Between originality and functionality. Conservation challenges of two photographic albums from the Saturnino Herrán Foundation

Ariadna Rodríguez Corte
Photograph Conservation Fellow Amon Carter Museum of American Art

This poster presents the decision-making process regarding the conservation treatments of two photo albums from the Saturnino Herrán Foundation’s (SHF) Archive.

The SHF is a small foundation that aims to disseminate the work and life of the Mexican painter Saturnino Herrán (SH) and is directed by Saturnino Herrán’s grandson, Saturnino Herrán Gudiño (SHG). SHG gathered the family documents related to SH and created the archive with the aim to allow researchers and people interested in SH’s artwork and life to study these documents.

During the examination many elements of the albums suggested that they were bound by SH. Nevertheless, the original bookbinding did not allow the safe handling of the albums, so the transformation of their structure was required. Through a video call with SHG during the spring of 2020 we assessed together the original elements that suggested the SH’s intervention and determined which ones would be transformed through the conservation treatment.

### Decision Making

**Original binding issues**

- During the examination the conservator observed that while the binding structure was thought to be original it was no longer functional.

**Original features**

- These were emphasized by SHG as relevant evidence of Saturnino Herrán’s craftsmanship.

### Conservation Treatment

**Decision 1.** Thin Japanese paper hinges joined the leaves together in order to avoid increasing the width of the albums.

**Decision 2.** A French link stitch provided strength and enabled the book to open widely.

**Decision 3.** A Japanese paper hollow tube released the tension in the spine.

### Blue Album Issue

- Stapled spine
- Photograph attached by SH that reveals his love for bullfights
- Thick leaves
- Use of recycled materials
- Adhesive spots attaching the leaves together
- Guide drawing and irregular trimming of window mat
- Leaves partially detached

### Red Album Issue

- Stapled spine
- Photograph attached by SH that reveals his love for bullfights
- Thick leaves
- Use of recycled materials
- Adhesive spots attaching the leaves together
- Guide drawing and irregular trimming of window mat
- Leaves partially detached

### Resolution

As result of the discussion with SHG, we determined that the priority of the treatment was to provide a new structure: flexible and strong for both albums, even though the original binding was constructed by SH. The other original features made by SH were preserved in the new binding structure because they were in good condition.

### Conclusions

This project demonstrates that conservation in private practice can be an opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders. Sharing concerns, expectations, and different ways to see and understand these objects was very important to determine and execute an appropriate conservation treatment.

The author recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic adds extra challenges to collaborating with stakeholders. In this case, new strategies and digital resources had to be implemented to replace the physical interaction with the albums.