

Investing in Education and Advocacy: A Partnership to Preserve the Photographic Heritage of Africa

By: Debra Hess Norris, Unidel - Henry Francis DuPont Chair of Fine Arts, Chair and Professor, Art Conservation Department, Director, Winterthur/UD Program in Art Conservation

Photography collections across Africa — 19th-century albumen images, silver gelatin black-and-white prints, glass plate and film-base negatives, contemporary color, and digital media — provide a vibrant cultural and archival resource to their local societies. When preserved and made accessible via traditional media platforms, these images have the capacity to improve visual literacy, enhance local history programming, engage communities, and strengthen regional conflict resolution.

In Africa, important and often large photograph collections face growing environmental and economic danger. Many are held privately or housed in regional museums and libraries where controlled environments are rare and damage caused by flash floods, silverfish, termites, and mold is widespread. Increases in international sale and theft pose new and formidable threats. Sustainable, site-specific, and technology-appropriate collections care solutions are required.

The *Centre de Recherche et de Documentation du Sénégal*, a museum, library, and photograph archive in Saint-Louis, Senegal, has made a significant impact on photograph preservation practice throughout the region. Likewise, the impressive *École du Patrimoine Africain* (ÉPA) in Porto Novo, Benin, provides sound training and education in museum practice for 26 francophone and lusophone countries of West Africa.

Despite the good work of both institutions, more photograph preservation training across sub-Saharan Africa is needed — urgently! In response, the ÉPA partnered with Resolution Photo, the Department of Art Conservation at the University of Delaware, the *Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation* in Paris, and Photograph Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, collaborating to identify important photographic repositories at risk and to develop, organize, and administer a four-day Photograph Preservation Workshop held in Benin in April 2014.

Imagined as the first phase of a much larger initiative called 3PA or *Préservation du Patrimoine Photographique Africain*, this workshop included 24 established curators, photographers, collection care professionals, and directors of contemporary art centers, museums and regional archives deeply committed to the preservation of African heritage in Africa. Well over 50% of the participants were talented artists/photographers who care for influential archives, including those representing the collections of Roger DaSilva of Senegal, Alioune Bâ and Adama Bamba of Mali, and J.D.'Okhai Ojeikere of Nigeria, all photographers of historic and cultural significance. Their repositories include stunning portraits, landscapes, and community celebrations.



Photo credit: 3PA.- Benin, Courtesy of Caroline Lacey/Resolution Photo.

Core lectures and hands-on demonstrations were taught by **Bertrand Lavédrine** (Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation des Collections, Paris, France), **Debra Hess Norris** (University of Delaware Department of Art Conservation), and **Nora W. Kennedy** (Photograph Conservation at The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Addressing topics ranging from the identification of negative and print processes and creative storage solutions, to advocacy and grant writing, the workshop stimulated compelling contributions from all quarters. Teaching was hands-on where possible and translated simultaneously to ease communication.

Additional discussions were led by **Fatima Fall** (director of the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation du Sénégal museum, library, and photographic archive in Saint-Louis, Senegal); **Henrike Grohs** (director of the Goethe-Institut in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire), **Franck Ogou** (curator, cultural producer, and cultural heritage manager at the École du Patrimoine Africain in Porto-Novo, Benin); and **Erin Haney** and **Jennifer Bajorek** (co-directors of Resolution Photo and organizing partners). These speakers addressed diverse issues related to public programming, community outreach, advocacy, intellectual property, and digitization. Some of the most exciting brainstorming sessions focused on the use of traditional clay and earthen architecture to provide

passive cooling and ventilation and opportunities to connect independent photographic archives across borders.

African participants spoke eloquently and with passion about the preservation of these rich photographic resources. While great strides have been made in the preservation of photography in Africa, the broadening of networks and further dissemination of information as a result of this workshop are further steps in connecting and empowering talented African archivists, artists, collection care professionals, directors, and educators capable of advancing preservation practice, public programming, and advocacy. This work must continue through additional programming, online mentoring, and an investment of new preservation funding for collections at risk. A workshop at the Zimbabwe Art Gallery is planned for 2015 once funding is secured.

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Debbie Hess Norris

is chair of the Art Conservation Department at the University of Delaware, director of the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation, and professor of photograph conservation. Norris has taught more than 100 workshops and seminars

for conservators and allied professionals globally, published over 35 articles and book chapters on the preservation of photographic materials. Working with the Arab Image Foundation in Lebanon, the Getty Conservation Institute and other treasured professional colleagues, she co-leads a multi-year initiative aimed at preserving photographic holdings across the Middle East. She currently serves on the boards of Heritage Preservation, the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, and the American Friends of the National Gallery of Denmark, the Advisory Committee for the FAIC Heritage Photograph Conservation Initiative, among others. In 2002, Norris was inducted into the University of Delaware's Alumni Wall of Fame. In January 2004, she was appointed as the Henry Francis du Pont Chair in Fine Arts. Norris has received the Rutherford John Gettens Merit Award for outstanding service to the American Institute for Conservation (1998), the Sheldon and Caroline Keck Award for excellence in the education and training of conservation professionals (2004), and the American Institute for Conservation University Products Award for distinguished achievement in the conservation of cultural property (2008).

Debra Hess Norris

Chair, Department of Art Conservation

303 Old College
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716
dhnorris@udel.edu

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