

R.I.T.

*Chester F. Carlson*

College of Science

Center for **IMAGING** SCIENCE

**Seminar Series**

## The Transition from Analog to Digital Imaging at the Metropolitan Museum of Art



**Barbara Bridgers-Johnson**

*General Manager for Imaging, Metropolitan Museum of Art*

The history of photography and its trajectory of technological innovation reflect in the equipment, materials and processes archived within the Museum's secondary and tertiary photographic collections. The juncture between the rise of the Internet and the introduction of digital imaging has proved revelatory in relation to Museum photography. An overview of the first century of the Metropolitan Museum's Photograph Studio will be presented.

**4pm, Wed., May 14, 2008**

**Auditorium of the Center for Imaging Science**

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## **Abstract**

The earliest negatives found in the negative archive at The Metropolitan Museum of Art date to the late 1880's. By 1906, formal photography of objects in the collection began, and newly created negatives were numbered and logged into neat, hand-written ledgers. The next year visitors could purchase printed images of these photographed works at the Information Desk just inside the Museum's main entrance. The relationship between works of art and photographic reproductions of those works, reveals itself in nearly every aspect of museum activity from curatorial study and research, to conservation, merchandising, publishing, design, development and marketing. The history of photography and its trajectory of technological innovation reflect in the equipment, materials and processes archived within the Museum's secondary and tertiary photographic collections. The juncture between the rise of the Internet and the introduction of digital imaging has proved revelatory in relation to Museum photography. Fine art photographers now represent one of the largest communities of high-end digital camera users in the world. In addition, luminous new printing technologies and image editing tools have swept away the concept of the dusty in-house photo studio, and led to centralized centers employing creative, innovative digital artists. As the studio has moved forward, it continues to look back, converting all of the Museum's existing photographic materials to digital form, so that they can exist alongside new direct digital resources. This past fall, the Metropolitan Museum implemented the first phase of its digital asset management system, MediaBin. This important new tool is available for use throughout the Museum and represents the culmination of many years of work and planning, and allows unprecedented access to the Museum's image resources and collections. Along the photographic trajectory, however, it is a natural and inevitable evolution of those first negatives shot in 1906, and those first prints sold quietly across the Museum's Information Desk. An overview of the first century of the Metropolitan Museum's Photograph Studio will be presented.

## **Speaker Bio**

Barbara Bridgers-Johnson, the General Manager for Imaging at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, has been in charge of the Museum's in-house photography program since 1986. She manages a staff of 12 full-time photographers, 6 assistant photographers, and a ten-person administrative, printing and production group. The department began shooting digitally in 1986, and completed the transition to a fully digital workflow in the summer of 1996. Today, the Photograph Studio focuses on direct digital capture, high resolution scanning and post-production, and custom ink-jet prints and facsimiles. Images created in the studio appear in the pages of the beautiful and award-winning exhibition catalogues produced by the Museum, on the Met's website, and are represented in myriad merchandising products found throughout the Museum's stores and satellite shops around the world.