

**Photoconservation
Bratislava 2008**

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In this summer, between 21 July and 9 August, took place in Bratislava, at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, an International Course, concerning the Conservation of Photographs, organized by the mentioned Academy, the Getty Institute, and the Slovak National Library.



Fig. 1. Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Faculty of Conservation.

The Course was organized in order to support the efforts of those who are interested in the Conservation of Photographs and in the Development of this domain in the Central, Eastern and Southern Europe.

The three weeks of lectures and practical applications, carried on from Monday to Friday, in the morning and in the afternoon, required solicitude from all the participants, both sides carrying about the collaboration for the best transfer of the knowledge.

So, the first week was dedicated to the Chemistry and the Methods available for Identification of the Old Photographic Processes. The presented lectures become the theoretical background for the next step: the series of tests and analyses intended to set up the individual experience in approaching the issues.



Fig. 2. Practice in analyzing the photographs.

The strange chemistry of Silver and its light-sensitivity, the importance of halides and binding media, the alternatives in image construction (the Non-Silver processes), were important topics, also because of some laboratory demonstrations.



Fig. 3. Prof. Dusan Stulik explaining the Silver Chemistry details.

The most important and well known methods of investigation, from the stereomicroscopic to the FTIR and XRF analyses were presented in order to be used for identifying the old processes and the special cases. Also, some interesting old photographs were described from historical, structural, chemical, and even esthetical point of view.

The team of lecturers in this fundamental week was mainly coming from the Getty Institute: Dusan Stulik –Senior scientist, Art Kaplan – Scientist, Sean Charette – Project Education Specialist, and Janka Krizanova – Internship. From Northeast Document Conservation Center was coming Monique Fischer - Senior Paper Conservator, and from the Slovak Academy of Fine Arts the contribution was coming from Barbara Burianova – Assistant in the Conservation Department.

The first part of the second week was the opportunity to put into operation the knowledge gained before, by studying different cases and trying to identify the processes. In this simple way, everybody could evaluate its own level and by comparing to the others. Here, the team of lecturers increase with Tram Vo – Private Photograph Conservator coming also from Getty Institute. A special mention must be done here about the old photographs for didactic use, that were collected by the teaching staff during the years especially for this aim.



Fig. 4. Different photographic processes, during the identification.

The next three days were dedicated to the problems of Deterioration of Photographs and the issues of Handling, Surveys and Condition Reports. Each of this topics was extensively presented in its content, so that became understandable the main directions for approaching the domain.

The presentation of the Deterioration of the Photographs involved not only the oldest processes but the most recent, considering that the digital photographs replace the analogue ones, which is no more in current use. Each of all this has its own symptoms, that must be recognized, in order to take the appropriate measures.

Gloves for touching the photographs (prints and negatives), using volunteers for arranging the items of a collection following an established plan, making the boxes and four-flaps enclosures, the mounting and framing of the common and oversized photographs, and many other interesting issues formed the body of Handling Presentation. This was fundamental for the next presentation, because without a correct handling procedure we cannot make the correct Survey for a Condition Report.



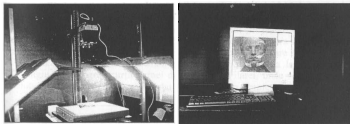
Fig. 5. Aspects during the courses.

The last week started with an impressive visit in Wien, at the Albertina and at Nationalbibliothek, where was presented the general view of the deposits, the areas for studying the items (making the difference between the public and staff rooms), the conservation workshops, and some of important conservation works. This visits were intended to cover the topics of Housing and Matting of Photographs, but were much more useful, because they shown how a long and dedicated experience can improve the conservation conditions and the knowledge in the domain.



Fig. 6. Rooms for study, for public (left) and professionals (right).

The next three days were dedicated to the problems of Documentation of Photographic Collections, namely to the possibilities for Digitalisation, courses held by Klaus Pollmeier, from Studgard Academy of Fine Arts and Design, and with the practical help from Jurgen Seidel, from Anagramm Gesellschaft fur elektronische Systeme mbH,



Munchen.

Fig. 7. Steps of Digitalisation.

The last day was dedicated to some introductory issues concerning the Treatments allowed for Photographs, namely the Surface cleaning, course held by Tram Vo and Janka Krizanova. So that it was again an opportunity to be in contact with old photographs. The importance of a good identification of photographs appeared now as



vital, in order to avoid any dangerous mistake.

Fig. 8. Aspects of Dry Cleaning of Photographs.

So, the three weeks of courses passed like a twinkling, but with a huge impact in improving the understanding and knowledge of old and new photographic processes. The Generosity of the Project, the high professional standards, the beautiful city, were all very helpful for the team, in order to gain the experience and the confidence, needed to be at their turn helpful for their institutions and their general practice.