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Department News 1-10

- 1 ♦ James Van Der Zee Archive News
- 2 ♦ Welcoming Felice Robles
- 3 ♦ State-of-the-Art Climate Monitoring
- 4 ♦ Study Collection Lantern Slides
- 5 ♦ A "Snapshot" of Staehle's *Eastpoint*

Exhibitions	11
Support & Acknowledgements	12

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1 ♦ James Van Der Zee Archive News —

In December 2021, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and Mrs. Donna Van Der Zee, [announced](#) the establishment of the James Van Der Zee Archive at The Met. This collaborative effort brings together, at long last, the extensive archival holdings of the renowned American photographer, which include roughly 20,000 prints and 30,000 negatives. With grant funding awarded in 2022 by the Bank of America, The Met hired a Conservation Apprentice to conduct the treatment of an initial 500 photographic prints.

James Van Der Zee (1886–1983) worked in Harlem from the early 1900s until his death in 1983. Exposed to photography at a young age, he soon devoted his time to recording the people and places around him, and would continue to do so for the entirety of his life. His most notable and predominant



subject during his career was the growing African American middle class of Harlem during the 1920s and 30s, a period known as The Harlem Renaissance; the Archive currently serves as the most comprehensive photographic documentation of this period in United States history.

In his studio, Van Der Zee photographed individuals, couples on their wedding day, families dressed in their Sunday best, and members of social clubs in his community. Outside of the studio, he memorialized the deceased in sometimes elaborate funerary portraits, documented the interiors and exteriors of people's homes and businesses, including his own, and recorded major neighborhood events, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association parades.

What makes Van Der Zee's work unique was an ability to record the personalities of his subjects and the skill with which he physically enhanced the prints he created. From the poses he orchestrated, to the use of elaborate backdrops and props, to the pre-Photoshop combining of multiple negatives, Van Der Zee ensured that the environment surrounding his subjects complemented their stories.

For some photographs, the creative process ended there, but for many, Van Der Zee was only getting started. Once the negatives were developed, and before he printed them, Van Der Zee would often retouch a negative by drawing on it to either adjust a sitter's features or add elements. For example, on a selection of his prints, one can see lines forming "smoke" coming out of a pipe, a butterfly near a sitter's head, and the chain of a lady's necklace or ring on a man's finger. His retouching also extended to whitening teeth and whites of eyes, shortening hair, and more. After his prints were processed, Van Der Zee would often apply coloring to the photograph in a variety of media. Though research into his applied media



techniques is ongoing, Van Der Zee himself spoke of using watercolors and oil paint in interviews (see reference below). Some of these materials were found in his studio and are maintained in the Archive. All of these creative elements came together to achieve his ultimate goal of presenting his subjects in their best light.

Conserving these photographs involves not only material and physical stabilization, but a consideration of their function as artworks and historic artifacts, as well. Unlike the finished products delivered to clients, many of the prints that remained in the artist's studio bear traces of his own practices—from mends carried out with postage stamps, to markings working out the placement of collaged elements—many of which provide significant insight into his creative process. For a majority of photographs, conservation treatment may be as minimal as removing excess surface dirt with eraser crumbs and consolidating or re-securing frayed edges and corners with light applications of liquid gelatin as an adhesive to preclude any further losses. In cases with greater structural concerns like larger tears or major creases and folds, tears are mended and reinforced to reduce the risk of further damage and to allow safe handling and access. Larger areas of loss that are at risk of further creasing or tearing are bridged with custom paper inserts to stabilize them. Any inpainting or other visual reintegration is minimal at this point in the stabilization process. Tones on the inserted repairs are chosen to harmonize with the surrounding area so as not to draw attention. No attempt to recreate lost image details is made. In short, these stabilization treatments allow us to safely access and handle these prints that are such an important window into Harlem life as documented by James Van Der Zee.

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Image: ♦ James Van Der Zee (American, 1886–1983), [Self Portrait], 1931. Gelatin silver print, 8 × 10 in. James Van Der Zee Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Purchase, Louis V. Bell, Harris Brisbane Dick, Fletcher, and Rogers Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, Alfred Stieglitz Society Gifts, Twentieth-Century Photography Fund, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee Gift, Joyce F. Menschel Fund, and Ford Foundation Gift, 2021 (2021.443.18)

Reference: ♦ James Van Der Zee, *The World of James Van Der Zee: A Visual Record of Black Americans*, ed. Reginald McGhee (New York: Grove Press, 1969).



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Image: ♦ An example of Van Der Zee's hand-coloring and multiple printing. ♦ James Van Der Zee (American, 1886–1983), [Untitled], 1939. Gelatin silver print, 10 × 8 in. James Van Der Zee Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Purchase, Louis V. Bell, Harris Brisbane Dick, Fletcher, and Rogers Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, Alfred Stieglitz Society Gifts, Twentieth-Century Photography Fund, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee Gift, Joyce F. Menschel Fund, and Ford Foundation Gift, 2021 (2021.44.3.49)



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Images: ♦ Several examples of Van Der Zee's retouching the negative, to add a butterfly, and to highlight necklace, eyes, and costume details. ♦ James Van Der Zee (American, 1886–1983), [Untitled], 1929. Gelatin silver print, 8 × 5 in. James Van Der Zee Archive, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Purchase, Louis V. Bell, Harris Brisbane Dick, Fletcher, and Rogers Funds and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, Alfred Stieglitz Society Gifts, Twentieth-Century Photography Fund, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee Gift, Joyce F. Menschel Fund, and Ford Foundation Gift, 2021 (2021.443.178)

2 ♦ Welcoming Felice Robles – Welcoming Felice Robles back to the Photograph Conservation Department, now as Assistant Conservator, feels natural, but not a bit less exciting! Felice was an essential part of our Department for much of the last year, while completing the final internship portion of her four-year graduate degree at the [Conservation Center](#) of New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. She has been working in photograph and in time-based media conservation, building further knowledge and expertise in both disciplines. These skills are in high demand in cultural heritage institutions that collect artwork across these related genres. Prior to her graduate internship for NYU, she also gained treatment experience here in the lab during her coursework. We are thrilled to welcome Felice back in this official Met staff capacity.

When Felice joined our lab for her internship, we shared an introduction in [Bulletin 27](#), highlighting her considerable previous professional experience, which includes the completion of a wide range of internships at the [Art Institute of Chicago](#); the Smithsonian's Native American Film and Media Festival at [Elmer Holmes Bobst Library](#) at NYU; as a Polonsky Intern at the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#); at the [Library of Congress](#); and at [The Better Image](#). Also, prior to attending NYU, Felice spent several years working at [Gawain Weaver Art Conservation](#).

Felice has been hired as the lead conservator for the upcoming Schaeffer Collection exhibition, which will highlight the extraordinary photographs from the promised gift made in celebration of the Museum's 150th anniversary from Trustee Philip Maritz and his wife, Jennifer, and held in the Department of Photographs. The collection comprises over 700 photographs and albums from the 1840s to the 1910s



which were originally part of the William L. Schaeffer Collection and includes a wide variety of photographic processes and formats from daguerreotypes to gelatin silver prints. Felice's already extensive conservation treatment and project management experience make her the perfect conservator for the project, which she began in this new capacity on May 2nd.

If you haven't already, please join us in welcoming Felice to the official staff of the Photograph Conservation Department.

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Image: ♦ Felice Graciela Robles, Assistant Conservator, seated in the Greek and Roman Galleries on a recent afternoon. Credit: Aleya Lehmann



3 ♦ A New State-of-the-Art Climate Monitoring System — A stable climate is best for the long-term preservation of artworks, whether in the galleries or in storage, so monitoring the climate conditions in the Museum is a critical aspect of preventive conservation. The Met has an impressive Engineering Department, that works tirelessly to maintain stable climate conditions throughout the many galleries and storage spaces in our two million square foot building. Conservators, scientists, collections managers, and registrars also monitor the climate in storage vaults, galleries, lab and office spaces, and sometimes even travel crates.

With the variety of people and departments engaged in this activity, it may not be surprising that we don't always use the same equipment to carry out this monitoring. The variety of dataloggers used across the Museum varies from the trusty yet antiquated hygrothermograph to Bluetooth-enabled Hobo® dataloggers. Each of the dataloggers used in the building has benefits and drawbacks. However, the largest drawback is the non-standardized data that results from such institution-wide variety.

Since 2016, a group of conservators, scientists, and collections managers at The Met, led by Research Scientist Eric Breitung, have been working towards implementing a new, Museum-wide climate datalogging system. In addition to introducing standardized data gathering across the Museum, the top priorities were to establish a system that uses highly accurate sensors more closely aligned with equipment already in use by Met Engineers and that transmits data wirelessly, eliminating the need to walk from one datalogger to the next collecting data.

While exploring a range of products, in December of 2016 we began a period of beta testing sensors that were being developed by the Finnish company, Vaisala. Photograph Conservation participated in this phase by installing sensors in our off-site cold storage vaults. During this testing phase, Associate Conservator Katie Sanderson was part of the group of conservators and scientists that met with Vaisala representatives to provide feedback on the functionality and features of the sensors and accompanying software.

Once we began using the sensors, it was clear that the wireless connection was a significant benefit. Remote access to the sensors as they measured the climate in real time, in conjunction with customizable alerts when conditions strayed out of range, meant that it was possible to check the current climate off site from the lab at the Museum. The real benefit of this feature was especially well demonstrated when Katie was able to check the climate in our 60-degree cool storage vault from Brazil while traveling with the *Irving Penn: Centennial* exhibition.

This spring marks an exciting milestone for Museum-wide preventive conservation. As you read this, collections staff across the Museum are engaged in installing hundreds of Vaisala sensors in a fully collaborative effort to elevate and standardize the way we gather climate data at The Met. The initiative was funded by the Director's Office with full support from Deputy Director for Collections and Administration, Andrea Bayer, and would not have been possible without the efforts of Eric Breitung and Sarah Freshnock in the Department of Scientific Research.

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Images: ♦ A variety of devices that have been used by Photograph Conservation over the years to monitor climate with the new Vaisala datalogger front, center. Credit: Aleya Lehmann ♦ A new Vaisala datalogger installed in the exhibition, *Berenice Abbott's New York Album, 1929* in the Gilman Gallery (852). Credit: Aleya Lehmann



4 ♦ Study Collection Lantern Slides — The Photograph Conservation Study Collection (PCSC) is a growing group of non-accessioned photograph-based materials that serves as a research and educational resource in the Photograph Conservation Department. The PCSC comprises a wide variety of photographic processes and formats in various states of preservation. Access to this collection is essential for staff and for students in our many educational initiatives, as it is used to hone identification skills and to study examples of deterioration and damage. In addition, PCSC objects play a sacrificial role for conservators to test treatment techniques and conduct experiments on first, working out any treatment subtleties before applying these techniques to works of art from the Museum's accessioned collection.

In this *Bulletin*, we highlight the PCSC collection of lantern slides, a precursor of 35mm slides, composed of 3 1/4 x 4 in. black-and-white positives on glass or color transparencies on plastic held between glass, and meant to be viewed with transmitted light. Some black-and-white lantern slides were hand-colored, with media applied directly to the surface of the positive image before binding. The final format includes a paper “mask” or mat, placed on the transparency to frame the image. The mat may have printed information which can be aesthetically pleasing and also keeps the protective glass up off the surface of the photograph. This sandwich of transparency, mat and glass is then held together around all four edges with

paper or plastic binding strips, so it can be placed in a projector for viewing.

The history of the lantern slide dates to the 17th century, when hand-painted glass pictures were projected using a “magic lantern”, the forerunner of the slide projector. When photography was introduced, lantern slide production increased, utilizing numerous photographic processes as photographic technology advanced.

The majority of the lantern slides held in the PCSC were acquired from the Museum's Image Library when it was dispersed in 2011. Starting in 1907, The Met built an extensive visual resource collection of over 800,000 photographs and slides documenting artworks, architecture, and other subjects of cultural significance. These were accessible to staff and outside scholars for reference and teaching through the Museum Library. By 1968, the collection was designated the Photograph and Slide Library and occupied a beautifully designed new space with storage cabinets, study carrels, and a bindery for slide preparation and repair. The department was renamed the Image Library in 2005. Though a preeminent international resource, eventually it was eclipsed by the advent of new technologies, and in 2011 it was dispersed with great portions ultimately discarded. This was the fate of many visual resource collections internationally as the ease of digital access won out over the high quality of these historical records.

Before the Image Library was disbanded in 2011, Museum departments were invited to go through the holdings and remove whatever 35mm slides and lantern slides they might find relevant to their department's collections. At this time Conservator in Charge Nora Kennedy selected a group of slides for the PCSC that illustrates a range of photographic processes, binding and masking techniques, and show examples of interesting deterioration.

These lantern slides, as well as the numerous other objects held in the PCSC, are currently being cataloged and imaged by administrator Aleya Lehmann with the help of our long-time volunteer, Susan de Bary. We look forward to sharing more about this and other PCSC photographs in forthcoming issues of the *Bulletin*.

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Image: ♦ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Extension Division*, photographed on March 15, 1939. Digital image made from black-and-white print. Credit: Wilson Santiago

References: ♦ “The Metropolitan Museum of Art,” in *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, vol. 17 (New York NY: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1976), 483–91. ♦ Conversations with James Moske, Managing Archivist, Office of the Senior Vice President, Secretary and General Counsel, The Met; and with Kenneth Soehner, Arthur K. Watson Chief Librarian, Thomas J. Watson Library, The Met.

◆ These four examples represent three variants of the lantern slide process. We see the Ingres *Portrait of Madame Gonse* documented in a gelatin silver black-and-white image on glass, compared with a later rendition as a chromogenic transparency on plastic. Below are two black-and-white slides with applied hand coloring. Interestingly, the image of Sterling Place in Watertown has a label identifying the colorist as one Miss C.M. Hills of New York.



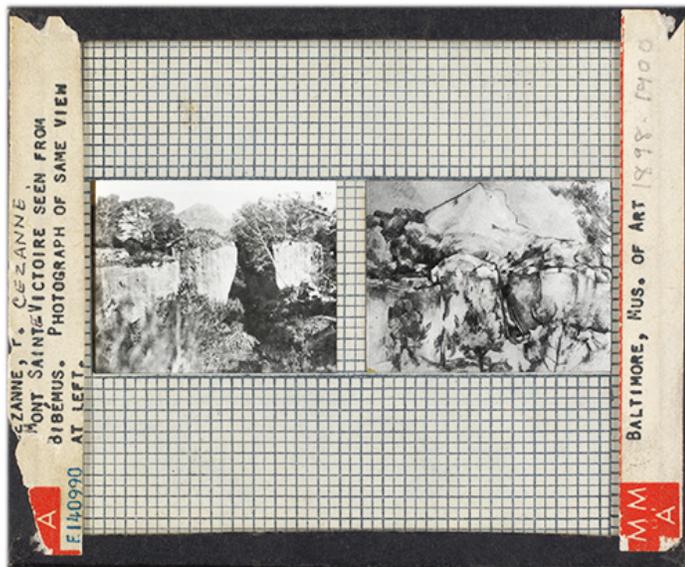
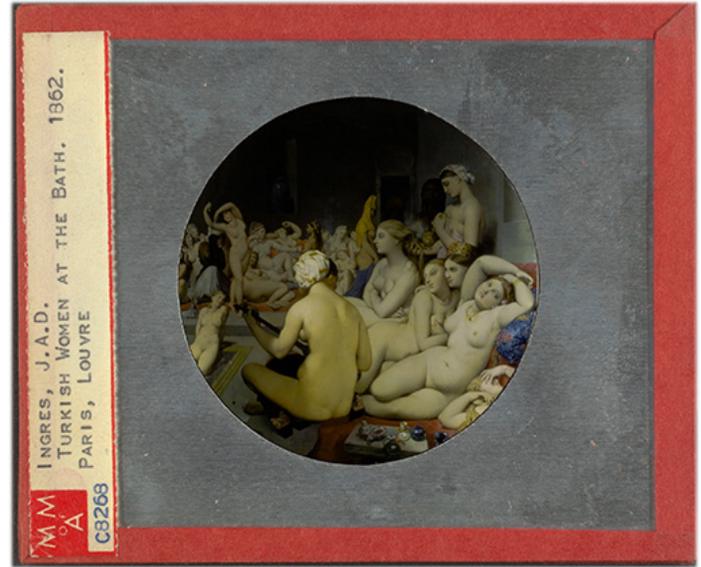
Images: 1 ◆ J.A.D. Ingres, *Portrait of Madame Gonse*, 1852, Musée Ingres, Montauban. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., gelatin dry plate. 2 ◆ J.A.D. Ingres, *Portrait of Madame Gonse*, 1852, Musée Ingres, Montauban. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., chromogenic color transparency. 3 ◆ Washington, D.C., *Washington Cathedral, Peace Cross and the Cathedral Landmark*. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., gelatin dry plate, hand-colored, Edward Van Altena, New York. 4 ◆ *Sterling Place, Watertown, NY, Exterior*. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., gelatin dry plate hand-colored by Miss C.M. Hills, New York.

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Images: ◆ Sets of paired and individual lantern slides featuring bindings, masks, hand-coloring, and labeling, with images created by compositing reflected and transmitted light captures of each slide. Credit: Aleya Lehmann

◆ These lantern slides show the variety of binding papers and tapes as well as some of the different mats used in the collection. The mats have three functions: (a) they physically block light thereby framing the image during viewing (b) they provide a slight separation between the photographic material and the cover glass; and (c) some have an aesthetic function or are imprinted with information about the producer, the owner or the subject.



Images: 5 ◆ Fernand Boucher, *Jupiter and Callisto*, ca. 1766, from the Collection of Mrs. Sosthenes Behn, now in the North Carolina Museum of Art. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., chromogenic color transparency, featuring a handmade black paper mask and red binding tapes. 6 ◆ J.A.D. Ingres, *Turkish Women at the Bath*, 1862. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., chromogenic color transparency, metallic card mask and red binding tapes. 7 ◆ Paul Cezanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from the Bibémus Quarry*, ca. 1895-1899 (on the right) with photograph of the quarry on the left. Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., gelatin dry plates with printed mask with black binding tapes. 8 ◆ *New York, Cooper Union Museum, Arts of Decoration Interior, Frames, etc.* Lantern slide, 3 1/4 x 4 in., gelatin dry plate with printed black mask and black binding tapes.

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Images: ◆ Sets of paired and individual lantern slides featuring bindings, masks, hand-coloring, and labeling, with images created by compositing reflected and transmitted light captures of each slide. Credit: Aleya Lehmann

5 ♦ A "Snapshot" of Wolfgang Staehle's *Eastpoint* through Disk Imaging — Time-based media conservators Jonathan Farbowitz, Felice Robles, and Kayla Henry-Griffin, recently performed a treatment called “disk imaging” on Wolfgang Staehle’s artwork *Eastpoint* (*September 15, 2004*). On his personal website, Staehle categorizes this work as “digital chronophotography”, which he defines as taking a series of still pictures over a pre-determined amount of time. In the case of *Eastpoint*, Staehle took 8,126 digital photographs of the landscape in New York’s Hudson River Valley within a 24-hour period. The artwork displays them in real time, giving the viewer a temporal sense of place in addition to the visual. *Eastpoint* is part of a series of digital chronophotography works by the artist, which also includes works shot at Niagara Falls and on Ludlow Street in New York City.

For the presentation of *Eastpoint*, Staehle used computer software to update the photographs every eight seconds to create a moving image and to synchronize each photograph with the moment it was originally captured. When The Met received this work, the artist provided an early 2006 Mac Mini, a small form factor computer, which stored the images and the software necessary to synchronize their presentation. The time-based media team recognized that planned obsolescence and deterioration of the equipment over time would make it more difficult to preserve *Eastpoint* on the Mac Mini alone. They decided that creating a disk image of the early Mac Mini—essentially producing a backup copy of the hard drive in its entirety—would support the preservation of the artwork.

Through the process of disk imaging, a snapshot of the entire contents of a storage device, such as a hard drive, floppy disk, or optical disc, is saved as a single computer file. This disk image contains all the data on the original storage device, including empty space and sometimes deleted files.

In the case of disk imaging for *Eastpoint*, the time-based media team planned to disk image the Mac Mini and store the resulting file on The Met’s artwork server. Disk imaging often involves opening a computer and removing the hard drive. However, to avoid opening the Mac Mini, the team decided to image the computer in Target Disk Mode, an option where the computer starts up and operates as an external hard drive. Once in Target Disk Mode, the computer can then be connected to a forensic bridge—in this case a Tableau UltraBay 4—which keeps the data on the artist-provided computer from being changed in any way.



To acquire the disk image, the team utilized the command line version of software called Forensic Toolkit Imager (specifically FTK Imager CLI 3.3.1). Produced by AccessData, now called Exterro, FTK Imager is designed to image data from storage devices, and it can also further analyze the data contained in a disk image by comparing the contents of files or revealing when files were last modified. Through this information, conservators can hypothesize a narrative about the artist’s production process or gain further insight into which files are intended to run the artwork when exhibited.

When run on the Mac Mini used for *Eastpoint*, the software created a single file of all the data on the computer in the Expert Witness Format (also known as EWF or E01). This format is the default option for computer forensic tools such as FTK Imager and is preferable to other formats because of its ability to losslessly compress data and embed metadata in the disk image as well as its wide adoption. With this work successfully completed, the time-based media team can now preserve the data in The Met’s digital artwork storage. In addition, they can research and further analyze the files within the new disk image to create more thorough documentation on *Eastpoint*, including a list of all the software and files used to run the artwork and information about how the Mac Mini’s configuration was set up by the artist. Using the disk image and specialized software called an “emulator” or “virtual machine”, the team may even be able to experiment with running the artwork on a current computer, helping to ensure the long-term preservation of the artwork—all without touching the original Mac Mini.



Born in Ohio, Berenice Abbott moved to Paris and in 1923 became Man Ray's darkroom assistant. In 1927 she made this photograph, above, of Eugène Atget, the renowned documentarian of the streets of Paris and an unwitting hero of the Surrealists; when she returned to his apartment to deliver a print of her portrait, Abbott learned of the elderly artist's death. This circumstance put in motion a process that led to Abbott's purchase of Atget's archive of 5,000 photographs and 1,000 negatives, the first (1930) monograph on Atget (edited by Abbott), and the collection's eventual acquisition by MoMA in 1968.

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

Ongoing

Maha Maamoun: Selected Works

December 5, 2022 through July 2023

Richard Avedon: MURALS

January 19 through October 1, 2023

Robert Wood Johnson, Jr. Gallery

February 9 through September 4, 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 and North Africa

October 23, 2023 through January 21, 2024

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Image: ♦ Berenice Abbott (American, 1898–1991), *Eugène Atget*, 1927. Gelatin silver print, 4 3/8 × 3 5/16 in. Gift of Maria Morris Hamburg, in honor of John Szarkowski, 2020 (2020.374) ♦ On view in *Berenice Abbott's New York Album, 1929* in the Howard Gilman Gallery through September 4, 2023.



Support the Department of Photograph Conservation

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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To learn more about how you can become involved and support this critical area at The Met, please contact:

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Bulletin No. 30 June 2023

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Acknowledgements

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 and North Africa focuses on a rare portfolio of photographs printed in advance of Du Camp's 1852 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.

Composing an image characteristic of his brooding style, as in the image above, photographer Dave Heath captures two figures in an indistinguishable, dark scene. His meticulous printing focuses our attention on contemplative faces, clothing, and poses. A cigarette in the right hand of each woman becomes a central character in the scene, emphasized even more so by a looming cloud. This photograph conjures a bygone era when museumgoers smoked meditatively with art. Heath photographed visitors at The Met, a frequent New York haunt where he sought out artistic circles and expanded his self-taught knowledge of art history. Heath and other writers often describe his focus on quotidian public life as self-portraits—this concentrated, reflective moment perhaps mirrors the ways he experienced art.

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Image: ♦ Dave Heath (American, 1931–2016), *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1962. Gelatin silver print, 6 1/8 × 9 7/8 in. Gift of Donald and Alison Weiss, 2008 (2008.582.2) ♦ On view in the Robert Wood Johnson, Jr. Gallery through September 4, 2023