



Article: Hand Colored Photographs: History, Identification and Research (Abstract)

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Hand Colored Photographs: History, Identification and Research

Janka Krizanova

Presented as a poster at the 2014 AIC Annual Meeting in San Francisco

When first introduced in 1839, the daguerreotype process was admired for its definition, clarity and beauty, but it was also criticized for its lack of color. The Swiss painter, printer and daguerreotypist Johan Baptist Isenring introduced the first known hand-colored daguerreotypes in 1841. From this early date until the 1960's, many new monochrome photographic processes and hand coloring methods were introduced. Photographic supply houses offered coloring sets, and many manuals and articles on photograph coloring methods and materials were published in the photographic and popular literature. When color photography became the dominant photographic medium in the 1960's, hand coloring of monochrome photographs diminished to become a method of image modification used by only a few practitioners.

Today, there are many Slovak photograph collections that contain hand-colored photographs. This poster highlights a small part of a larger research project carried out as a PhD dissertation at the Academy of Fine Arts (AFAD), Bratislava, Slovakia. The objectives of this research were to present the variety of hand-colored photographs, coloring sets and hand-coloring methods used by American, European and particularly Slovak photographers. These goals were achieved through the study of related literature, combined with the examination and analysis of over sixty hand-colored photographs and thirteen nineteenth and twentieth century coloring sets under the supervision of Dusan Stulik and Art Kaplan in the laboratories of the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI). This poster also highlights one of twelve rare chromophotographs from the Bratislava City Museum collection that were analyzed and treated as a part of this study.

Prior to the research presented here, there was very little written about the existence, nature and behavior of hand-colored photographs in Slovak photograph collections. The addition of hand coloring to photographs may change the aging characteristics and light stability of these materials when compared with other photographs. We must be able to identify not only the underlying photographic process, but also the chemical nature of colorants and binders used in order to develop a methodology for long-term storage, exhibition, and conservation treatment of hand-colored photographs. The results of this research will help to improve this methodology today in Slovak museums and galleries. In addition, it provides a resource for future investigations into this fascinating part of photographic history. Though focused on the preservation of treasures from the Slovak historical and cultural heritage, the research has further application to the care and preservation of collections of hand-colored photographs worldwide.

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