

Report on *Taller de Conservación y Preservación de Fotografía* - Second Session

Finca Vigía, San Francisco de Paula, Cuba, September 23-27 2024

Instructor: Luisa Casella

Organized by Finca Vigía Foundation

Introduction

The second session of the *Taller de Conservación y Preservación de Fotografía* took place at Finca Vigía in San Francisco de Paula, Cuba, from 23 to 27 of September 2024. Building upon the principles shared in the first session in April, this workshop focused on practical conservation techniques and materials. Participants experimented with a variety of adhesives and consolidants, applying these materials to consolidation of photographic image layers. Additionally, participants experimented with various techniques for separating photographs stuck to glass or blocked to each other, and flattening methods. An essential aspect of the workshop was foregrounding the importance of conservation documentation, underlining its critical role as a standard of practice.

Power cuts on most days limited the use of electrical equipment, but participants adapted by focusing on manual conservation methods. Additionally, with a hurricane warning in effect during the workshop, and heavy rainfall, several participants found it challenging to arrange transportation to the lab. To obviate this, one morning was dedicated to preparing sample kits of adhesives and consolidants for all participants so they would have the necessary materials for future practice.



Participants working independently on the various hand-on exercises (from left: Yuliet Labrada, Isabel Ferreiro, Amanda Sondon, Luisa Casella and Anabel Suarez).

Workshop Overview

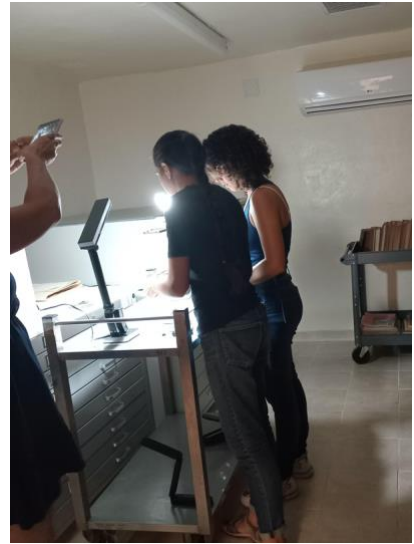
The workshop spanned 4.5 days and was attended by eight participants in total, although most days not all students were able to travel to the Finca. Two of the previous participants were unable to attend (Yaritzta Medina and Miriam Hernández) so two new participants were able to join (Anabel Suarez and Yuliet Labrada). Instructional materials, including worksheets, guides on adhesives, and practical exercises, were provided in Spanish. Binders containing the first session handouts and supplies, as well as the second session handouts and samples were brought such that all participants from both sessions had the complete instructional materials for continued study and experimentation.



Preparing samples of materials for participants who were unable to travel to the Finca proved to be an excellent learning opportunity to handle and become familiar with the various adhesives (left: Yuliet Labrada and Anabel Suarez; right: Isabel Ferreiro).

Topics Covered

- Documentation - Importance and Procedures: Participants learned about examination and documentation methods, following AIC (American Institute for Conservation) guidelines. They practiced illumination techniques, such as normal and raking light, to capture detailed images of objects before and after treatment, and understanding the importance of consistency of records. Each participant received their own reference target that they were encouraged to use for all future documentation¹.
- Adhesives and Consolidants: This section focused on the different adhesives and consolidants commonly used in photographic conservation, including albumin, Aquazol, Klucel-G and Funori. Participants had the opportunity to test these materials, learning about their properties, how to prepare them, and their appropriate application for photographic objects. This session offered participants the opportunity to experiment with materials such as Aquazol that are not commercially available in the region, discussing their properties and applications and finding comparable alternatives.
- Solvents and Humectants: A variety of solvents, such as acetone, ethanol, and isopropanol, were tested for their use in cleaning and treatment of photographic materials. The humectant propylene glycol (Photo-Flo) was tested in cleaning and in helping with the separation of photographs stuck to glass or blocked. The pros and cons of these were discussed and tested.
- Separation of Adhered Photographs: This segment focused on photographs adhered to glass or to each other (blocked), a common issue in photographic collections in humid climates. Participants practiced evaluating the condition of adhered prints and tested appropriate separation techniques, ensuring the preservation of the image layer during the process.
- Consolidation of Emulsion Cracks: Participants practiced consolidation of cracks in photographic emulsions, using adhesives and consolidants to stabilize the damaged areas. Various tools and methods of heat application for flattening of cracks were experimented with.
- Humidification and Flattening: Participants learned techniques of humidification and flattening processes. Different methods were explored and tested.



Yuliet Labrada y Anabel Suarez
photographing objects before treatment.



Leticia Rangel and Isbel Ferreiro
discussing flattening methods.

¹ See: [Kushel, Dan, Luisa Casella and Jiuan Jiuan Chen. 2008. Photographic Reference Plate for Conservation Documentation. Photographic Materials Group, AIC, online publication.](#)

Presentation of New Materials

Recently developed materials in conservation were brought to the lab and presented to participants. Samples of Nano Restore Gels®, developed by the CSGI (Center for Colloid and Surface Science) at the University of Florence, were shown. These gels offer advanced cleaning solutions with minimal residue, but they have had limited application for treating photographic materials.

The other material that has recently been introduced in document conservation that was demonstrated to participants was nanocellulose films using Celova®. This material has interesting properties, including high tensile strength and transparency. These characteristics make it suitable for delicate conservation work, providing both strength and subtlety in applications. Students were able to prepare a sample of nanocellulose film and test it in study collection pieces.

The inclusion of these advanced materials reflects the workshop's broader goal of exposing participants to cutting-edge technologies, even though these may not always be accessible or ideal for the specific environmental and logistical challenges faced in Cuba. In the ever-evolving field of conservation, it is important for conservators to test new techniques even if the result is confirming their preference for methods already used and familiar.

Practical Exercises

The workshop provided numerous hands-on learning opportunities, including:

- Adhesive application and testing: participants experimented with various adhesives like Aquazol and Klucel-G, focusing on their effectiveness in consolidating damaged photographs, some of which are not available in the Cuban market and are of particular interest to students for testing;
- Use of solvents: participants practiced using solvents such as ethanol and acetone for surface cleaning or silver mirroring reduction;
- Separation of adhered and blocked photos: participants worked on separating photographs adhered to glass and to each other (blocked), learning how to choose methods from the least harmful (vapor humidification in chamber) to the most invasive (immersion in water with humectant);
- Emulsion crack and loss consolidation: participants used adhesives and consolidants to stabilize cracks in photographic emulsions, experimenting with both protein-based and acrylic emulsions to understand the varying results;
- Humidification and flattening: participants planned and executed flattening techniques using manual humidification methods;
- Creation of study tools: participants all created swatches of the various adhesives and consolidants in a variety of supports (study silver gelatin photograph; black background;



Deny Javier Alcolea separating photograph stuck to glass.



Amanda Sondon y Anabel Suarez testing various coatings and adhesives.

white background). The materials provided in the workshop are meant to serve as a toolkit for participants for their future work - be it to observe and choose different coatings based on performance, be it as a teaching tool for their own to train future colleagues.

Case-study Application

As a conclusion and real-case application of the workshop teachings, participants and the instructor observed objects from the Finca Vigía collection: one copy silver gelatin print with delaminating emulsion and losses; and a group of five round photographs of Ernest Hemingway and Pauline Pfeiffer that show severe image layer deterioration. The objects were examined, deterioration and its possible causes were discussed and possible treatment approaches were suggested.

The real-case application of learned methods was an especially rewarding moment of the workshop where it became evident that all participants fully grasped the various concepts - from understanding physical deterioration to all the ethical and practical considerations of potential treatment approaches.

Conclusion

The second session of the *Taller de Conservación y Preservación de Fotografía* was a success. Participants gained both technical knowledge and experience in adapting to a variety of treatment approaches and materials. The workshop also introduced them to new conservation technologies, providing experience and understanding with materials that, while not widely available in the region, represent the latest innovations in the field.

Ultimately, the workshop emphasized the importance of adaptability, resourcefulness, and the continuous pursuit of new knowledge in document conservation practices.

Respectfully submitted,



Luisa Casella

Photograph Conservator. MAC, Fellow of AIC.

Ithaca, NY, October 6, 2024



Examining original objects from the Finca collection.