



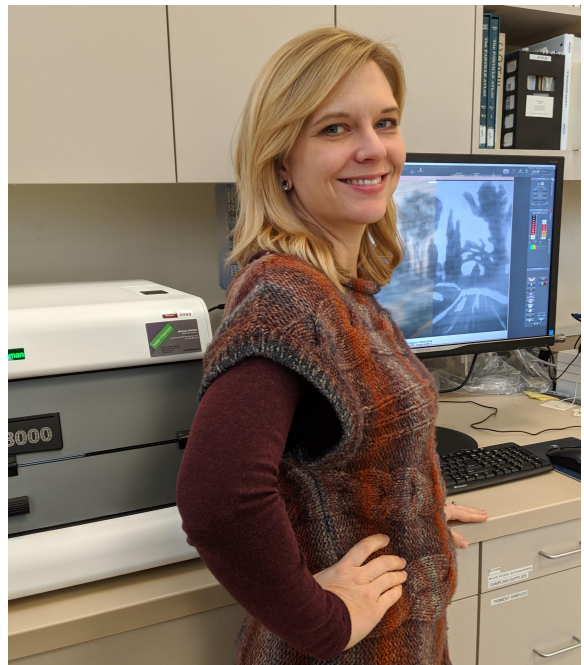
Emerging
Conservation
Professionals
Network

Each month, ECPN is proud to introduce one of our amazing Specialty Group Liaisons. Specialty Group Liaisons are volunteers who serve as an intermediary between emerging conservation professionals who are interested in or part of the specialty group they represent. To learn more about ECPN liaisons, contact the ECPN Outreach Officers at ecpn.outreach@culturalheritage.org or visit ECPN's website.

For our November Liaison Highlight we welcome the new Photographic Materials Group (PMG) Liaison, Sarah Casto.

Sarah is the Photograph Conservation Fellow at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in Fort Worth, Texas. She received her M.A., C.A.S. in Art Conservation from Buffalo State College and a B.F.A. in Photography from Bowling Green State University. She has completed internships at the Cleveland Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institution Archives and Archives of American Art, The Better Image, and the Art Institute of Chicago. She specializes in the conservation of photographic materials.

Photo: Sarah Casto uses the VSC 8000, a forensic imaging tool, to analyze photographic prints and negatives as part of her fellowship research project at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art.



1. Of all the specializations, why did you decide to pursue photograph conservation?

I completed my undergraduate degree in fine art photography at a time when it was still entirely darkroom-based; I processed all my own film and prints, and even designed and built my own experimental cameras, which helped me understand the entire photographic process from initial exposure to final print. Even with a BFA in photography, I had been planning to specialize in paper conservation during my first year of graduate training because I was afraid I would ruin my love of photography by making it my job - but I couldn't resist the draw of photographs when it finally came time to choose. Every photograph I approach teaches me something new about a process, a material, or an artist, and I love that about my specialty.

2. Are there any particular skills that you feel are important or unique to your discipline?

Process identification! Correctly identifying and understanding the material properties of photographs is essential when assessing condition and planning treatment. Each photographic support, binder, image material, and coating has unique properties that affect the way a photograph ages, responds to the environment, and responds to treatment. I would argue that there are countless photographic processes out there, and I've learned that photographers can (will, and do!) manipulate a photographic process to make it look like something entirely different.

3. What has been your favorite treatment within your specialty?

My favorite treatment is inpainting – I love to match the true tone of a black and white photograph, which is rarely ever truly black and white. It's also a treatment that I don't get to do very often; if a photographer didn't retouch or spot out areas after making a print, a treatment usually only addresses inpainting of something like a tear or loss that happened later. A recent very challenging treatment during my fellowship brought a large albumen silver photograph from an un-exhibitable condition to the gallery walls, and I was able to inpaint extensive tears and losses throughout the photograph to unify the image.

4. Do you have any advice for someone interested in specializing in your discipline?

Look closely at as many types of photographs as you can and make some photographs of your own, especially if you've never been in a darkroom before. Sign up for a class, use a view camera, take a historic process workshop, and look through old photography manuals. Photography is inherently a chemical process, relying on the light-induced response of materials like silver halides and silicon-based semiconductors. I first learned photography from the viewpoint of an artist, so I started studying these chemical mechanisms long after I learned to correctly use the darkroom chemicals themselves, and I'm still learning every day. If you're like me and love photography, it will help you at work and in your own photography practice.