

PHOTO

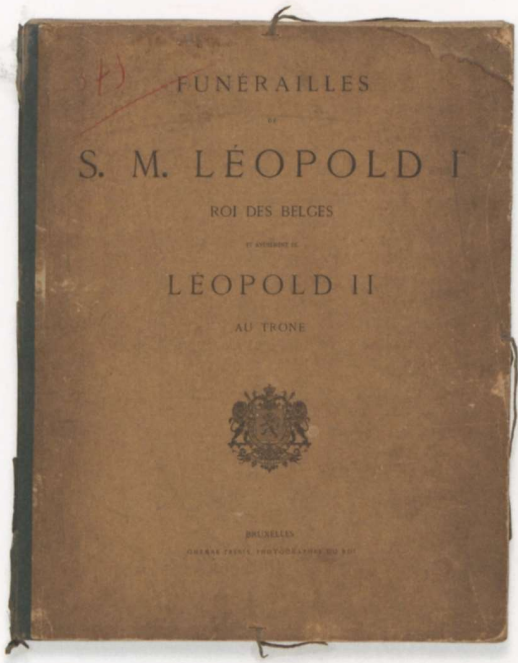
Edited by
Tamara Berghmans

1854

BOOK

NOW

BELGE



Funérailles de S.M. Léopold 1er, roi des belges et avènement de Léopold II au trône
 Funeral of H.M. Leopold I, King of Belgium, and the advent of Leopold II to the throne

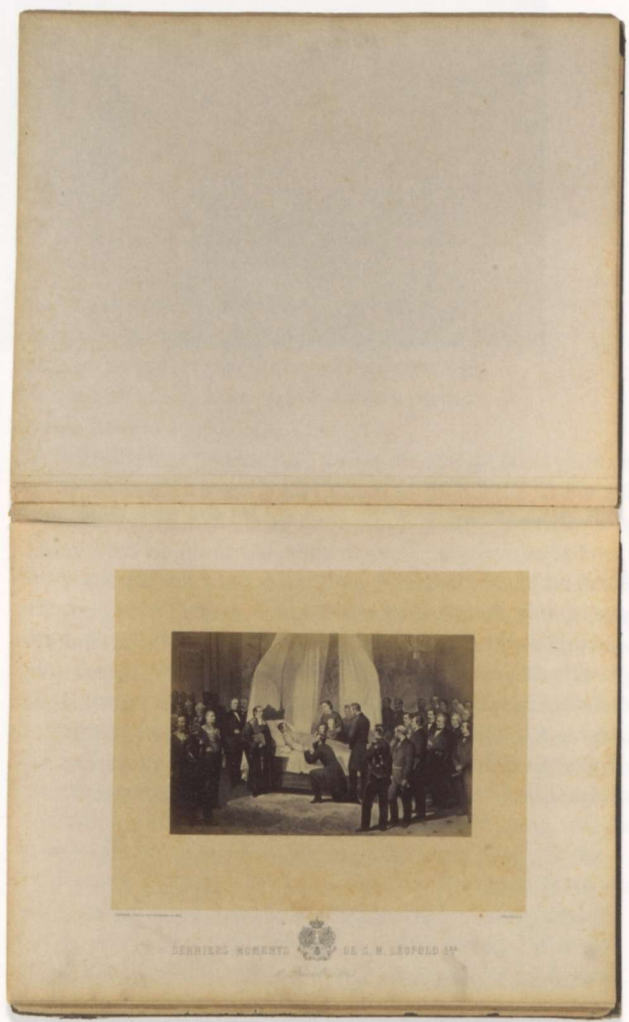
Louis Ghémar (1819–1873)

This folio album covers the events from King Leopold I's death on 10 December 1865, his lying-in-state and funeral to the swearing-in of Leopold II on 17 December. There are three portraits – of the two monarchs and the new queen consort – followed by compositions created by leading Brussels portrait photographer Louis Ghémar as a masterclass in photographic manipulation. The portraits are retouched, giving the sovereigns a serenity and preternatural smoothness of skin.

The compositions are a hybrid of graphic and photographic, an exercise in photomontage and combination printing. Ghémar proceeded like a director storyboarding an action movie: for each episode, he pasted a background paper on a canvas mounted on a frame. He then pasted on two albumen prints, 55 cm high and of variable width. He scribbled indications in the margin, probably for the attention of an assistant, to explain how to retouch details of architecture and objects and paint in the people that the lens failed to capture, such as spectators along the funeral route. In the composition of the funeral procession, the notes 'Prince de Ligne en Paletot [...] Voir les cartes' et 'Van den Castle général sans bottes le pantalon bleu à lignes sans manteau voir la carte' indicate that studio *carte de visite* portraits served as models for the personalities holding the cords of the funeral bier.

The colours used for the highlights and retouching – purplish grey and orange – lend these compositions an unnatural overall effect. They aim to correct distortions of chromaticism in an era when the translation of coloured values into grey tones was imprecise. Since blue light, of a shorter wavelength, blackens the negative plate more quickly, blue appears almost white on the positive, while red, at the other end of the spectrum, hardly affects the negative plate and appears almost black on the positive. Ghémar masterfully solved the technical problems and, thanks to these reworked views, he combined the advantages of photography and those of drawing. Once this reworking process was completed, the whole set was rephotographed and printed for publication.¹ M.C.C.

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Published by Ghémar Frères, Brussels, (1866)
 Folio, 540 × 430 mm, title page (copies bound in cloth boards) and plates
 13 albumen prints; copies exist containing an extra plate titled
Investiture de l'Ordre de la Jarretière, 246 × 189 mm oval (portraits)
 and 168 × 250 mm (compositions) or 168 × 282 mm (extra plate)
 Issued either with the plates loose within a buff-coloured printed portfolio with silk ties titled
 on upper board or with the plates hinge-mounted in blind-stamped black cloth boards with
 the Belgian coat of arms in gilt on the upper board

¹ Marie-Christine Claes & Catherine Rommelaere, 'L'album Ghémar des funérailles de Léopold Ier (1866): histoire de l'édition d'un reportage "photographique"', *Bulletin de l'Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique*, no. 31, 2004–05, 159–204.