



NEWSGRAM

News in brief from the Conservation Center

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INSTITUTE of FINE ARTS
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Joint Meeting of the AIC Photograph Materials Group and the ICOM-CC Photograph Materials Working Group

Wellington, New Zealand, February 11–15, 2013

On February 11th, third-year conservation student Maggie Wessling and recent alumna Katie Sanderson '11 traveled to Wellington, New Zealand, to participate in the second joint winter meeting of the photographs working groups of the AIC and the ICOM-CC.

The week-long meeting was held at the *Te Papa Tongarewa*, the national museum of New Zealand. The conference began with tours of the museum and other notable collections in the city including the *National Archives*, the *National Library*, and the *New Zealand Film Archive*. Conference participants had the opportunity to see collections, visit conservation labs, and meet local conservators. Of particular interest was a tour of the Māori art collections at the *Te Papa* museum. The Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand, and *Te Papa* now preserves extensive holdings of their cultural heritage. Preserving the Māori collections requires extensive knowledge of the history of the people and their traditions, which was eloquently communicated by the museum's conservators and collections managers. The presentation of the Māori culture culminated in a special *Whakapapa* (pronounced: [*ˈfakapapa*]) ceremony held at the end of the second day of the conference to welcome all the participants.

The last three days of the conference involved talks given by a variety of professionals working in photograph conservation and preservation around the world. Talk topics included disaster recovery and preparedness, technical analysis and research, conservation materials and protocols, collections surveys, and public outreach.

I presented my current research into a specific wire-transfer facsimile technology from the mid-twentieth century, in a talk entitled, "Characterizing United Press International's Unifax Facsimile Prints." These prints represent an early means of transferring pho-

tographic images over great distances in a short period of time, now a process rendered obsolete by digital technology. Colleagues were especially interested in a re-creation of the process using filter paper, solutions of sodium chloride and catechol, and a thumbtack. Many from New Zealand and Australia had encountered similar facsimile prints in their collections, and I was invited to the National Library to examine wire-transfer facsimile prints in their collection.

Katie Sanderson, Assistant Conservator of Photographs at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA), presented her ongoing research quantifying color change in photographs using spectrophotometry. Katie's talk was innovative for the length of time covered by the study (using data dating back 20 years), as well as conclusions she was able to draw, in some cases related to a particular artist's work, a particular process, and the relationship of these to exhibition and storage history.

Katie also presented a talk by adjunct professor Nora Kennedy, Sherman Fairchild Conservator of Photographs at the MMA, who was unable to attend the conference. The talk focused on her work writing the technical glossary for the catalogue accompanying the recent exhibition *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photo-shop*. The talk used examples from the exhibition to illustrate both common and lesser-known methods of photographic manipulation, and highlighted the challenges of refining a list of technical vocabulary as well as the necessity in the midst of the digital age to include such basic terms as "darkroom" and "negative." As the final presentation of the conference, it was a fitting tribute to the history of analog photography.

Overall the conference was rich with content, networking and enjoyment, and both I (whose travel expenses were entirely covered by the 50th Anniversary Fund) and Katie were appreciative of the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from an international forum. We are both looking forward to publishing our research in the conservation literature. •

–Maggie Wessling

Maggie is a third-year photo conservation student

Photo credit: Maggie Wessling