appeared in an explicit and significant way within the creative process. This delimitation responds directly to the question guiding the study: to understand how photography intervenes as an active part of the methodological construction of the artistic practice narrated by the students.

The relevance of this delimitation becomes evident in the diversity of the selected corpus itself. In some narratives, photography is linked to personal, family, or autobiographical archives and becomes the starting point of the project. In others, it functions as a visual or affective trigger that guides subsequent plastic decisions. This attention to process and its transformations is aligned with studies that have stressed the need to observe artistic creation beyond the final outcome, attending to its internal dynamics, shifts, and modes of elaboration in contexts of visual arts education (Blanco & Cidrás, 2022), as well as with work that has approached methodological narratives and situated writing as forms of reflection on artistic practice itself and as valid materials for the analysis of creation processes (Albar Mansoa, 2026).

3.3. Criteria for the Selection of Material

The delimitation of the analytical corpus was carried out through purposive sampling guided by thematic criteria. Those narratives or fragments were selected in which photography or the photographic image fulfilled at least one of the following functions:

a) acting as the starting point or trigger of the project;
b) functioning as an autobiographical, family, or memorial archive;
c) intervening as a tool for documentation, observation, or recording;
d) serving as a reference image, visual repertoire, or database for the construction of the work;
e) participating in processes of editing, appropriation, montage, or translation between media and supports.

This criterion made it possible to narrow the analysis to the cases most relevant to the research question, while at the same time preserving the heterogeneity of the corpus. The aim was not to reduce the narratives to a single logic of use, but to identify a set of functions through which photography intervenes in artistic creation processes of diverse kinds. In some cases, its memorial or autobiographical dimension predominates; in others, it appears linked to searches in digital archives or online and to their subsequent material translation; and in others, finally, it is situated within a hybrid territory between photography, painting, scanning, printing, and image manipulation.

3.4. Analytical Procedure

The corpus was analysed through a reflexive thematic analysis strategy, understood as a flexible procedure for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns of meaning within a set of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this case, the analysis was not directed solely towards recording mentions of photography, but towards understanding the methodological and pedagogical functions it acquires within the students' narratives.

The procedure unfolded in several stages. First, a full reading of the selected corpus was carried out in order to become familiar with the texts and to detect the explicit or implicit presence of the photographic. In a second phase, an initial coding of the relevant fragments was conducted, attending to expressions, actions, and descriptions linked to photography, the visual

archive, documentation of the process, the use of digital images, visual memory, and translation between supports. Subsequently, these codes were grouped into broader thematic categories, constructed inductively from the material itself, although in dialogue with the conceptual framework of the study.

From this process, several lines of analysis emerged: photography as archive and memory, photography as project trigger, photography as documentation and observation, photography as visual repertoire or digital reference, and photography as intermedial mediation between the digital and the material. These categories should not be understood as watertight compartments, since in many narratives a single image or photographic practice fulfils simultaneous functions. For this reason, the analysis also attended to the overlap and complexity of meanings that run through the narratives studied.

3.5. Analytical Positioning

The analysis is situated within an interpretative perspective that understands methodological narratives not as transparent or exhaustive descriptions of the creative process, but as situated discursive constructions, in line with narrative approaches that conceive experience as something that is organised, interpreted, and endowed with meaning through narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is based on the idea that students do not merely report what they do, but also elaborate a particular understanding of their own practice, retrospectively organise experience, and give it coherence through language. In this sense, the study is inscribed within a conception of research in the human sciences as a field under construction, in which ways of narrating, interpreting, and shaping experience also participate in the production of knowledge (Aguirre-García & Jaramillo-Echeverri, 2025). Far from diminishing the value of the corpus, this condition constitutes one of its principal interests for the research, since it makes it possible to observe how photography is thought, narrated, and legitimised within the creation process.

From this position, the study does not seek to verify empirically every material operation described by the students, but rather to analyse the functions that photography acquires in their narratives as part of a formulated and reflected methodology of creation. The corpus thus offers a particularly valuable route for exploring the relationship between artistic process, visual thinking, and methodological awareness within the university context. From this perspective, the narratives are understood not only as descriptions of process, but as forms of situated writing that articulate experience, reflection, and knowledge around artistic practice itself (Albar Mansoa, 2026).

3.6. Ethical Considerations and Scope of the Study

The analysed corpus derives from a teaching and training context, which situates its reading and interpretation within a specific framework of production. The fragments incorporated into the analysis are used exclusively for academic and research purposes, in relation to the study of the methodological and pedagogical functions that photography acquires in the artistic creation processes narrated by the students. In the presentation of the results, participants' full names are not included, and when it is necessary to distinguish cases, they are identified by initials.

This study seeks to understand in a situated way how photography appears and is narrated within a specific corpus of artistic creation processes in higher education. Its scope is therefore interpretative and contextual, insofar as it attends to how the experience of the creative process is narrated, organised, and given meaning by the students themselves (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Its main contribution lies in identifying methodological and pedagogical functions of photography that may serve as a basis for future research in related contexts.

4. Results

The analysis of the corpus shows that photography does not appear in the students' methodological narratives as a secondary resource or an isolated visual reference, but rather as an active mediation across different stages of the artistic creation process. Its presence takes diverse and, in many cases, overlapping forms: autobiographical archive, project trigger, tool for documentation, visual repertoire, or device for translation between media. Rather than constituting a homogeneous category, the photographic appears in the corpus as a field of operations that accompanies the methodological construction of the work and brings into relation memory, digital visual culture, and materialisation.

4.1. Photography as Archive and Activation of Memory

One of the most visible functions of photography in the corpus is its role as an autobiographical, family, or memorial archive. In several narratives, photographic images are not presented merely as documents of the past, but as materials that activate processes of evocation, reworking, and meaning-making within artistic practice. Photography operates here as a point of support from which students access memories, affective bonds, or intimate imaginaries that are subsequently transformed through plastic, compositional, or installation-based decisions.

In some cases, the project begins with family photographs and personal objects that function as containers of memory and as the nucleus of the creative process. These images are not used in a passive or merely illustrative way, but are subjected to operations of selection, reinterpretation, montage, or displacement into other media. Photography thus acts as an intermediate material between lived experience and its artistic reformulation, fostering a methodological elaboration of memory that does not simply recover the past, but visually reorganises it from the standpoint of the present.

This function can be seen clearly in narratives where the family photographic archive serves as the starting point for a pictorial or installation-based

narrative. In the case of (AGC), for example, the process begins with images of the family circle and intimate spaces, which are selected intuitively and recombined through digital collage before being transferred into pictorial language. Along similar lines, (ASJ) works with photographs, letters, and personal objects that function as "containers of memory" and activate a symbolic and identity-based reconstruction through collage and assemblage. Likewise, in (LGG), childhood photographs operate as triggers for a pictorial re-reading of the past, in which the image ceases to be preserved as a stable document and instead becomes a support for evocation, loss, and reconstruction.

This use of the photographic archive is especially significant because it situates the image in a hybrid space between document and creation. Rather than being presented as stable proof of a prior biography, photography becomes integrated into the process as a working surface onto which new readings, affects, and formal decisions are projected. In this way, the archive ceases to appear as a closed repository and becomes a dynamic repertoire that feeds artistic practice and helps articulate the relationship between memory, subjectivity, and visual production.

4.2. Photography as Trigger and Orientation of the Creative Process

Beyond its link to memory, photography also appears as an element that sets the creative process in motion. In some narratives, the photographic image acts as a first threshold from which plastic inquiry begins to take shape: not so much as a personal archive, but as a presence that orients, suggests, and activates. From it, students are able to fix an initial intuition, formulate a visual question, or recognise an atmosphere from which to begin working. Photography does not close down the meaning of the project, but opens up a field of exploration that later unfolds through other media, materials, and formal decisions.

This initiating function can be seen, for example, in narratives where a specific image or a series of visual references helps to establish an initial working atmosphere. In (ALNL), the search for online images of bodies in states of well-being constitutes the starting point for constructing pictorial scenes in which environment, posture, and atmosphere are jointly defined. In another register, (CTF) points out that an image seen or a photograph taken with the intention of returning to it later may function as an initial support, both graphic and conceptual. In such cases, the trigger is not an intimate photograph, but an image sought out or captured in order to retain a sensation and return to it during the process.

In this sense, photography helps to define the emotional tone of the project, guide the selection of materials, or establish relations between the initial idea and its possible formalisation. This is not simply inspiration in a vague sense, but rather a methodological use of the image as support for organising and activating visual inquiry. This triggering role also becomes evident when photography acts as a mediation between the perception of the environment and the artistic formulation of the work. The capturing of scenes, details, spaces, or situations enables students to pause their gaze, select what they consider meaningful, and turn it into material for subsequent elaboration. Thus, photography not only records a prior experience, but also helps construct it as a visual problem and as an object of artistic inquiry.

4.3. Photography as Documentation, Observation, and Monitoring of the Work

Another significant line of analysis shows that photography intervenes as a tool for documenting and observing the creative process. Its function is not limited to the beginning of the project, but accompanies its development and makes it possible to record transformations, decisions, tests, and intermediate states of the work. Photography here acquires a methodological value linked to the monitoring of the work, the review of the process, and the possibility of returning to earlier stages from a more distanced perspective.

This documentary dimension appears explicitly in narratives where photography is understood as a record of observation and as a continuous accompaniment to the work. (AP), for example, defines it as a "record of the act of observation" and links it both to communication with the surrounding environment and to the monitoring of artistic production itself through field notebooks and other complementary records. In a similar vein, (MDJ) highlights the role of photographic technique in generating images that are later printed and articulated within an exhibition discourse.

This use should not be understood merely as an external record. In many narratives, photography forms part of the very thinking of the process, since it allows students to observe variations, compare moments, detect compositional relations, or reconsider the evolution of the work. In this sense, documenting photographically does not simply mean preserving evidence, but rather generating a device for reflective observation of practice.

Its significance lies in the fact that it turns photography into a tool of methodological self-regulation. By recording tests, materials, rehearsals, or spatial configurations, the image facilitates decision-making and expands students' capacity to read their own process from the outside. This visual mediation is especially significant in contexts of artistic creation, where the temporality of the work is not always linear and where the possibility of reviewing the shifts within the process may alter later decisions.

4.4. Photography as Visual Repertoire and Mediation between the Digital and the Material

The analysis also makes it possible to observe that, in many narratives, photography does not appear merely as a concrete image or a specific reference, but as part of a broader visual field from which students think, search, select, and construct their creative process. In this sense, the photographic often functions as a repertoire of available images: found photographs, screenshots, digital archives, images obtained from the internet, or visual references that, in one way or another, shape the

imaginary of the work. In this context, that imaginary does not refer to a mere collection of images, but to a broader web of visual and symbolic relations that guides the construction of the work (Caldera, 2025). Although these images are not always transferred directly into the final outcome, they nevertheless intervene in defining the visual horizon from which the work begins to take shape.

This function becomes especially visible in narratives where the process is nourished by digital archives, screenshots, and visual references found online. (ASL) describes an inquiry sustained through the internet, involving screenshots, image downloads, and scanned books, while (CV) places digital images at the very centre of his practice. Alongside this, other cases clearly show the movement between supports: (AER) works with old private photographs subjected to processes of scanning, printing, drawing, and painting, while (AGC) uses digital collage as a space of prior experimentation before pictorial materialisation.

What is relevant here is not only where the image comes from, but also the role it comes to play within the process. In some cases, it serves to establish an atmosphere, sustain an association, rehearse a composition, or open up a formal possibility. In others, it functions as a visual reserve to which students return, compare, select, or transform. Photography thus occupies a mediating space between searching in digital environments, the student's visual memory, and the need to give material form to an intuition or an idea.

Moreover, in several narratives this function of visual repertoire is linked to a constant movement between the digital and the material. The photographic image may be printed, cut out, scanned, intervened upon, transferred into collage, translated into painting, or turned into the starting point of an installation. Rather than remaining fixed within a single support, photography circulates, is transformed, and changes its status as the process unfolds. From this perspective, it does not function merely as a final image or as a simple reference, but as an intermedial mediation that accompanies

translation between techniques, materials, and languages and participates actively in the plastic construction of the work.

4.5. Synthesis of the Findings

Taken together, the results show that photography occupies a more active place within the creative process than might be assumed at first reading. It does not appear merely as a reference image or as occasional visual support, but as a mediation that cuts across different moments of the work and participates in the ways students organise, orient, and shape their practice.

Rather than performing a single function, the photographic unfolds in the corpus as a flexible tool of visual thinking. In this sense, the categories identified—archive and memory, project trigger, process documentation, visual repertoire, and intermedial mediation—should not be understood as closed compartments, but as interwoven dimensions through which photography participates in the construction of the artistic creation process.

At this point, the results also coincide with studies that have highlighted the value of arts-based methodologies in fostering processes of reflective participation and knowledge production during the unfolding of practice itself (Morris & Paris, 2022). In this sense, the narratives analysed make it possible not only to identify the functions of photography, but also to understand how it contributes to making the creative process itself visible and thinkable.

5. Discussion

The results make it possible to argue that, within these narratives, photography occupies a methodologically more complex place than might be assumed if it were understood solely as a technique, an autonomous language, or a form of visual support. What emerges from the corpus is not merely the presence of images within the creative process, but the way in which photography accompanies, activates, and, at times, reorganises the

very construction of artistic work. In this sense, the analysis confirms that the photographic appears not only as an outcome or iconographic reference, but as a mediation that intervenes in the relationship between memory, visual inquiry, methodological decisions, and the materialisation of the work.

This finding enters into dialogue with studies that have shifted attention away from the finished work and towards the creation process as a space of inquiry and knowledge production (Nogué-Font, 2020). In the narratives analysed, photography appears precisely at this processual level: not so much as a closed image, but as an operator that accompanies the elaboration of the work, whether through autobiographical archive, the recording of tests, the activation of a visual atmosphere, or movement across different supports. From this perspective, photography intervenes in the development of the creative process itself, in those moments where looking, remembering, selecting, recording, and transforming all form part of artistic thinking.

Likewise, the importance acquired by archive, memory, and family or personal images reinforces the idea that photography participates in the construction of meanings that are not limited to the formal. As García-García et al. (2021) suggest, the relationship between memory, creativity, and image forms part of many processes of symbolic elaboration. In the corpus studied, this relationship does not appear as a secondary emotional background, but as a dimension that methodologically organises part of the work. Photography allows students to return to experiences, fix traces, activate memories, or reorganise intimate materials, but it does so within a practice that transforms these elements into visual and plastic decisions. At this point, the archive ceases to be a simple repository and becomes active material for creation.

Furthermore, the results confirm that the place of photography in these processes cannot be understood apart from contemporary digital visuality. The presence of found images, screenshots, digital archives, and references drawn from the internet shows that students work within an expanded visual

ecosystem in which images circulate, are stored, selected, and continually transformed. This connects with the idea of post-photography developed by Toro-Peralta and Grisales-Vargas (2021), insofar as photography no longer refers only to a stable image but becomes integrated into a broader logic of circulation, appropriation, displacement, and visual recontextualisation. In the narratives, this condition is not formulated in theoretical terms, but it can nevertheless be seen in the ways images are incorporated into the process as repertoire, visual reserve, or the basis for subsequent material translations.

One of the most significant aspects of the analysis is that photography does not appear separate from material artistic practice, but closely bound to it. Images are printed, cut out, scanned, intervened upon, translated into painting, or incorporated into other spatial and object-based configurations. This movement between the digital and the material suggests that photography functions as an intermedial mediation capable of connecting visual search environments with concrete decisions of formalisation. Rather than replacing materiality, photography expands its possibilities and facilitates new relationships between images, supports, and processes.

From a pedagogical perspective, this issue is especially significant, since the corpus derives from methodological narratives produced within an educational context whose purpose was to enable students to recognise and develop their own creation process. In this sense, photography appears not only as a visual resource, but also as a tool for organising the process and promoting a situated reflection on one's own practice (Feu et al., 2025).

At the same time, the study invites certain qualifications. Although the corpus makes it possible to identify distinct functions of photography with clarity, not all the narratives develop them with the same depth or the same degree of explicitness. In some cases, the photographic appears in a highly visible and structuring way; in others, it is more diluted within a broader constellation of references and images. This suggests that photography does not occupy a uniform place in all processes, but that its presence depends on

different modes of relation to memory, the visual environment, or methodology itself.

It is also worth noting that certain contemporary forms of visual production do not appear explicitly named in the narratives, despite forming part of the current horizon of creation in Fine Arts. Among these, and with due caution, one might include the generation of images through artificial intelligence. Its absence from the narratives does not allow one to affirm its use within the corpus, but it does open up a question for future research: to what extent do certain contemporary visual tools participate in students' working processes without being explicitly incorporated into their methodological narratives? Rather than as a finding, this issue should be understood here as a possible zone of silence or discursive underrepresentation.

Taken together, the discussion makes it possible to affirm that, within this corpus, photography does not merely accompany the creation process, but participates actively in its construction. Its value lies in this intermediate condition: between archive and project, between memory and visual inquiry, between digital environment and material formalisation, between subjective experience and methodological reflection. From this perspective, photography emerges as an especially fertile mediation for thinking not only about how students create, but also about how they learn to recognise and narrate their own practice within the Fine Arts classroom.

6. Conclusions

This study has made it possible to analyse photography as a methodological and pedagogical mediation in narratives of artistic creation processes developed within Fine Arts higher education. Drawing on the selected corpus, the findings show that photography does not occupy a peripheral or merely instrumental place, but intervenes actively in different phases of creative work: as archive and memory, as a trigger for the project, as a tool

for documentation, as a visual repertoire, and as a mediation between the digital and the material.

One of the study's main contributions lies in showing that photography does not appear merely as a reference image or as an autonomous language, but as part of the methodological thinking of the creation process itself. In this sense, the photographic accompanies the ways in which students organise their search, recognise their decisions, articulate links between experience and form, and translate intuitions, memories, or working materials into visual terms. More than a complementary resource, photography emerges as a flexible mediation that participates in the construction of artistic practice.

The analysis also makes it possible to highlight the pedagogical dimension of this presence. Since these are methodological narratives produced in an educational context, the corpus provides information not only about how students create, but also about how they learn to identify, verbalise, and structure their own process. From this perspective, photography does not act solely on the level of visual production, but also on that of methodological reflection on one's own practice.

At the same time, the study shows that photography is now inscribed within an expanded visual ecology, in which personal archives, found images, screenshots, digital references, and processes of translation between supports coexist. This condition broadens its role within the creative process and requires it to be understood as a mediation between memory, contemporary visuality, and the materialisation of the work.

As a limitation, the study is situated within a specific corpus of methodological narratives produced in a particular teaching context. At the same time, this condition also constitutes one of its strengths, since it allows for a situated reading of the functions that photography acquires within real artistic creation processes narrated by the students themselves.

Taken together, it can be affirmed that photography constitutes an especially fertile mediation for understanding the relationship between creative

process, pedagogy, and visual thinking in the Fine Arts classroom. Future research could expand this line of work by comparing other educational contexts, attending to different artistic disciplines, or exploring more specifically the relationship between photography, digital visuality, and generative artificial intelligences in contemporary narratives of creation.

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