

AIC Photographic Materials Group Meeting, May 30, 2014

Condition documentation and monitoring of an exhibition of daguerreotypes at the State Hermitage Museum

Jiuan Jiuan Chen, Assistant Professor of Conservation Imaging and Technical Examination, Art Conservation Department at Buffalo State College, Chen, chenj@buffalostate.edu

Tatiana Sayatina, Head, Laboratory for Scientific Conservation of Photographic Materials, The State Hermitage Museum, tsayatina@rambler.ru

Paul Messier, Conservator, Paul Messier LLC, pm@paulmessier.om

ABSTRACT:

From December 7, 2011 to February 5, 2012, the State Hermitage Museum produced a major exhibition entitled *The Age of the Daguerreotype: Early photography in Russia* displaying significant daguerreotypes from its collection with major loans received from the Museum of the Russian Literature Institute of the Russian Academy of Science and the Library of the Russian Academy of Arts. One of the first large-scale photography shows at the Hermitage, the exhibition was considered a breakthrough, displaying for the first time many objects of significant artistic, historical and cultural value. Curated by Dr. Natalia Avetyan of the Hermitage's Department of Russian History and Culture, the exhibition received wide recognition and awards from the Committee of St. Petersburg Culture and the Vladimir Potanin Foundation.

This exhibition also was notable from the standpoint of being the first major display of daguerreotypes following *Young America: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth & Hawes* which was organized by the George Eastman House and the International Center of Photography. This exhibit traveled to three venues from June 17, 2005 to April 9, 2006 and the showed more than 160 daguerreotypes from 37 major institutions and collectors. Carefully documented, changes to some plates occurred during this exhibition, including the development of a white haze. Subsequent research led by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a lender to *Young America*, demonstrated contact with chlorine-containing compounds can cause silver to be re-deposited on the surface of daguerreotype plate upon exposure to ultraviolet radiation and light.

Cognizant of this research and its implications, the newly formed Laboratory for Scientific Restoration of Photographic Materials (within the Department of Scientific Restoration and Conservation) at the Hermitage Museum, as part of its involvement in an ongoing FAIC-Mellon initiative in photograph conservation, developed and implemented a unique system to document the condition of displayed items before, during and after exhibition. This system primarily relied on precisely controlled and repeatable photographic documentation combined with a tablet computer-based system for daily inspection of the plates while on display in the galleries. This work was combined with active monitoring and recording of temperature, relative humidity, light intensity and duration. Careful examination of the documentation before and after exhibition indicated there were no obvious, visible, changes to the plates as a result of display. However, existing deterioration products on the interior of cover glasses showed changes in size, distribution and amount. This work clearly demonstrates the dynamic nature of the microclimate within a daguerreotype case or passe-partout. The presentation will focus on the documentation system, display monitoring protocols and an examination of results following exhibition.