

The Characterization of French Paper Negatives through the Calotype Initiative Project

C. Daher¹, M.-A. Languille¹, A. de Mondenard², M. Becka³, C. Garnier¹, P. Lamotte⁴, S. Aubenas⁴, K. Hellman⁵, S. Freeman⁵, A. Kaplan⁶, M. Schilling⁶, B. Lavédrine¹

¹ Centre de recherche sur la conservation (CRC, USR 3224), Sorbonne Universités, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, CNRS, Paris, France

² C2RMF, Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France, Département de Conservation Préventive, Paris, France

³ Artist photographer, Paris, France

⁴ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris, France

⁵ J. Paul Getty Museum, Department of Photographs, Los Angeles, California, USA

⁶ The Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), Los Angeles, California, USA

The calotype initiative is an international partnership between several institutions - *Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation (CRC)*, the *Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France (C2RMF)*, *Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF)*, the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the J. Paul Getty Museum (JPGM). The goal of this initiative is to develop an analytical protocol that identifies the materials and techniques used by French makers to create negatives. Using non-destructive analytical techniques, scientists in collaboration with art historians and conservators will record physical characteristics of objects from the collections including thickness, weight, surface textures, as well as visual assessment of coatings and finishing techniques using microscopy and imaging techniques. The project aims to provide a series of physical data that will be examined through a statistical approach in order to identify unique styles associated with each maker. In addition to non-destructive analysis, a conservation survey will be carried out on paper negatives held in major collections in France and at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Paper negatives represent some of the earliest examples of photographic images produced in the history of photography. During its short history (in France) from 1840-1860's, not only did the first positive negative process used to create multiples become firmly established, but photography became identified as an art form. Despite broad variation in techniques and the significance of paper negatives supported by the historical literature and by visual example in the collections to be surveyed, few scientific studies characterizing the materials and techniques have been published. Due to the historical significance and the aesthetic value of early photographs, the study and display of paper negatives has become increasingly more popular in recent years. This project intends to provide curators and conservators with more insight into the stability for display and access of these materials for research and the public. The JPGM has organized an exhibition and accompanying catalog on early French photography that will complement the Calotype Initiative Project research.

Presenter's bio:

Celine Daher is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the CRC (Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation, Paris, France). In 2012, she obtained a PhD in analytical and physical chemistry working on developing a non-invasive methodology to study natural organic substances. She worked in several institutions in the conservation science field (the CRC, the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France, the Art Institute of Chicago) and is specialized in vibrational spectroscopies and statistical data treatments.