

Icon Photographic Materials Group - Lightning Talks

Wednesday 10th December 2025 Programme

10:00 – 10:10 Welcome and housekeeping

Session 1 – In focus, special processes

10:10-10:15 Introduction of session & speakers

10:15 – 10:20 *All That Glitters is not Gold: Analysis, Treatment & Display of an Unusual Process at the National Portrait Gallery*

Sarah Allen, Project Conservator: Photographs, National Portrait Gallery (UK)

“This beautiful and unusual photograph was found at the bottom of a box at the National Portrait Gallery and brought to the conservation department for identification and preparation for display. The photograph was, to be frank, a conundrum. It was on an extremely soft and flexible metal base, the emulsion was in perfect condition, and it shone like gold. This lightning talk discusses the detective work that was undertaken to identify it (which included consulting photographic history experts from around the world and collaborating with the V&A conservation science department) in order to inform its treatment and display.”

10:20– 10:25 *Keeping it together - treatment of broken and delaminating autochromes*

Mathilde Renauld, Senior Conservator, paper and photography, Victoria & Albert Museum (UK)

"The V&A recently acquired around 150 autochromes by Helen Messinger Murdoch from a private collection. These vary in sizes - from expected formats (full-plates and half-plates) to unusual and tiny plates (100x126mm and 44x59mm). While most of the acquisition was in good condition, 36 autochromes needed to be stabilised urgently for future use and access, due to having broken or missing glass, as well as lifting/lost emulsion, sometimes over large extents.

This presentation will explain the damage seen and the conservation treatment steps, including re-adhering lifted emulsion, repairing broken image-carrying glass, and saving inscriptions on the original paper tape."

10:25 – 10:30 *Snips of the Royal Photographic Society*

Paula Ogayar Oroz, Project Conservator: Paper & Photographs, Victoria & Albert Museum (UK)

“The V&A has endeavoured in the monumental task of entirely cataloguing and digitising the Royal Photographic Society collection, which moved to South Kensington in 2017 from the National Media Museum in Bradford. As part of this effort, and with the hope of understanding the challenges ahead, a survey of 5% of the collection has been conducted. In this presentation, a snippet of the more fascinating finds will be highlighted. From a sealed suitcase with an absent key, to early cinema in glass and microscopic images, the RPS collection holds treasures yet to be discovered by the public.”

10:30 – 10:45 Questions and discussion

10:45-10:50 Short break

Session 2 – Community, building and protecting

10:50-10:55 Introduction of session & speakers

10:55–11:00 ***Documentation as a shield against dissociation: Emergency interventions of personal heritage***

Ana Carreres Llopis, freelance conservador in Valencia, Spain

“This presentation focuses on some of the challenging aspects of the early recovery of materials affected by the 2024 floods in Valencia. The project, still ongoing and run by a task force of more than 300 volunteers, aimed to retrieve private photographic heritage from the affected households. While literature can be found on the techniques and needs to recover photographic materials, there was no basis for the legal and ethical way to work with private heritage. These are some of the measures taken to prevent dissociation of the 340.000 photographs that came from more than 400 families.”

11:00 – 11:05 ***Founding the First Photographic Conservation Centre in China: Challenges, Gaps and New Beginnings***

Yue Li, PhD Candidate in Photography, University of Westminster. Director, China Institute for Photographic Conservation (Hong Kong)

“This talk shares the story behind founding the first photographic conservation centre in China and the journey of introducing photographic preservation to a field where no institutional infrastructure previously existed. Drawing from my experiences since 2019, I will discuss the challenges of establishing a new professional discipline, the absence of local training, and the need to translate global conservation knowledge into Chinese cultural and material contexts. The talk will also highlight the re-establishment of our centre in Hong Kong, our current initiatives in public education and capacity building, and how grassroots efforts can contribute to shaping a sustainable future for photographic conservation in China.”

11:05 – 11:10 ***RICHeS mobile lab access***

David Thickett, English Heritage (UK)

“The RICHeS Integrated sustainability and materials deterioration facility is now open to access requests. A pilot access with the National Motor Museum will analyse a large portion of their 5000 cine film collection to identify cellulose acetate bases. This will prioritise freezing to preserve this material. The access will involve using two portable FTIR spectrometers onsite with four scientists and pollution measurements to assess the preservation environment. The facility will also be able to investigate improvements in sustainability, through building performance measurements and diagnosing faults. It will have a focus on deterioration measurements and mechanisms and the access aims to correlate A/D strip results with FTIR deterioration measurements.”

11:10 – 11:25 ***Questions and discussion***

11:25– 11:40 Break

Session 3 – Understanding degradations

11:40-11:45 Introduction of session & speakers

11:45 – 11:50 ***How long should we display this photograph?***

Esther Ng, Conservator, Heritage Conservation Centre, Singapore

“This talk presents on the microfading of photographs as a tool to assess the light sensitivity of photographs so as to determine display options for a 10 year exhibition at the National museum of Singapore. The microfading set up at the Heritage conservation centre will be briefly introduced, together with a few case studies of testing photographs, ranging from tinted albumen to hand-coloured photographs. The objective is to establish a feasible display and rotation guideline for photographs that balance between preservation, use and operational feasibility.”

11:50 – 11:55 ***Fading and Recovery in Blueprints: Revisiting Light Sensitivity in Display and Storage.***

Alison Grotz, Freelance Book and Paper conservator with Artemis Papierrestauratie (NL)

“Prussian-blue-based blueprints are traditionally limited in exhibition due to their perceived extreme light sensitivity. This study examined short-term fading and re-oxidation during real world “daylight exposure/overnight dark” cycles at 50, 500, and 5000 lux, and tested whether storage configurations influence colour recovery after accelerated fading. Fading remained negligible at 50 and 500 lux. Only 5000 lux produced visually perceptible change. All storage methods (individual folders, stacked folders, and polyester enclosures) supported similar recovery rates. These results indicate that blueprints tolerate low and moderate light levels more safely than previously assumed, enabling broader access with appropriate monitoring.”

11:55 – 12:00 ***Silver Mirroring: Documentation Utilizing Polarized Imaging***

Diane Knauf, PhD student, Imaging Science at Rochester Institute of Technology (USA)

“This research investigates the use of polarized imaging to document and quantify the surface coverage of silver mirroring on silver gelatin prints. Conventional methods, such as oblique illumination and UV-reflected imaging, are limited by distortion and UV exposure. Using a DSLR camera equipped with linear polarization filters, polarized imaging offers a standardized approach to visualize and map mirrored regions by exploiting the differential reflectance between silver mirroring and the emulsion layer. The project will develop a documentation protocol and quantitative method for assessing silver mirroring coverage, improving consistency and accuracy in monitoring its progression over time.”

12:00 – 12:15 **Questions and discussion**

12:15-12:20 Short break

Session 4 – Collection care and long-term perspectives

12:20 – 12:25 Introduction of session & speakers

12:25 – 12:30 *Conserving Nikolaos Zographos' Negatives: Rediscovering a Greek Photographic Legacy*

Adia (Archontia) Adamopoulou, Conservator in Private Practice at Athens Art Conservation Studio, Greece

“The recently rediscovered negatives of Nikolaos Zographos reveal a hidden chapter of early 20th-century Greek photography. Around 1,000 negatives, showing meticulous retouching and mastery of diverse historical techniques, offer rare insight into the artist’s creative process. This talk highlights the conservation approach, material analysis, and preventive strategies used to stabilize these fragile artifacts. Beyond technical challenges, the project underscores the archive’s cultural significance, providing a fuller understanding of Zographos’ work and demonstrating how the preservation of photographic materials can illuminate overlooked artistic legacies.”

12:30 – 12:35 *Vinegar Syndrome: When Negatives Turn Sour*

Jade Pinkett, Conservation Technician, National Museum of the Royal Navy (UK)

“The National Museum of the Royal Navy is racing against time to slow the deterioration of cellulose acetate negatives affected by vinegar syndrome through improved storage and documentation. These acetate negatives, previously housed in unsuitable conditions, have suffered accelerated decay due to limited time, funding, and staff. Polyester negatives in the same collection remain stable but require rehousing for long-term care. What began as a student placement in 2021 has grown into a major ongoing project (2024–present), offering valuable lessons for both Conservation and Collection teams. This talk explores challenges, strategies, and collaborative learning in safeguarding vulnerable photographic materials.”

12:35 – 12:40 *Hanging Out at the PAA: Updating Oversized Panoramic Storage*

Sean McKinnon Conservation Intern, Provincial Archives of Alberta (Canada)

“This presentation discusses the development of updated storage for panoramic photographs and negatives within the Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA) holdings. Previous solutions had begun to fail due to age as well as overfilling. Updated slings were tested and made to have increased longevity and accessibility while keeping sustainability and material reuse in mind. This opportunity allowed for collaboration within the conservation lab and across the archives, provided many valuable learning experiences, and produced design and fabrication instructions that can be used for future expansion of the holdings.”

12:40 – 12:55 Questions and discussion

12:55 – 13:00 **Closing remarks**