

Edited by Debra Hess Norris and Jennifer Jae Gutierrez
from the Readings in Conservation series.
Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2010

When I received my copy of the new book *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs*, which is the most recent publication in the Getty Conservation Institute's series "Readings in Conservation," I could tell even as I unwrapped it that it would be something special. As I opened it and with growing excitement perused the Table of Contents, I found myself thinking nostalgically of a period in the past when as a conservation student there were so many books that I turned to with an eager anticipation of discovery. In time comes familiarity, the texts become references, and fewer publications appear with such excitement and novelty. *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs*, now that I've had time to examine it more fully, turns out to have profound value that fleshes out my initial interest in a most satisfying way. This will be a reference I turn to many times, initially to recapture something of that eagerness of my student days, later as a memory refresher as any true reference will be; and also as a very useful tool in teaching.

In fact, as I recall another book I fell upon in this manner was the first volume in the Getty Conservation Institute's series "Readings in Conservation," *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. I suppose it shows my nerdiness that I read that book from cover to cover, and promptly used it in teaching. *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs* is the third in the series; I do not have the second, *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings* but I now think I will have to get it, despite the fact that I am not a paintings conservator, since the other two are such valuable compilations of core material.

One great frustration that I and others experienced in studying photograph conservation was the fact that the most important sources of information about the materials and their stability and preservation were so dispersed and in some cases hard to obtain. (Clearly this is a problem shared with other specialties, thus the need for the GCI series). Once acquired, usually in photocopy form, the articles became an ongoing storage and access problem that even the best bibliography and filing system would struggle to conquer. This new book is a first step, and a critical one, in solving these problems.

Comprising 72 texts, the earliest from 1850 and most recent published in 2010, *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs* was compiled by Debra Hess Norris and Jennifer Jae Gutierrez, both of the University of Delaware. (Telling, isn't it, that as early as 1850 Eugene Vaillant published an article entitled "Process for Restoring Stained and Oxidized Old Prints to their Original Condition"--the "old prints" in question being daguerreotype plates a maximum of 11 years old!) According to the opening pages of the book, the editors solicited suggestions for citations from 50 photograph conservators and made their selections with the help of an international advisory committee of well-recognized photograph conservators and a core group of readers.

The articles are divided into eight sections: "I. History of Photograph Conservation," "II. Silver Image Structure and Stability," "III. Silver, Mercury, and Gold: Philosophical and Practical Approaches in the Preservation of Daguerreotypes," "IV. Albumen Print Materials: Manufacture, Structure, and Treatment," "V. Photographic Negatives: Problems and Issues," "VI. The Preservation of Color Photography," "VII. Developing Criteria in the Conservation of Photographs: Collection Management and Treatment," and "VIII. Exhibition Practice." There are also three valuable Appendices with identification aides; and an extensive section of "Further Reading" which is a bibliography organized in sections paralleling the topics detailed above.

In many cases the book reprints the original article in its entirety; in others the work is excerpted or a chapter taken from a larger work of importance (e.g., Robert A. Weinstein's and Larry Booth's "Introduction" from their book *Collection, Use, and Care of Historical Photographs* of 1978.) In still other cases, such as James M. Reilly's "Stability Problems of 19th and 20th-Century Photographic Materials (1980)," an article originally published as a stand-alone text is used apparently in place of a better-known, but longer work—in this case, Reilly's book *Care and Identification of 19th-Century Photographic Prints*, 1986.

The selection of articles is excellent and clearly benefited from the wide range of professionals who contributed during the selection process. Indeed, it is an achievement to have compiled such a comprehensive list of sources and then to have arranged them so coherently, seemingly without anything important omitted or misplaced. (Please note that I, like the editors, am counting the "Further Reading" section as containing important references that could not be included in the text itself.)

Comprehensive though the book is, it is still very consciously within its specific topic of the conservation of traditional photographs. Related topics, such as the history of photographs or the conservation of digital materials, are notably and rightly absent. In the case of the former, the topic is a discipline in its own right and including even a limited section of it would have hopelessly lengthened and bogged down this book and complicated the process of compiling it. In the case of the latter, again the topic touches broader issues beyond the range of the field of photograph conservation proper; also these materials and their preservation issues are still recent in development. While research on their preservation has been initiated and quite a bit already published, it would be difficult to feel that a section about them could be truly comprehensive, as yet. While a photograph conservator needs knowledge of both these topics, it must be gained from other sources. Finally, *Issues* is a book of readings, and as such it is not a textbook per se. A student of photograph conservation will find it a treasure of core texts, but must rely on her instructors or her own comprehension of the subject to provide the context and structure necessary to make sense of the group of readings as a whole.

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Book Review, continued

When I was asked to write something about *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs*, it was pointed out that our field is still so small, and everyone involved is so familiar with each other through training and work relationships, that a true critical review of such a publication may be impossible. Fortunately for me as a reviewer, as well as for the field as a whole, this publication is so genuinely valuable and well-presented that it is not necessary to parse my criticism. However, in the interests of full disclosure I must point out that, not only do I count Debra Norris as a former teacher, mentor, and inspiration (as does, it would be fair to say, most of the field); but I was also privileged to be a summer internship supervisor for Jae Gutierrez when she was a graduate student. I congratulate them, as well as their advisory committee, on the completion of this wonderful book. The field has been enriched from their efforts.

Articles You May Have Missed
