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Refining the Daguerreotype Package

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Abstract

The preparation for a major exhibition of Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey daguerreotypes at The Metropolitan Museum of Art presented the opportunity to revisit one of daguerreotype housing designs currently in use at this institution. The Girault de Prangey plates arrived at the Museum housed between glass, with wooden spacers at all four edges, and the whole bound with brown paper tapes. The Met often utilizes Z-tray polyester film trays to hold a plate nestled into a matboard spacer and bound between glass for any daguerreotypes without an original intact housing. Research commenced to replace the matboard spacer with a material that was not hygroscopic, was less complex and potentially less reactive than matboard. Ideally, the amount of air within the package would be reduced as much as possible. Other considerations included expense and the ability for in-house creation. There was a desire as well to fulfill basic aesthetic criteria. This talk will trace the history of daguerreotype packaging, highlighting those materials and designs with favorable characteristics. We will review the materials identified and tested as well as the technologies used to create a range of spacer styles. The tests carried out will be discussed and the results evaluated. The final solutions add a further refinement and additional options for conservators to choose from in when making conservation treatment decisions in this continually evolving area of our profession.