

R.I.T

Chester F. Carlson

College of Science

Center for **IMAGING** SCIENCE

Seminar Series

ANALYSIS AND PRESERVATION OF THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPH



Barbara N. Brown

Photograph Conservator

*Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center
University of Texas at Austin*

Dr. Dusan C. Stulik

Senior Scientist

Getty Conservation Institute

4pm, Wed, Feb 21, 2007

Auditorium of the Center for Imaging Science

This presentation will cover the preservation history of the Niépce First Photograph after its arrival at The University of Texas at Austin in 1963 through the present, and look towards its future. Documentation on the details is still being sought, but the heliograph was first housed in a sealed, protective case, with an atmosphere of nitrogen, sometime in the mid- to late 1960's. The next major undertaking began in June 2002 – the joint HRC/GCI collaborative project during which, after more than 30 years in its original protective enclosure, the First Photograph traveled to the Getty Center for its first scientific examination.

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Abstract

The most important goal of this project was to study the state of preservation of the First Photograph in relation to its long-term preservation. The second goal was to establish, for the first time, an objective conservation baseline that will be used in the future to monitor the state of conservation of the heliograph. Scientific data was also collected to support historical and art historical study of the First Photograph and of the heliographic process. The project also resulted in a new, oxygen-free protective case for the heliograph.

This presentation will address individual aspects of the analysis and examination of the First Photograph, including measurement of the basic parameters of the heliograph, the analytical investigation of the metal support of the image, and a detailed microscopic investigation of the image layer, as well as commentary on the sampling and analysis of the atmosphere of the original protective case. Notes on conservation of the heliograph's frame will be included. New scientific findings will be presented together with a working hypothesis on the formation of the image during the exposure and fixing of the first surviving image recorded from Nature.

Barbara Brown bio sketch

Barbara Brown has been the photograph conservator for the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin since 1987. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a BFA in Art History and studio art, including basic photography, and also completed supplemental coursework in chemistry and art conservation. She then earned an MS in Art Conservation from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation, where she majored in photograph conservation and minored in paper conservation.

Barbara worked in internships at the George Eastman House International Museum of Photography, and the Image Permanence Institute in Rochester, NY, and with conservator in private practice Tom Edmondson, before joining the staff at the HRC. She is an active member of the Photographic Materials Group of the American Institute for Conservation, and has published several papers in Topics in Photographic Preservation including one on another collaboration with Dr. Dusan Stulik and his colleagues at the Getty Conservation Institute discussing the scientific analysis and photohistorical investigation of four metallic photographic prints in the Harry Ransom Center collection.

Dusan Stulik bio sketch

Dr. Stulik is a Senior Scientist at the Getty Conservation Institute. He received his BS and MS degrees in Chemistry and BA in Art History from the Charles University and his PhD in Physics from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague.

Before joining the GCI Dr. Stulik was a Professor of Chemistry at the Washington State University and he served as a Visiting Professor of Material Sciences at the Cornell University. He is a Project Leader of the GCI Research in Photographic Conservation project and his current research focuses on application of modern scientific and analytical methodologies for identification and characterization of photographs and photographic material.

Dr. Stulik is an author or co-author of several scientific and conservation science books and he published more than fifty peer reviewed research articles. He is also a recipient of several prestigious awards for his work related to the preservation of cultural heritage.