

Taller de Conservación y Preservación de Fotografía - Report from April 22-26, 2024, at Finca Vigía, Cuba

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The "*Taller de Conservación y Preservación de Fotografía*" (Workshop on Preservation and Conservation of Photographs) hosted by the Finca Vigía Foundation and generously sponsored by the United States Embassy, was conducted at Finca Vigía, Cuba, spanning from April 22 to April 26, 2024. This educational initiative, tailored for a cohort of five participants, garnered a total attendance of eight individuals.

Utilizing binders that included a comprehensive array of instructional materials such as worksheets, printed texts, identification charts, and practical examples, participants engaged in an enriching learning experience. Although the training relied on binders brought for 5 participants, all attendees could follow the exercises seamlessly, sharing materials and leveraging supplementary items provided by the instructor.



Participants during process identification session

The curriculum encompassed various topics, delving into key facets of photograph preservation and conservation. Participants gained insights into the historical evolution of photographic processes, the intricacies of identification and characterization, and fundamental principles relating to the preservation of photographs. Furthermore, discussions centered on strategies for damage prevention, emergency planning, and responsive measures. Finally, the training equipped participants with essential knowledge about conservation treatment principles and their practical application in preserving photographic artifacts.



Samples provided to each participant

Workshop Methodology and Materials Provided

The workshop was structured to unfold over three days and designed as an interactive forum for group discussions centered on conservation and preservation challenges. The resources provided were integral to the training, comprising literature tailored for the course and established texts in the field. While most materials were presented in Spanish, a few essential references, such as the *Identification Guide for 19th*

Century Processes by James Reilly, are only available in English. To streamline participant engagement and ensure focus, recommended reading materials not directly furnished were summarized into a concise list. This approach aimed to strike a balance, offering an essential yet manageable selection of core texts, thus avoiding overwhelming attendees while directing them toward foundational resources. In the initial hour of the training session, the instructor gave an overview of their professional background and career trajectory. Subsequently, participants were invited to introduce themselves, articulating their backgrounds, expertise, and prior experiences within photograph conservation. Participants shared their aspirations and objectives for the training, setting a collective agenda for the ensuing sessions.



Provided binder

The workshop was organized under five sections with corresponding teaching materials:

- Evolution and Identification of Photographic Processes - This segment encompassed a chronological exploration of the evolution of photographic technologies, including a timeline that included significant milestones from Ernest Hemingway's life. Participants delved into reading materials and guides on characterization of photographic processes commonly found in collections and their associated deterioration characteristics. Through a combination of samples provided in each binder and supplementary examples, attendees gained insights into the nuanced variations inherent in these processes. Each participant was offered a 60x-120x loupe for examination, a tool to facilitate continued learning beyond the workshop. Additionally, the resources binder included cross-polarized filters to aid in identifying polyester-supported negatives, enhancing participants' proficiency in process identification. This comprehensive section was conducted on the first day of the workshop, Tuesday, April 23.
- Preservation of Photography Collections - This section addressed the causes of deterioration, methods for monitoring and enhancing environmental conditions, best practices for handling, object housing, and microclimates, as well as exhibition standards and mold prevention strategies. Attendees were presented with tangible examples of deteriorated materials, including an acetate negative exhibiting degradation, and housed within a polyester pouch alongside an acid-indicator (AD) strip. This demonstration vividly illustrated the efficacy of such survey tools in preservation practices. To enhance participants' understanding and practical skills, various preservation materials were provided in each instructional binder, including two humidity indicators, one enclosed within packages alongside desiccants, exemplifying the efficacy of sealed microclimates. Additionally, temperature indicator strips and samples of aluminum/polyethylene (MarvelSeal) were distributed, allowing participants to engage in hands-on exercises such as heat sealing and crafting custom housing solutions. This informative segment was delivered on the second day of the workshop, Wednesday, April 24.

- Response and Preparation for Emergencies - In this segment, participants were provided with comprehensive guidelines and printouts of the Spanish version of the Pocket Response Plan™ (PReP™), a valuable resource designed to furnish staff with swift access to crucial information during emergency or disaster scenarios. This customizable document offers a succinct yet comprehensive framework for response protocols, facilitating efficient decision-making and coordination amidst crises. Delivered on the second day of the workshop, Wednesday, April 24, this segment underscored the significance of proactive planning and readiness in safeguarding photographic collections against unforeseen challenges.



Mariset Cancio and Miriam Hernández removing samples from humidification chamber

- Interventive Treatment on Photographic Materials - This segment explored treatment procedures applicable to photographic materials, including surface cleaning, flattening, consolidation, tape removal, tear repair, stabilization, and inpainting. Additionally, participants were briefed on treatments deemed too risky, such as light bleaching and silver mirroring reduction, developing their awareness of conservation nuances. To facilitate hands-on learning, participants were equipped with worksheets to examine samples and formulate treatment proposals. Practical demonstrations of proper photographic documentation techniques illustrated lighting protocols (standard and raking illumination) and the use of a reference plate for adequate record-keeping. Subsequently, attendees gained practical experience executing various treatments, beginning with surface cleaning, humidification, and flattening techniques. They were then encouraged to autonomously implement learned methods, including various silver mirroring reduction techniques, light bleaching, inpainting, tape removal, and the creation of sealed packages. Due to the limited timeframe, participants were encouraged to examine each other's work to observe different techniques, fostering a diverse experiential understanding of various treatments. Conducted on the third day of the workshop, Wednesday, April 25, this predominantly practical session facilitated immersive learning experiences, equipping participants with valuable skills and insights essential for effective photographic conservation practices.



Leticia Rangel washing print

- Study examples, conservation supplies, and practical exercises - Study examples, conservation supplies, and practical exercises were integral to this training. Students were presented with

diverse study examples, allowing them to examine and formulate treatment proposals in provided fillable forms, applying the knowledge assimilated during the preceding sessions. These materials were the focal point for the practical exercises conducted on day three of the workshop, which took place on Wednesday, April 25.

Workshop Evaluation and Next Steps

The workshop effectively condensed a substantial volume of information into a limited timeframe, eliciting enthusiastic engagement from participants, notably during the practical exercises on the final day. The decision to conduct the workshop entirely in Spanish enhanced its effectiveness significantly.



Participants Mariset Cancio, Isbel Ferreiro, Idania Martinez and Yaritza Medina observe prints after light bleaching

Participants demonstrated a very high level of sophistication and understanding. Most had previous advanced training in conservation, and the concepts presented were not new. Proving particularly beneficial was the demonstration of proper documentation techniques, the standard of practice specified in most international conservation codes of ethics and using more recent techniques and materials such as synthetic adhesives or specific interventive techniques.

Engaged discussions on ethical considerations permeated each session. Conservation deontology in Cuba is rooted in European standards of differentiated treatment. Students appeared very positively responsive to the North American approach, emphasizing seamless treatment integration. The importance of using retreatable techniques and documentation (photographic and textual through exam and treatment reports) was discussed. The concept of "retreatability" increasingly put forth by conservators in the Global North over the idea of "reversibility" was especially novel and welcomed by participants.

Opportunities for enhancement in subsequent training iterations include expanding on photographic documentation techniques and providing avenues for participants to review past treatments, fostering a deeper understanding of interventive procedures. Having a chance to review treatments and make observations is essential in solidifying concepts and questioning why some more interventive procedures are only to be employed with deep consideration. Furthermore, there are various standards of practice that attendees did not appear to be familiar with, such as visual reintegration techniques, that can be further demonstrated.

Finally, facilitating participant feedback through workshop evaluations would enable assessing their experience and inform potential avenues for improvement or complementing in future training events.

The instructor expresses profound gratitude for the exceptional experience afforded to all involved, extending appreciation to participants, administrators, and particularly to the contributing entities: the

Public Affairs Office of the United States Embassy in Havana, notably Xavier Billingsley, the Finca Vigía Foundation, the Finca Vigía staff, and especially Mary-Jo Adams for her instrumental role in realizing this training initiative and continues commitment to preserving Ernest Hemingway's legacy.

Respectfully submitted,



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