

# THE CONSERVATION PROJECT OF THE MANILA DAGUERREOTYPES

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In April 2007, an exceptional group of eighteen daguerreotypes were discovered in the collections of the Hispanic Society of America in New York City. The group included thirteen whole plates and five half-plates, presenting remarkable views of Manila city and its surroundings. They most likely constitute the first photographic records of the Philippine Islands. Discovered in partially opened or incomplete housings, these fragile objects were vulnerable to irreversible damage due to simple neglect and careless handling.

To preserve this important heritage, the Photograph Conservation Department at George Eastman House offered to undertake the stabilization of the group. The conservation project lasted eighteen months and involved the work of six Mellon Fellows from the Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation (ARP), as well the contribution of conservators and scientists from various institutions.

Several notable achievements of the project were the establishment of a documentation protocol adapted to French daguerreotypes housings, development of a stabilization system of the plates in their original housings, and techniques to reproduce the format of some original painted and decorated cover glasses. These three aspects benefited from the creation of didactic tools (guidelines, detailed instructions, and videotaping) for dissemination to the field for similar challenges of documenting and treating French daguerreotypes.

This presentation introduces the Manila Daguerreotypes and their historical context, and describes how the detailed examination of individual objects revealed additional information regarding the material history of the group. It will discuss the didactic tools developed during the project. The final section will synthesize the conservation interventions performed to document, stabilize and ensure the long-term preservation of the Manila Daguerreotypes.

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Papers presented in *Topics in Photographic Preservation, Volume Fourteen* have not undergone a formal process of peer review.