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Surface classification for black and white prints

Paul Messier¹, James Coddington², Lee Ann Daffner³

The appearance of a photograph is defined, in part, by surface texture and sheen. Manufacturers of 20th century photographic paper developed their own systems for describing these attributes, often consolidating them into proprietary surface designations. Manufacturer surface designations are useful and interesting but ultimately are of limited use when describing the full range and diversity of silver gelatin papers. To create a shared vocabulary describing surfaces, classification experiments were conducted based on human observations. These subjective groupings were augmented by measurements of gloss and surface texture. This work resulted in the formulation of six archetypal surface categories. Adoption and use of these proposed categories will help conservators, curators, collectors and other allied fields effectively communicate surface attributes when describing silver gelatin photographs.

¹ Conservator of Photographs, Paul Messier LLC, Boston, MA 02135, USA, 617 782 7110, pm@paulmessier.com

² Agnes Gund Chief Conservator, Conservation Department, Museum of Modern Art

³ Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Conservator of Photographs, Conservation Department, Museum of Modern Art