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## Edward Weston's Platinum and Palladium Photographs

Margaret Wessling

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Edward Weston is recognized as a pioneer of the Modernist movement in photography, and largely as one of the greatest American photographers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known for his still lifes and nudes meticulously printed on gelatin silver developed-out papers. However, early in his career Weston favored pre-manufactured platinum and palladium papers. Photographs Weston made between 1913 and 1923 reveal a Pictorialist aesthetic, which he later came to reject in favor of Modernism's sharp focus and straight style. He famously destroyed journals and materials from these early years, and his published Daybooks do not include journal entries prior to his move to Mexico in 1923. Consequently, Weston's early career has remained a mysterious part of his life and the photographs have received less consideration.

The Lane Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, houses approximately 2,300 photographs by Edward Weston, with forty examples of his early platinum and palladium prints made before his move to Mexico in 1923. Given the lack of information about Weston's printing practice between 1913 and 1923, a survey was conducted to characterize and document these early photographs in the Lane Collection. The prints were examined visually for clues about manufacture, and with X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) to ascertain the image-forming elements. Historical sources of information were consulted to better understand Weston's working habits, and to attempt identification of his pre-manufactured platinum and palladium papers.

During the survey an unusual preservation problem was noted associated with Weston's mounting method. Areas of altered tonality were observed on the recto of eleven photographs relating to the location of the mounting adhesive on the verso. XRF spot analysis was used to investigate the source of the tonal difference. Additionally, adhesive samples were taken from eight unmounted prints to analyze by Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), matrix-assisted laser desorption/ionization (MALDI), and gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GCMS). Analytical results were then used for mock-up experiments on sample platinum and palladium prints.

This paper will present the results of analytical testing of the Lane Collection Edward Weston platinum and palladium prints made between 1913 and 1923, as well as observations on his printing and processing techniques. Results of the adhesive testing and mock-up experiments will also be discussed, along with information discovered in historical documents. The breadth and depth of the Lane Collection is an unusual opportunity to look both microscopically and macroscopically at Edward Weston's printing practice from a period of his career that is not well documented.

For further information regarding this project please see the publication “Edward Weston: The Early Years” by Karen Haas and Margaret Wessling, published by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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