

SMITH COLLEGE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (FALL 2023)
2023 Internship Project Description

(Send to Alex Capobianco [REDACTED])

Name of Smithsonian Staff Mentor(s): Stephanie Lussier and Betsy Johnson

Title of Smithsonian Staff Mentor(s): Paper and Photographs Conservator and Assistant Curator

Phone Number(s): [REDACTED]

Email Address(es): [REDACTED]

Museum/Institute/Office: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Department/Division/Office (if applicable): Conservation and Curatorial

Project Title (must be ONSITE): Survey of the Herbert Lust Photography Collection

The Hirshhorn Museum has recently received a gift of 206 photographs by 49 photographers that includes works that span from the late 19th century to the present day. We are just beginning to process this collection, which presents a rare opportunity for a student to be involved with the initial condition assessments of these works, which include collotypes, albumen silver prints, fresson prints, chlorobromide prints, gelatin silver photographs, and collages. Many of these works are by renowned photographers such as Eadweard Muybridge, Eugène Atget, Wynn Bullock, Aaron Siskind, György Kepes, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Judy Dater. Others are by lesser-known photographers such as Chansonetta Stanley Emmons, Carlotta Corpron, and Jonas Dovydenas. From a curatorial perspective, we are interested in building research files on all of the gifted works and uncovering threads of connection between them. For an intern, this would provide an opportunity to conduct research within a closed set of artists and artworks and observe as narratives emerge—shedding light on the development of photography as both a technological medium and an art form over the course of the past century and a half. It would also offer the intern the opportunity to understand on a small scale, how one might expand the art historical canon to accommodate lesser-known voices and narratives.

Conservation documentation is essential to proper care and stewardship of a collection. By conducting object-level condition assessments, the intern will contribute to immediate and long-term preservation of this important collection by identifying physical condition issues, establishing treatment and rehousing priorities, and building knowledge of the materials and techniques employed in the making of these prints and photographs. The intern will be introduced to various examination techniques, the Museum System (our collections information database), and will be trained in proper handling techniques. Minor conservation treatments and rehousing may be carried out, time permitting. Hands-on conservation activities will be supplemented by focused readings on relevant topics.

This project will support an upcoming collections move as well as preparing works for future exhibition. The conservation and curatorial departments at the Hirshhorn collaborate routinely and the intern will benefit from regular engagement between these subject-matter experts to create a more holistic learning experience.

Mentored internship activities will include creating museum object files for each work, conducting general research on photographers and artworks, conducting an object-level condition survey, performing printmaking and photographic process identification, entering conservation reports into the Museum's collections information database, and possibly performing object rehousing and minor conservation treatments.

Learning Objectives:

- Exposure to curatorial research practices for new acquisitions
- Identify connections between works and photographers in the gift
- Gain an understanding of print and photographic processes from the 19th century to present including identification
- Develop technical vocabulary to describe condition issues as well as print and photographic processes
- Identify physical and aesthetic condition issues and learn to prioritize needs
- Understand the roles of conservators and curators within the museum environment and gain exposure to the cross departmental dialogue essential to the care of collections