

BULLETIN

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Department of Photograph ConservationSherman Fairchild Center for Works on Paper and Photograph Conservation

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1 ◆ Berenice Abbott's New York Album — On view in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Howard Gilman Gallery, Berenice Abbott's New York Album, 1929, revolves around the artist's eponymous photograph album assembled during that year. Between 1921 and 1929, Abbott lived in Paris, where she learned to photograph as Man Ray's studio assistant and then later opened her own portrait studio. She returned to New York City in 1929 to find the cityscape changed, with gleaming skyscrapers rapidly replacing "old New York." Abbott aspired to document these changes, inspired in part by French photographer Eugène Atget, with whom she had found a professional resonance, admiring his methodical dedication to documenting his beloved Paris as it, too, modernized. Following Atget's death in 1927, Abbott acquired his glass plates and archive, intent on promoting his work and ensuring his place in the photographic canon, including publishing Atget, Photographe de Paris in 1930, a copy of which is also on view. Curator Mia Fineman foregrounds the disbound 1929 album leaves, together with numerous other photographs by Abbott, Atget, and other contemporary photographers including Margaret Bourke-White and Walker Evans.

In her New York album, Abbott arranged the 266 small, glossy gelatin silver prints onto the pages of a standard commercially

produced album with black paper pages. The leaves include a selection of images that helped to inform Abbott's iconic 1939 E. P. Dutton & Co. publication of her photographs, *Changing New York*, produced with her partner, the prominent art critic Elizabeth McCausland. The publication of *Changing New York* was supported by the Works Progress Administration and remains a definitive photographic guide to New York City in the 1930s.

Unlike many objects in the collections at The Met, Berenice Abbott's album arrived in comparatively poor condition. Already disbound and missing its covers, the album's 32 loose leaves were gifted to the Museum in small batches between 1978 and 1984. Originally held together with screw posts that passed through two holes along the left edge, the leaves support between six and twelve photographs each, mounted to the rectos with swipes of adhesive. Some of the photographs have become discolored; some have creases where Abbott seems to have been composing a future image; many have graphite checkmarks in the image areas; some were mechanically removed from the leaves and housed in display mats upon arrival at The Met. The black paper support leaves themselves are now extremely delicate, with significantly damaged edges and many tears resulting from use and the







inherent deterioration of the short-fibered poor-quality paper. Thankfully, their lives here at The Met have kept them protected across the last four decades in enclosures that have limited their direct handling.

The delicate condition of the leaves, a lack of definitive archival order, and the inherent weakness of the text block paper make the volume impossible to rebind into an integrally sound bound volume. These limitations, though, also present the opportunity to share the album's content more broadly rather than offering a view of just a single opening page spread. Abbott's photographs are mounted only on the front of each leaf; thus, matting and framing the conserved pages does not limit visual access in this way either.

Individual leaves have, through the years, been treated by various conservators for exhibition, with a leaf shown most recently in *The New Woman Behind the Camera* in 2021. Associate Conservator Georgia Southworth and Research Scholar Catherine E. "Cat" Stephens have now prepared the complete set of album leaves for exhibition and digital access, employing a relatively non-interventive treatment protocol to stabilize each object and present the work in a way that integrates visually distracting damage yet allows each to be shown as clearly having been part of a once-bound volume. Conservation treatment entailed consolidating the photographic emulsions with gelatin where they had become creased or damaged—either intentionally by the artist in composing an image or unintentionally through years of

use—and mending the numerous tears in the delicate black album leaves. After the leaves were treated, each was hinged to a tertiary support of black acrylic-painted 2-ply matboard, which visually recreates the concept of an original album page and offers structural support to the object. These black tertiary supports do not disguise the deterioration of the album leaves, yet they diminish their visual distractions and allow one's focus to return to the intimacy of the small photographs. Experiencing the leaves exhibited together on the gallery walls gives a wonderful sense of how the artist envisioned and carried out the project. Rarely does an exhibition proposal provide the chance to address the preservation needs of an entire complex object like Berenice Abbott's Album, and being able now to share the newly conserved leaves helps advance the understanding of this iconic American artist.



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Images: ◆ Left: Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge Nora Kennedy, Associate Conservator Georgia Southworth, and Curator Mia Fineman reviewing album leaves. ◆ Center: Research Scholar Cat Stephens hinges a detached photograph back into its original location. ◆ Right: Associate Conservator Georgia Southworth mends tears in an album leaf. ◆ Lower right: Preparing an album leaf (1982.1180.87-.95) for hinging to its acrylic-toned tertiary support for display. ◆ Credits: Georgia Southworth and Cat Stephens

2 ♦ Welcoming Natasha Kung — We are delighted to announce that Natasha Kung joined The Met staff as Assistant Conservator for Photographs on March 6th. Many of you will remember Natasha in her previous roles at the Museum. She initially joined the Department of Photograph Conservation as an unpaid, part-time intern in the fall of 2016 while working other jobs, interning in numerous other conservation labs. and completing coursework requirements for conservation graduate school. She was then hired as a Research Assistant in Photograph Conservation in November 2017, prior to her acceptance into the New York University (NYU) graduate conservation program. During her previous Met employment, Natasha provided invaluable assistance researching Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey daguerreotype plates and housings for the 2019 exhibition Monumental Journey: The Daguerreotypes of Girault de Prangey curated by Stephen Pinson. A key member of the team, she ensured that all data collected about the plates was organized and accessible and assisted with the materials testing and modification of the design of the daguerreotype packages.

Natasha earned undergraduate BA degrees from NYU in Chemistry and Art History. Then, during the four-year NYU graduate conservation program, she gained varied experiences holding internships at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia, the Barbara Goldsmith Preservation and Conservation Department at NYU, the Ancient Site of Aphrodisias in Turkey, and NYU's Villa La Pietra in Florence. Upon graduation from NYU with an MS in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works and an MA in the History of Art and Archaeology, Natasha accepted the Craigen W. Bowen Paper Conservation Fellowship at the Harvard Art Museums. After work hours, she serves as a Research Assistant for the Getty Conservation Institute's Readings in Conservation publication, *Philosophical Issues* in the Conservation of Contemporary Art, with editors Glenn Wharton, Brian Castriota, and Rebecca Gordon.

After joining the American Institute for Conservation in 2018, Natasha became an active member of the AIC's Emerging Conservation Professionals Network, first as the Regional Liaison for New York City and later as the Graduate Liaison for the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU. During 2020 and 2021, she prepared PowerPoint presentations to accompany the audio lectures on photographic chemistry by Dr. Scott Williams,



funded and hosted by the Foundation for the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) and currently accessible online. With the waning of analog photography, these online courses provide hundreds of individuals worldwide with access to the complex world of photochemistry, so critical to photograph conservators and allied professionals.

Natasha replaces Diana L. Díaz Cañas, who was Assistant Conservator from February 2020 to October 2022 and has returned home to Texas for the arrival of her first child. Diana is now employed as the Head of Photograph Conservation at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

Please join us in welcoming Natasha to The Met!



3 → CSMVS in Mumbai Highlights Treasures of Early Photography in India — In November 2022, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS Museum) in Mumbai, India, made history by inaugurating its exhibition of photographs as part of the ongoing centenary celebrations of the Museum. The exhibition, Early Photography and Archaeology in Western India has broken new ground in many ways. A collaboration between the British Library (BL) and CSMVS, it features the work of six 19th-century photographers working for the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) under colonial rule. In the absence of 19th-century prints, modern prints were painstakingly created by hand in salted paper and albumen paper processes by Arpan Mukherjee of Studio Goppo from scans of the original paper and wet plate collodion negatives in the BL collection. In the exhibition, these recreations of the



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Follow Us @metphotoconservation Images: ♣ Above: An overview of the exhibition showing the recreated 19th-century photographs paired with contemporary color views and sculptures from the site. Credit: Nora Kennedy ♣ Below: (L to R) Roly Keating, CEO, BL; Malini Roy, Head of Visual Arts, BL; John Falconer, former Lead Curator of the Visual Arts at the BL; Arpan Mukherjee, printmaker from Studio Goppo who made the prints; Nikhil Ramesh, Assistant Curator in charge of documentation, conservation education and research, CSMVS; Vaidehi Savnal, Assistant Curator (International Relations), CSMVS; Shreya Mukherjee, Proprietor of Studio Goppo; and Luisa Mangoni, Head of Asian and African Collections from the BL. © Trustees, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya

l9th-century views are paired with enlarged digital prints and contemporary color images of the same monuments and sites as they appear today. Though the BL collections of negatives are extensive, the partner institutions chose images of sites close to Mumbai that would resonate with their audiences. Interspersed between the photographs are beautiful stone and architectural fragments from the CSMVS collection that originate from these depicted sites.

To further enhance understanding of the subject for its audiences, CSMVS incorporated a large format camera, contemporary paper and wet collodion negatives on a lightbox, and an explanatory video of the printmaking processes. A wall of technical details augments the public's understanding of these historic photographic processes, which are often mysterious and unfamiliar to today's digitally-focused public. The multi-layered narrative of the exhibition addresses the conservation status of archaeological sites, the urbanization around them, the history of photography in India, the journeys of these pioneering photographers, the value of historic processes and their contemporary possibilities, and the need to preserve the physical photographic materials.

This captivating exhibition was curated by former Lead Curator of the Visual Arts at the BL, John Falconer, with curatorial support from Vaidehi Savnal, Assistant Curator (International Relations) at CSMVS, and Nikhil Ramesh, former Indian Conservation Fellowship Program Fellow and Assistant Curator in charge of documentation, conservation education and research at CSMVS, along with Malini Roy, Head of Visual Arts at the BL.

As a part of the educational programming, a five-day workshop on making salted paper and albumen prints was organized. A curatorial walkthrough of the exhibition saw over 150 participants, and the multiple digital outreach initiatives garnered much interest that has resulted in an increase of visitors coming to the Museum to see the exhibition. A public lecture is now being organized with an art historian and a photograph conservator, who together will speak about photography through their complementary lenses. Initially scheduled for a three-month duration, the exhibition has now been extended by an additional two months due to popular demand.

The exhibition is accompanied by a <u>catalog</u> that traces the history of India's cultural heritage in parallel with its







documentation in early photographs. The exhibition is supported by The British Council (India/UK Together, a Season of Culture) and by Cyrus Guzder, a Patron of CSMVS and Centenary Committee member.

We salute the CSMVS for taking this momentous step to bring photographs and an aspect of the rich history of photography in India to the public in this beautifully presented and richly informative installation.

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Images: ↑ Top: An overview of the exhibition. Credit: Nora Kennedy ↑ Middle: An exhibition detail showing the recreated salted paper print, a digital enlargement of the same, and a contemporary color view of the sculptures where they can be seen in present day. Credit: Nora Kennedy ↑ Bottom: A group of schoolgirls weaves through the exhibition. Though their attention is distracted by the visiting foreigner, many are drawn to the contemporary recreations of paper and collodion negatives displayed on a lightbox. Credit: Nora Kennedy

4 ◆ Conservation Conclave 2023, Mumbai, India — The Metropolitan Museum of Art has many international engagements, and key among these in recent years has been the Indian Conservation Fellowship Program (ICFP), a collaborative project among the Ministry of Culture, the Government of India, The Met, the Stichting Restaurie Atelier Limburg (SRAL), and the Mellon Foundation. The ICFP is now drawing to a close after over a decade, during which 44 Indian conservation professionals each benefitted from a fellowship, spending between two and six months at The Met, the National Museum of Asian Art, or at SRAL. Photograph Conservation was fortunate to host three fellows, including one member of the final cohort, Rajeev Kumar Choudhary, from the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) in Bangalore this past winter.

Each year, as these wonderful Indian colleagues concluded their fellowships, an annual gathering was organized in India to engage the Ministry of Culture and all the participants in a presentation of the achievements and progress of the program. This afforded a rare networking opportunity for all involved. As this February marked the conclusion of the remarkable exchange, the CSMVS Museum in Mumbai organized a special three-day Conservation Conclave 2023 to celebrate the occasion, providing an opportunity to assess the current state of conservation in India and to plan future steps toward strengthening the field. The conference gathered leaders in conservation, science, and education from throughout India and abroad to present talks and share experiences during panel sessions, generating fruitful discussions. The Conservation Conclave was successfully conducted under the aegis of the corporate-museum collaboration, ConservArte: Citi, and CSMVS Art Conservation Project.

Some of the overriding topics at the conclave included India's national conservation association, the state of conservation education, recruiting, and professional positions. Attendees discussed the importance of advocacy and public outreach through exhibitions and publications and the role of science in conservation with the goal of engaging universities and industry in conservation research. The continuing need for the education of collections care professionals in their local languages—of which there are a staggering number in India—was a thread that wove through the whole event. Though all speakers and panelists emphasized different aspects of these topics, a particular highlight was a talk given by former Met ICFP fellow Nikhil Ramesh, who cogently and clearly outlined many of the foremost challenges and areas for growth.





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Images: ♦ Above: A view of the newly opened Museum of Art & Photography (MAP) in Bangalore. Credit: Iwan Baan ♦ Below: Rajeev Choudhary and Nora Kennedy at MAP in February. Credit: Vaishnavi Kambadur







Following the conference, Nora Kennedy, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge, Department of Photograph Conservation, traveled from Mumbai to Bangalore to visit the most recent Photograph Conservation ICFP fellow, Rajeev Choudhary at MAP, a brand new and beautifully appointed museum which, at present, features a stellar exhibition of work by the photographer *Jyoti Bhatt: Time & Time Again*; *VISIBLE/INVISIBLE*, a fascinating exhibition that explores the representation of women in art through the centuries; and

LN Tallur: Chirag-e-Al, a small exhibition showing the work of the innovative sculptor LN Tallur in various media. During the visit, both the conservation lab and the galleries were buzzing with visitors excited to explore this new museum. It was wonderful that Nora was able to meet many of Rajeev's MAP colleagues and visit him in his home institution. There is no doubt that these professional and personal relationships will continue to enrich the international conservation community into the future.

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Follow Us @metphotoconservation Images: * Top: Group photograph of the assembled fellows, supervisors, and allied professionals, all engaged with ICFP at some point over the last decade. Credit: Neil Todankar * Above left: Nikhil Ramesh, Assistant Curator in charge of documentation, conservation education, and research at CSMVS, and former Met ICFP fellow, presenting "The Present and a Hopeful Future for Art Conservation: The Role of Institutions." Credit: Nora Kennedy * Above right: Rajeev Choudhary, Team Manager-Conservation, Museum of Art & Photography, Bangalore, at the entrance to the MAP conservation lab. Credit: Nora Kennedy





5 • Presenting Maha Maamoun — In 2022, Gallery 914 in the Modern and Contemporary Art wing of The Met was transformed into a black box space to exhibit Amar Kanwar's *The Lightning Testimonies*. Subsequently, Associate Curator Clare Davies has reactivated the space with an exhibition of two video pieces and a series of four photographs, all by artist Maha Maamoun.

The exhibition, Maha Maamoun: Selected Works, includes 2026, a single-channel projected video installation with audio narration created in 2010 that is part of The Met's collection. The format of the video takes its inspiration from the 1962 experimental science fiction film La Jetée by Chris Marker and is almost entirely constructed of a sequence of still photographic images. The text of the narration for 2026 derives from the science fiction novel The Revolution of 2053 by Egyptian author Mahmoud Osman, in which the narrator looks into the future to describe scenes of a dystopian, postrevolution era Cairo. The narrator lies on a dingy hammock in a closely framed, slightly claustrophobic shot, with a strange contraption attached to his head. He relates his visions of the wealthy and the impoverished navigating a future Cairo. The viewer encounters the work projected on a hanging screen suspended at an angle in a dimly lit space, where it is screened on a loop, alternating with a second video work, Shooting Stars Remind Me of Eavesdroppers (2013). This single-channel video work depicts couples, animals, and plants in Al-Azhar Park in Cairo, overlaid with a conversation about eavesdropping and truthful conversations. A related series of chromogenic prints,

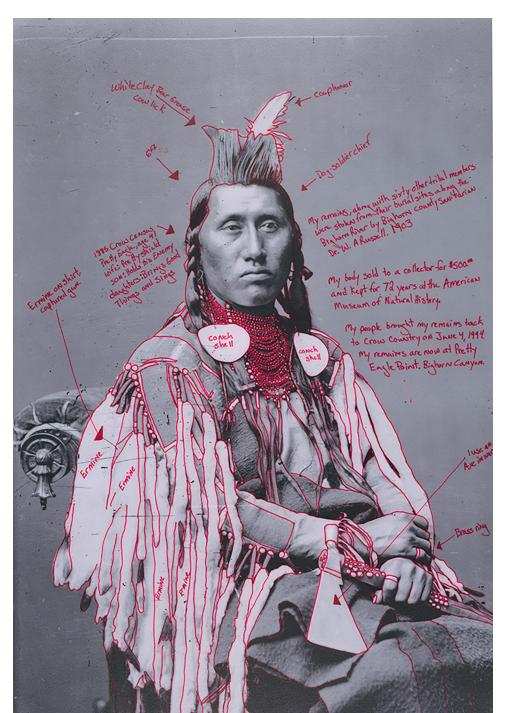
Domestic Tourism II (2005), lines the deep blue wall opposite, while the remaining black box space allows the video works to draw in the viewer. In a <u>recent article</u> in the Abu Dhabi newspaper *The National*, Maamoun stated that the *Domestic Tourism* series represents her interest in "looking at some of the staple touristic images of Egypt, and intervening in them."

Installing this iteration of the work highlighted the importance of condition checking as part of the time-based media conservation process, as well as the role that exhibition often plays as an impetus for conservation. 2026 was acquired five years ago when the Museum did not have a media conservator on staff to review new acquisitions. Condition checking the work prior to this new exhibition revealed that the extant files were not of the resolution specified by the artist in prior documentation, hampering the Museum's ability to present the work as she intended. We contacted the artist, who provided an updated file in the correct resolution. Jonathan Farbowitz and Felice Robles condition checked the new file to ensure that it was suitable for exhibition, then cataloged this new component of the artwork, packaged the files, and placed copies of them in the Museum's digital artwork storage. Exhibition of a timebased media artwork marks a key opportunity to improve its documentation. A visit from the artist to the exhibition allowed us to learn more about her working process and, thus, to enhance the accuracy of the records we produced for this iteration of her artworks' display. We invite you to come experience Maha Maamoun: Selected Works before it closes in June 2023.

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Images: ↑ Left: (L to R) Kayla Henry-Griffin, Felice Robles, and Jonathan Farbowitz discussing the installation of Maha Maamoun's 2026. Credit: Aleya Lehmann ↑ Right (L to R) Felice Robles, Clare Davies, Maha Maamoun, and Kayla Henry-Griffin during their interview with the artist in the gallery. Credit: Jonathan Farbowitz ↑ Maha Maamoun (Egyptian, born 1972). 2026, 2010. Single-channel digital video, black-and-white, sound, 8 min., 21 sec. Art Jameel Fund, 2018 (2018.82) ↑ On view in Maha Maamoun: Selected Works, December 5, 2022 through June 5, 2023.



Locations and Hours

The Met Fifth Avenue

Sunday-Tuesday and Thursday: 10 am-5 pm Friday and Saturday: 10 am-9 pm Closed Wednesday

The Met Cloisters

Thursday-Tuesday: 10 am-5 pm Closed Wednesday

Date Night at Met Fifth Avenue!

Fridays and Saturdays 'til 9 pm

Current Exhibitions

Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room

November 1, 2021, ongoing

Maha Maamoun: Selected Works

December 5, 2022 through June 5, 2023

Richard Avedon: MURALS

January 19 through October 1, 2023

Robert Wood Johnson, Jr. Gallery

February 7 through Summer 2023

Berenice Abbott's New York Album, 1929

March 2 through September 4, 2023

Upcoming Exhibition

Proof: Maxime Du Camp's Photographs of the Eastern Mediterranean

October 23, 2023 through January 21, 2024

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Follow Us @metphotoconservation Image: ◆ Wendy Red Star (Apsáalooke/Crow, born Billings, Montana, 1981), Déaxitchish / Pretty Eagle from 1880 Crow Peace Delegation, 2014. Inkjet print of artist-manipulated digitally reproduced photograph, 24 in. × 16 7/16 in. (61 × 41.8 cm). Purchase, Nancy Dunn Revocable Trust Gift and John B. Turner Fund, in memory of Loren G. Lipson M.D., 2019. (2019.335) ◆ On view in the Robert Wood Johnson, Jr. Gallery through Summer 2023.



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With steadfast commitment and support from our friends, The Met's Department of Photograph Conservation continues to thrive and be a crucial resource for the preservation of works of art, as well as a vibrant center for research.

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Monumental Journey: The Daguerreotypes of Girault de Prangey was made possible by the Aretê Foundation/Betsy and Ed Cohen. Additional support for the exhibition was provided by Jennifer S. and Philip F. Maritz and the Alfred Stieglitz Society. ◆ It was organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in collaboration with the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Paris.

Amar Kanwar's *Lightning Testimonies* was made possible by The Modern Circle.

Before Yesterday We Could Fly: An Afrofuturist Period Room is made possible by the Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation and the Director's Fund. Additional support is provided by Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne and the Terra Foundation for American Art. ◆ The Met's quarterly Bulletin program is supported in part by the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by the cofounder of Reader's Digest.

Maha Maamoun: Selected Works includes *2026*, a nine-minute single-channel video created in 2010, a year before the Egyptian revolution that toppled then-president Hosni Mubarak. Viewed today, Maamoun's work appears to foretell real-world events, while narrating a scene of time-travel in which a revolution has both already happened and has yet to occur.

Richard Avedon: MURALS celebrates the centennial of the artist's birth on May 15, 1923 with the presentation of the photographer's most innovative group portraits, including three of his monumental photomurals. ◆ The exhibition is made possible by Joyce Frank Menschel.

Berenice Abbott's New York Album, 1929, features Abbott's 1929 album consisting of 266 small gelatin silver photographs arranged on 32 pages. It marks a crucial turning point in Abbott's career and offers a rare glimpse of a photographer's mind at work. ◆ The exhibition is made possible by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc.

Proof: Maxime Du Camp's Photographs of the Eastern Mediterranean focuses on a rare portfolio of photographs printed in advance of Du Camp's l852 landmark publication, Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie. This is the first exhibition to feature this portfolio of "proof prints." ◆ The exhibition is made possible by The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc.

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Image: \star Jim Gagnon (American), In the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1950s–60s. Gelatin silver print. Gift of the artist, 1960 (60.506.1) \star On view in the Robert Wood Johnson, Jr. Gallery through Summer 2023.