

# The Newsletter of the Visual Materials Section Society of American Archivists

February 2010

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From the Chair Stephen Fletcher UNC-Chapel Hill

Think Globally, Meet Locally? The Visual Materials Section Midwinter Meeting Revisited.

In January, 2003, twenty Visual Material Section members traveled to University Park, Maryland, for our section's first Midwinter Meeting. It was the cul-

mination of more than ten years of discussion about how to accomplish the business of the section in a way impossible to accomplish within the tight confines of the SAA Annual Meeting structure. The meeting was successful; as then Section Chair Laurie Baty reported in Views, "I easily can say that we left the meeting re-energized and committed to increasing our volunteer base, improving our work with Council on visual archival education, and in providing up-to-date information and information resources in Views and on our Web site. We were also exhausted from two very full days of considering Section activities."

During this economically challenging time, I am concerned about people's ability to travel to Midwinter, and as I began thinking about where to meet for this year, I became curious about past meetings and their attendance records. A little digging revealed some interesting numbers.

Of the twenty attendees for the first Midwinter Meeting, thirteen were from the immediate Washington, D.C. area and three lived as close as an eight-hour drive. Only three Section members visited from afar. After its initial success in 2003, as an informal trial, SAA sanctioned Midwinter as an official meeting, which enabled participants to be reimbursed by their employers if applicable. This seemed to have little effect, however, on travelers. Seventeen Section members attended the 2004 meeting in Boston, but again only three archivists made a trip farther than a day's drive. The third Midwinter Meeting returned to University Park, with sixteen attendees, and once again there were only three "distance" travelers. For 2006, in San Francisco, the first Midwinter meeting away from the East Coast, only ten participants were on hand, four being from the West Coast. The 2007 meeting in Durham, North Carolina, saw an even smaller gathering of seven, only two of whom traveled from the West Coast, with the balance being from the Carolinas or nearby Kentucky. The 2008 meeting had to be cancelled, but last year's return to Maryland saw a rebound to twelve attendees—but again all were local, or nearby, save one long-distance traveler.

#### VIEWS: The Newsletter of the Visual Materials Section of the Society of American Archivists

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Your comments and suggestions for improvements will always receive a cordial hearing. The next deadline for material for the newsletter is March 31, 2010. Opinions expressed are those of the authors.

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## Social Movement Visual Archives: Unusual collections require unusual approaches

#### By Lincoln Cushing

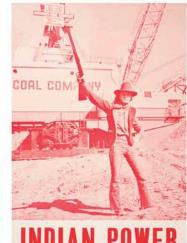
When Free Speech Movement activist Michael Rossman died of cancer in May, 2008, he left behind a huge collection of American political posters from the period known broadly as "the sixties." In fact, the collection consisted of almost 25,000 distinct titles, mostly from the San Francisco Bay Area, and mostly dating from 1965 to 2007. As a long-time friend and information management professional, it fell to me to help the family find a home for this remarkable body of work. The nature of the collection and the process of situating it in a suitable repository offered unique opportunities that are worth sharing with the archival community.

Rossman was a natural scientist, radicalized by Berkeley in the 1960s as an activist in the Free Speech Movement. In 1977 that combination prompted him to begin gathering posters as a tool for teaching young people about social movements, a passion which he continued until his death. He was not wealthy, so this collection was largely built through shameless pleading, dumpster diving, and flea market prowling. Fortunately, aside from a few narrow genres, such as rock posters and Black Panther art, this field was under the radar of commercial exploitation. And Michael's definition of "political" was very broad. Of course, it is rich with the expected - movement basics, including demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, support for Puerto Rican independence, and feminist challenges to the patriarchy. But it pushed that envelope. Sex, drugs, rock and roll, yes; human potential movement, vegetarianism, leather bars- why not? If it involved people trying to change their world, it was in. His personal subject expertise guided the collection. Much of this material is so provocative that it would make the (in)famous "Sun Mad Raisin" AA cover look like something from Reader's Digest.

Partially because he didn't have much money or space, and partially because he was inventive and iconoclastic, Rossman shunned flat files for an amazingly robust and compact storage system. He designed and built a series of Masonite folders, sturdy things with square bottoms and rope handles. With four different size categories, he filled these files so that the posters kept each other flat while in an upright position. These folders, in turn, were stored in custom-built cabinets that kept out dust and water. One example of the virtue of this system is that when we had to move the entire collection out of his house it took four of us less than a day.

Although an archival amateur (as many collection-builders are), as a scientist Rossman understood the importance of taxonomy. Beyond certain cryptic notes the collection was not cataloged, but it was arranged by size and subject. Folders for "R/E HA" contained materials about "Race and ethnicity, Hispanic-American" and were further subdivided into subject breakdowns.









Above: Michael Rossman in his Archive

Clockwise: 1970s posters

Rossman was clear about his wishes regarding the collection after he was gone. It should remain intact, it should remain in the Bay Area, and it should be processed and accessible to the public. The family was willing to donate the collection, but also wanted to make sure that it didn't drift around as an unfunded processing mandate. After much research and inquiry, the suitable institutional candidates came down to the Bancroft Library and the Oakland Museum of California, each with their strengths and weaknesses. In order to assure processing, I am to accompany the collection for a minimum of three years at half time.

To best promote the concern for public access, I have jump-started the challenging task of digitization by beginning it myself. The archive is currently housed right next to my photo studio, where I have shot a selection of over 1,500 posters at MOA standards. This was partly done in order to facilitate the appraisal process, which was very challenging due to the scale and the fact that much of this material is outside the market valuation sphere. I believe that such collections are best processed if digitized before cataloging, a position that I realize is unheard of. But since such marginal materials require that item-level cataloging involve real research rather than rote data entry, and the ability to share images with other scholars is essential to building an accurate record.

As of this date, the disposition of the collection is still being negotiated. At the family's insistence, both institutions have committed to preparing for full, mass digitization as part of the overall processing project. All parties are excited about the impact of this donation and the rich cluster of historical imagery that will become available to scholars all over the world.

Lincoln Cushing has served as cataloger of Spanish-language posters at UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library and as Electronic Outreach Librarian at UC Berkeley Institute of Industrial Relations. He has written several books on poster art history. His work can be seen at www.docspopuli.org

#### **Exhibits**

By Shawn Waldron Archive Director Condé Nast Publications

#### Photographs of Frederick H. Evans

Getty Museum Los Angeles, CA February 10th to June 6th

#### **Irving Penn: Portraits**

National Portrait Gallery London, England February 18th to June 10th

#### **Ansel Adams: Early Works**

San Jose Museum of Art San Jose, CA Ends February 28th

#### Faster Than the Eye Can See: Photographs by Harold Edgerton

Delaware Art Museum Wilmington, DE February 21st to April 11th

#### Portraits from the American West

National Portrait Gallery Washington, D.C. Ends January 24th

#### The Scurlock Studio and Black Washington

National Museum of American History Washington, D.C. Ends February 28

#### Atget, Archivist of Paris

International Center of Photography New York, NY January 29th to May 9th

#### Alias Man Ray:

The Art of Reinvention

Jewish Museum New York, NY Ends March 14th

#### **Big Shots: Andy Warhol Polaroids**

Nasher Museum of Art Durham, NC Ends February 21st

### Catching a Shadow: Daguerreotypes in Philly, 1839-1860

Library Company of Philadelphia Philadelphia, PA Ends February 26th

#### Edward S. Curtis: The North American Indian Amon Carter Museum

Fort Worth, TX Ends May 16th

#### Robert Doisneau

Foundation Cartier Paris, France January 13th to April 18th

## Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage

Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, NY February 2nd to May 19th

### Framing the West: Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan

Smithsonian Washington, D.C. February 12th to May 9th

#### Material Witness: Photographs of Things: Atget, Fenton, Fox Talbot

Clark Art Institute Williamstown, MA January 15th to April 11th

#### **NEW** in Print

By Liz Ruth, Assistant Editor Los Angeles Maritime Museum

Blair, John.

#### The Glossary of Digital Photography

Sebastolpol. CA Rocky Nook, O'Reilly Media, 2007. 350 p.

ISBN: 1933952040 \$39.95. Available from O'Reilly Media,

http://oreilly.com/

Berger, Maurice

### For All the World to See Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights

Yale University Press, March 2010. 224 p. ISBN: 9780300121315. \$39.95. Available at http://yalepress.yale.edu/

Chang, Joshua; with contributions by Steven W. Zucker and Allan Chasanoff

#### First Doubt Optical Confusion in Modern Photography: Selections from the Allan Chasanoff Collection.

New Haven, CT : Yale University Press, 2008. 220 p.

ISBN: 9780300141337

ISBN-10: 0300141335. \$50.00.

Available at http://yalepress.yale.edu/

Darlow, Andrew

## 301 Inkjet Tips and Techniques: An Essential Printing Resource for Photographers (Digital Process and Print)

Boston, MA: Thomson Course Technology, 2008. ISBN 10-59863-204-3. \$49.95.

Available at http://www.amazon.com

DeWolfe, George

## Digital Masters: B&W Printing: Creating the Digital Master Print (A Lark Photography Book)

Asheville, NC: Lark Books, 2009. 208 p. ISBN: 9781600591655 \$29.95.

Available at: http://www.larkbooks.com.

Frey, Franziska. Jeffrey Warda, editor

### The AIC Guide to Digital Photography and Conservation Documentation.

Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 2008. 111 p.

ISBN: 9780976050124 (pbk.) 0976050129 (pbk.) \$30.00

Available at http://www.conservation-us.org/

Jurovics, Toby, Carol M. Johnson, Glenn Willumson, and William F. Stapp; Foreword by Page Stegner.

### Framing the West The Survey Photographs of Timothy H. O'Sullivan.

Yale University Press, March 2010. 272 p ISBN: 9780300158915. ISBN-10: 0300158912. \$60.00. Available at http://yalepress.yale.edu/

Keller, Corey. With essays by Jennifer Tucker, Tom Gunning, and Maren Gröning; Additional contributions by Marie-Sophie Corcy, Erin O'Toole, and Carole Troufléau-Sandrin.

Brought to Light Photography and the Invisible, 1840-1900.

Yale University Press, 2008. 216 p.

ISBN: 9780300142105;

ISBN-10: 0300142102. \$50.00.

Available at http://yalepress.yale.edu/

Steinmueller, Uwe, Juergen Gulbins.

### Fine Art Printing for Photographers: Exhibition Quality Prints with Inkjet Printers, 2nd Edition (Paperback).

Sebastolpol. CA: Rocky Nook, O'Reilly Media, 2009. 298 p.

ISBN 933952172. \$44.95.

Available at http://oreilly.com/rockynook/

## Search Engine Optimization Techniques for Your Web Site

Karen Holt Digital Archivist Advanced Micro Devices karen\_holt@hotmail.com

While I was working in the School of Architecture's Visual Resources Collection at The University of Texas at Austin, I noticed that the foot traffic in our image collection was steadily decreasing. Our core user group still needed images for teaching, research, and publication, but instead of coming to our collection, more and more of these users were going online to find images. Because our site was not easily found by search engines, we were missing out on opportunities to introduce our collections to users.

I realized that one way we could reach this group was to utilize search engine optimization (SEO) techniques so that our collection would rank higher in the search results, and our patrons would be directed toward the high quality, fair use images in our collection. SEO is the process of optimizing a Web site in order to increase the traffic a site receives from search engines. In this article I would like to discuss a few simple things that you can do to optimize the way your site is ranked by search engines.

One of the major ranking factors for Web sites is the quantity and quality of links to a particular URL. Search engines use these links to establish the relevance of a site. Links from .gov and .edu sites are weighed more heavily in ranking algorithms, because these domains are considered more trustworthy. If there are university departments or governmental institutions that you work with that have a resources page on their Web site, you may want to ask them to add a link to your collection. Additionally, internal links, such as a link from your institution's home page or from a sitemap, can improve that page's ranking. If you have too many irrelevant links, however, this can hurt the ranking of your site in Google. To see which sites currently link to your site, simply enter "link: Your URL" into Google's search box, and the results will show all of pages that link to your Web site.

The page title is another factor that can influence page ranking. The page's title is defined in the <title> element in the <head> section of the page's HTML, and the title is displayed in the headline of a search result. (See Figure 1 for an example.) It is important that each page in your site has a descriptive title. You may also want to include targeted keywords in the page title as this will make the page rank higher in the search results when your users search on those keywords. You can use the free Google Search-based keyword tool (www.google.com/sktool) to identify the keywords that led users to your collection's Web site. A meta description tag is a great tool that you can use to direct traffic from a search engine to an individual site. This tag serves as a short text "advertisement" that allows you to describe the content of a page succinctly as well as display targeted keywords that indicate content to searchers. In addition to being descriptive and interesting, meta description tags should also contain keywords that are searched on by your users. A meta description tag consists of HTML code located in the <head> section of a Web page. The text in the tag is displayed in the search engine results, and Google has a display limit of 160-characters. Without a meta description tag, the search engine results will show the keywords in context, which may not necessarily inform potential users about your collection's contents. Below is an example of the meta description tag that my company uses.

#### <head>

<meta name="description" value="Advanced
Micro Devices is an innovative technology company dedicated to collaborating with customers
and partners to ignite the next generation./">
</head>



Figure 1 – AMD Page Title and Meta Description Tag Display in Google

Even though meta keywords are generally regarded as unimportant to search engine rankings, it is prudent to use a few major keywords and misspellings that describe the page's content in the meta keywords tag. Meta keywords are not displayed in the search engine results, but they may help to elevate your page ranking. Like the other tags mentioned above, the meta keywords tag is contained in the <head> section of the HTML document, and below is an example of a meta keywords tag.

#### <head>

<meta name="keywords" value="photo,
photographs, lantern slides, photgraph"/>
</head>

With the vast majority of our users searching for information online, I believe that it is important to make our collections findable in search engines. SEO offers a very inexpensive way to do that. You can assess the effectiveness of the SEO techniques that you implement by using web analytics software. If your Web site does not already have an analytics tool in place, Google offers a free and easy-to-use service entitled Google Analytics that allows you to analyze traffic to your site and create reports. This information will be invaluable when evaluating the traffic that your site receives.

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, there have been a number of books published on it. I have listed several informative online resources below.

Search Engine Blogs and Web Sites:
Search Engine Watch
http://searchenginewatch.com/
SEO Book
http://www.seobook.com/blog
SEO Black Hat
http://seoblackhat.com/
The Official Google Blog
http://googleblog.blogspot.com/
SEO Egghead
http://www.seoegghead.com/blog/

# The Midwinter Meeting Stephen Fletcher Visual Materials Section Chair UNC-Chapel Hill

With all the snow in the Mid-Atlantic states this winter, perhaps we are fortunate to be meeting in late winter this year! Having spring on the meeting's doorstep will be fitting, because the meeting will focus more on the future than reporting about the past. Hopefully many talented Section members from points nearby, and afar, will be in attendance, so let's maximize the constructive time we'll have together by reading reports in advance to inform our discussions. If you are a liaison, chair, or lead a working group, roundtable, etc., please send me a report, by the end of February, about your group's activities and plans. I'll post the reports on a wiki I've set up for the meeting so that everyone can see them. Watch for the wiki address in a future message to the section listservs.

The theme for this year's meeting will be "Staying Relevant." I really want the meeting to be forward-looking, because I believe we are at a critical juncture. We will be looking at SAA's strategic plan (http://www.archivists.org/governance/strategic\_priorities.asp) to see how we can stay relevant to Section members, and the larger SAA membership, but also to see what we can be doing as trendsetters. For the meeting's agenda, Friday will be "expansive thinking" day, with Saturday being the day we coalesce what we discussed on Friday to make it substantive, especially with follow-up assignments to carry us forward.

#### Cheers!



Friday attendees at last year's Visual Materials Section Midwinter Meeting pointed the way forward for 2009. You can

help lead the way for 2010 and beyond by attending Midwinter this year in Bethany, Connecticut. Photo by Stephen Fletcher.

## The Archivist Photographer

We feature work by three of the Visual Materials Section archivist photographers. See "Parting Shots" for the full story. And if you'd like to see more historical photos from your own repositories published in the Gallery, then just send them in!



Photos by Stephen Fletcher, from A North Carolina Album

Above: Church, Princeville, North Carolina.

Right: Bodie Lighthouse, 2005





Photos by Deidre Scaggs, from a continuing series, Mother's Unrealized Vacation(s) The Badlands, Interior, South Dakota, 1988. (Printed 2008).



Photos by Deidre Scaggs, from a continuing series, Mother's Unrealized Vacation(s)
The Castle, Versailles, Kentucky, 2004. (Printed 2008).





Photos by Tim Hawkins

Middle: Catskills Faerie, from the
Mythic Creatures series, 2008.

Right: Mosca Pass, Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado, 2009.

#### From the Chair (Continued from page 1)

What can we learn by looking at the above numbers? One obvious observation is that the preponderance of section members residing in the Northeastern United States contributes to better attendance when we hold the meeting in that portion of the country. Last year's meeting in the Washington, D.C. area occurred during the early throes of the economic downturn. That situation may have held numbers down because even those not in the immediate area of the meeting, but living within a day's driving distance, still have lodging, transportation, and food expenses, and many institutions cut travel funds at some point during 2009. Numbers for previous years, however, suggest that "tough times" may have had little to no bearing on travel decisions. I think, circumstantially, that attendance has more to do with most people's limits on travel funding; even in good economic times, those with travel funding typically have a dollar and/or numeric limit on professional travel that covers only one trip in whole, or in part, so most select the larger Annual Meeting. Good attendance, therefore, seems to be based more on selecting a location close to where many visual material archivists live. With that in mind, this year we selected a location within two hours of New York City.

If the above reasoning is true, how do we get more people involved in Midwinter regardless of funding or where they live? Or on a broader level, after seven years with attendance down from initial years, is Midwinter still relevant? And if it is still relevant, is there a way we can engage more members so they may contribute to the ongoing mission of the section especially given our long-time goal of broad-based participation?

Our section Bylaws do not require a Midwinter Meeting, but they do allow the Chair to call for additional meetings that, if scheduled, must follow certain announcement and reporting protocols. Having attended three Midwinter Meetings, I can attest to their vitality and importance, and wholeheartedly endorse its continuance. Section leaders, and others who attend the SAA Annual Meeting, typically return from the home to play

catch-up from having been gone a week, followed by leadership drumming up session proposals and endorsements, to be followed relatively quickly by the holidays and end-of-the year deadlines in our workplaces. Autumn can disappear in a flash, so Midwinter is the perfect time to refocus on Visual Materials Section matters and engage in meeting our goals in time for the Annual Meeting.

Our current three year-plan calls for an examination of the Midwinter Meeting, which we will undertake this year. I'd like to suggest one question for the study: "Are we locked into having Midwinter at one location?" Last year we tried to counter the difficult economic conditions that we thought might limit attendance with a last-minute idea to blog the meeting, so others could contribute from their home bases. We know from use statistics that many followed along, and some commented on blog posts covering specific topics. Can we use a blog or other technologies—even as simple as telephone conference calls on speaker phones—to widen member participation? An idea I've been contemplating since last year's meeting is the possibility of having multiple, simultaneous Midwinter Meetings: Section members in various parts of the country (to be determined by archival demographics, willing hosts and hostesses, and available facilities) could have discussions akin to breakout sessions that report back to the large whole periodically during the meeting. One agenda would be followed by all participants. Ideally, some form of teleconferencing or computer conferencing software could be used. Perhaps university or corporate archivists who have facilities available could serve as hosts or hostesses for a region. Agenda items that lend themselves to breakout sessions could be discussed at the various meeting sites, which in turn would share a report during agreed upon conferencing times to minimize tying up airtime or bandwidth. Perhaps Visual Materials Section funds could pay for a hosted Web conferencing site. Meeting regionally might even permit the bonding that occurs through shared dinners and downtime, like those we have experienced in the past. Is that too farfetched? Without traveling far, or maybe not at all, would you give part of your time during a two-day meeting to contribute to the Section's future?

## Parting Shots... By Tim Hawkins, Editor



The Editor, photographing in the Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado.

Are you a photographer?

Well, I am, and I have been for many years. One of the underlying rationales for originally becoming a photo archivist was to have a regular paying job in a field that's very difficult to make a living. Then I discovered that working with collections of photos really energized me to spend my personal time working on my own photo projects.

I know a few other archivists who are serious photographers. I consider this to be a level that goes beyond the usual connotation of the term "amateur" - a term for which I hold a certain fondness – because it connotes that we don't do it for the money. It's our passion.

And we're not alone. There's a long history of very accomplished photographers who pursued other occupations to make a living. Although maybe a bit arrogant, there's a sort of purism that goes along with a non-commercial attitude for our work.

One of my all-time favorite photographers is Ralph Eugene Meatyard. His subtly surreal staged photos set him apart from the mainstream of his time. But mostly I admire him for embracing his "amateur" status, working as an optometrist at Eyeglasses of Kentucky, photographing in his spare time, often on weekends, while exhibiting alongside photographers like Emmet Gowin and Van Deren Coke, and eventually being represented in a score of major photo collections.

From the other end of the spectrum, Edward Steichen was possibly the best known and most highly-paid photographer of the 1920's-1930's, on assignment frequently for such high end publications as Vanity Fair and Vogue, then after WWII moved on to become Director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

The point I'm trying to make is that some of us have become photo archivists because we're first photographers. We do it for the love of the medium, as dedicated amateurs, in the best sense of the word. And I'm guessing that there's a significant body of photographic work created by archivist photographers.

I've asked around about that a little bit, and I've found that the leadership of VM includes a number of accomplished photographers. I'm wondering how many more of you there are out there.

I'm also wondering if you'd be interested in participating in a group effort to showcase the creative side of archivists. Are any of you interested in trying to produce an exhibit about archivist photographers? I'd like to pitch it to some potential venues in Chicago for the 2011 SAA annual meeting. If you're interested, then send me some samples of your work.

#### Announcement

Submissions for the April issue of VIEWS are due on March 31st. Send us your articles, images, or announcements!

VIEWS is seeking a Photo Editor. Do you like to research images and share them with your colleagues. VIEWS needs a Photo Editor who can actively reach out to the visual archives community and help us fill the Gallery pages in every issue. If you're interested, contact tim.hawkins@steelworks.us