

Topics in Preservation Series, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, USA, March 19, 2010

## **Development and Research Applications for a Reference Collection of 20th Century Photographic Paper**

Paul Messier<sup>1</sup>

The largest collection of its kind in the world, Paul Messier's reference collection of photographic papers was started in the late 1990s to provide /an objective baseline for dating and authenticating photographic prints/ for scholars and connoisseurs. Papers typically enter the collection in manufacturer sample books or original manufacturer packages. Samples from 65 manufacturers, comprising over 360 brands, have been fully catalogued by manufacturer, brand, surface texture and reflectance. Containing over 5,000 samples, the collection was begun as a response to major authenticity scandals involving fraudulent print by photographers Man Ray and Lewis Hine.

This lecture will include an overview of the collection's contents, and descriptions of notable studies to date that have drawn on this resource. These projects include a survey for optical brightening agents, an online catalog of manufacturer back printing, measurements of inorganic components in the baryta layer (in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute), paper fiber identification (in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art) and the stability of optically brightened paper (in collaboration with the Art Conservation Research Center, Carnegie Mellon University).

Future research initiatives will include a survey of fluorescence behavior, a searchable catalog of surface textures and the creation of statistical algorithms for dating prints of questioned or unknown origin. Along with these and yet to be conceived research applications, the collection serves the intrinsically valuable function of preserving materials at the heart of 20th century photography.

A webcast of the presentation is available:

<http://www.loc.gov/preserv/tops/messier/index.html>

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