

Reprinting as a Preservation Practice: Where do we go from here?

Panel Discussion and Audience Q+A

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Speakers

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Jeff Rosenheim, Curator in Charge, Department of Photographs, Metropolitan Museum of Art

00:12: COREY KELLER: Hi, everybody. I'm Corey Keller, curator of photography. I am not going to give formal introductions to my illustrious panel, because that would take up the full hour of our discussion time. But I will tell you we have, from your left, Roberta Piantavigna, the conservator of photography here at SFMOMA; Jeff Rosenheim, who we've already heard from, and I expect to hear more from, curator in charge of the department of photographs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Sarah Meister, who we heard from, from the Museum of Modern Art; and Sylvie Pénichon, from the Art Institute of Chicago. I don't think I've ever got to be on a panel I get to use an Italian and a French accent, badly in both cases. It's pretty nice. I have a lot. First, I was going to derail the entire conversation. I think maybe we should have an entire symposium about the Met's drawer of penises. But we'll see. Because I've been taking notes on— I've developed a whole outline for that symposium, so we can share that later. But my aim here is to try and bring a little bit of conclusion to this extremely interesting conversation, and think if we can think toward a direction of what a policy might look like, and if we could even all agree that a policy about reprinting would be beneficial. But in thinking— I mean, my notes look like this from this morning, because I kept making this crazy Venn diagram that was going in multiple directions. And one of the things I'm hoping that we might get to, after we talk about some of the nuts and bolts about what each of our institutions actually do, is to think about what it is a museum

KELLER (Cont.): does. We started off this conversation talking about objects versus images, and I feel went rather quickly in a direction talking much more about images than objects. And thinking about why we collect objects in the first place, because it seems to me that what the museum's mission is is central to making some of the decisions about what we do about reprinting. So I thought it might just be interesting. Sarah, we heard a little bit from you already about what MoMA does. But maybe Jeff and Sylvie and Roberta, you could talk a little bit about what we do at each of our respective institutions. Sylvie, do you want to start with how the Art Institute of Chicago treats reprinting?

02:45: SYLVIE PÉNICHON: Well, I think the history of reprinting's very similar to what you talked about this morning. There was, at some point, a policy about buying two prints, which is no more in effect now. Reprinting happens— There is no policy, no general guidelines for the entire museum. Today, different curatorial departments collect photographs, so it's not only in the realm of the photography department that photographs are being collected. And each department, each curatorial department, has a different attitude, I think, towards reprinting. It's very obvious—to me, it's very obvious. So the photography department sees a print in a different way than the modern and contemporary department would or the architecture and design—

SARAH MEISTER: And do they talk?

03:51: PÉNICHON: No. I mean, yes and no. But it's very compartmentalized. So there are some discussions, but we never ever sit—or it hasn't happened yet—that we have this discussion about how we're going to tackle this issue. What do we do when an artist approaches the museum and says, 'I don't like what I'm seeing on your wall. I would like to exchange this print.' Or how are we approaching the artist? Because both are happening. But there is not a concerted action from the museum as a whole. It's on a

PÉNICHON (Cont.): case-by-case. I mean, it feels like it happens whenever. There is not really— It's out of control, I guess.

KELLER: And why did you decide to discontinue the reserve print policy?

05:01: PÉNICHON: Well, a change of leadership in the photography department, a lack of space or running out of space, and also the imperfection of the system, to start with. Like, having two prints, okay. But when those prints were acquired, there was no discussion. Really, nothing has been put in place as [to] who is going to decide that the exhibition print is dead and now we should use the archive print. I'm not even sure— I've been doing a little bit of digging and looking into the paperwork, the deeds and all that, when prints were acquired. There's been no discussion about should even the archive print be exhibited, or are we supposed to use it as a reference print, so that we could make— So these basic questions have not been addressed at the time of the purchase in the past. And it feels like even today, we would not be able maybe to foresee all these different questions that would need to be tackled to have a map. So a series of reasons, that's why we don't do this anymore. We might on— But there is no more policy that we require two prints. Sometimes we might get two prints, but that will be, again— There is no rule.

KELLER: Just one more question. So I know the contemporary department is active in acquiring photography. Are you the conservator who works with that collection? Or do they have a conservator attached to their department, who works with it?

06:58: PÉNICHON: So when the photograph conservation was created at the Art Institute in 1982, it was embedded within the photography department, curatorial department. A year ago, there was a change in the administrative structure, and now photograph conservation is part of [the] conservation and science department. So that

PÉNICHON (Cont.): there was this administrative change in structure, which makes working with different departments a little bit easier. Not that it didn't exist before, but now that it's clear that I am not part of one curatorial department, it facilitates the conversation with the other departments. But I am photograph conservation. My department is responsible for any photograph in the Art Institute collection, regardless of which department acquires it.

KELLER: Thank you. Jeff, do you want to talk a little bit about how the Met approaches this?

08:16: JEFF ROSENHEIM: Sure. Anyway, thank you all for having me. The department of photographs began collecting photography in the late twenties. But when we established a sort of color print collection, it was begun by Maria Hambourg, who came from the Museum of Modern Art. And she basically brought this system that Sarah outlined so elegantly, except she asked, actually, me to execute this. And I really didn't understand it, and I asked some questions, even earlier to Sarah, for clarification. And it kind of went like this. She said, "Get a refrigerator." And it was that Sears Kenmore refrigerator, and we did buy it from Sears and it is a Kenmore. And it had the largest freezer section. Or maybe the smallest. Anyway.

MEISTER: The smallest.

09:14: ROSENHEIM: Yeah, the smallest freezer section. Thank you. And we still have it. I have no idea what's in it, except for some old color film. And I don't know why there's color film in there, but that's where it is. And the idea was that when we were acquiring works from an artist, we would acquire two, just like Sarah described. And I was told what to do, and it was basically this. That we put one in a mat and put it in the box in the regular storage vault, and the other went into a plastic bag. I think it was a zip-lock

ROSENHEIM (Cont.): bag, possibly a zip— Where’s Henry? Some sort of bag. And it went in the refrigerator. And I asked my boss at the time, “So how do we know when to take it out? And what do we do when we decide that the actual one that’s been exhibited and showed in classroom situations and on the wall, we think it no longer looks like it used to? And are we just going to take the one that’s looking just fine out and that’s the end of it?” I mean, this idea, this problem—I guess the Art Institute just figured out it’s a problem—we still have. And we are doing this, except we actually now have cold storage. The Art Institute had cold storage, the Modern got cold storage, we, I think, have, and SFMOMA has cold storage. So we finally got cold storage, so things are much better. But it’s a big problem. And we, too, have a case-by-case basis. We have never taken something, as far as I know—and Meredith is here, who’s our collections manager—I do not believe we’ve ever taken a photograph out of the reserve print status and elevated it to the—I don’t know what it is—the standard exhibition status. But then we’re not going to have one in cold storage, so we have the same problem as if we didn’t acquire two.

11:16: PÉNICHON: Also, there is the issue of— It only works if you work with contemporary production, right?

ROSENHEIM: Right, of course.

PÉNICHON: If you want to purchase a print that’s been produced a few years ago, then...

ROSENHEIM: Right. Or better yet—

PÉNICHON: ...there are not two available or you are already reprinting when you purchase.

ROSENHEIM: Right. Or better yet, someone gives you something and you don't say, 'Well, no, we won't accept your gift unless you buy us a reserve print.' It doesn't really work. Although we have gone back to artists and say, "We have this nice thing. Can we make a print?"

11:50: ROBERTA PIANTAVIGNA: I have a question for you. So when you can have, actually, two prints, one is the one that will be exhibited, and the second one will be the reserve print.

ROSENHEIM: That's correct.

PIANTAVIGNA: Do they come mounted or framed or [inaudible]?

ROSENHEIM: Right. So we try to accept that the artist may know exactly what they want for the exhibition print, and we try not to have the reserve print mounted like that. Neither front-facing mount—what—face-mounted or any other, back-mounted. And we then put them in rolls. We roll them and we put them in our cold storage.

MEISTER: Even though it was our policy that Maria brought to the Met, we actually keep both copies in a refrigerator, in a folded sheet of paper, in a box, in a polyethylene bag, right? [inaudible voices] And then when we go— That was when we had a refrigerator. Now we have a closed, sort of zero-degree reach-in unit. And those also go into a Marvelseal bag that is what helps mitigate the change from that unit—I'm looking at Lee Ann like, I hope I have this right—mitigate the change from that into the cool storage, where it sits overnight. And then we bring it into the study center. So it's almost like if you have two but they both don't stay in the fridge, then you're just precipitating the problem of the first. But it's interesting to think about abandoning the policy, because

MEISTER (Cont.): we have the same situation if we get a gift. You know, we don't always have a duplicate print. And it's just it's like a little bit of an extra insurance policy that even if you know you're going to be confronted with a choice, eventually, of do I still like the way this looks, is this still what we want to put on the wall, if you have a second— And frankly, I think one solution might be storing— keeping a digital file, that you then use your reserve or duplicate print as a guide print against which any future prints might be made. But then the other thing, because storing a digital file carries with it all kinds of other problems for conservation and other things— The files need to be exercised, they need to be migrated, they need— You know, it carries with it all other kinds of problems. So the other option might be to use that reserve print— Like Henry is saying, there's more and more, the technology to make a facsimile from an object.

14:28: ROSENHEIM: Well, you're doing that.

MEISTER: Yeah.

ROSENHEIM: The Stephen Shore show, I think—correct me if I'm wrong, but—you didn't use either of your prints; you made an exhibition print, or Stephen made an exhibition print, that doesn't look like either the one you've been showing or the one you haven't been showing or the one we haven't been showing or the one that's in cold storage that we haven't been showing. And it doesn't look like the book that he made in 1978 either. How do you feel about that? [laughter]

KELLER: How do you feel about that?

MEISTER: Well, I'll say this. Actually, Lee Ann I did some real hand wringing about the vintage eight by ten contact prints that we put up. And I'll let you talk, too. But I'll the idea of making an exhibition copy, which we haven't quite gotten into that much here—

MEISTER (Cont.): We have the Gursky exhibition, the Louise Lawler exhibition, the Thomas Demand. We often make exhibition prints, so that we can blast them with light during an exhibition...

ROSENHEIM: Ah-ha.

MEISTER: ...and not have it feel like a mausoleum. So that was applied with—

KELLER: I like mausoleums, wait a minute.

15:43: MEISTER: Well, you know—

ROSENHEIM: We are mausoleums.

LEE ANN DAFFNER: Let me just interrupt. So Jeff, let me just clarify. So Stephen Shore exhibition. It was a mix. We had vintage prints on the wall, and we also rotated them out. So he made some prints that were fresh and then we pulled out some of our older prints that were in beautiful condition. And we also were very selective about which ones we put on the wall, because some, I felt with the group, were too susceptible to change. And so we worked with curatorial and tried to choose ones that we felt would be— You know, that would withstand the exhibition.

ROSENHEIM: Thank you for that clarification. I had this idea when John Divola was speaking that he said something about, like [inaudible] was like a library. It was an example from literature, that we don't need to have a scan in every— We don't need to have multiple examples of things, that maybe there should be, in this idea of ideal ways, that there should be a master set of pictures that are in one place, and that those are the ones that are used to generation the exhibition prints. And that when Stephen

ROSENHEIM (Cont.): wants to have a show or whatever, and that those travel around. And as you say, they can be blasted with light. But to be honest, the blasting with light is a whole other issue about the visibility of works of art and what kind of an environment should they be seen in. And in fact, scale is an issue, as well. And we have lost the ability to look at small things. Sorry, Richard.

RICHARD MISRACH: You're right.

17:28: ROSENHEIM: Okay. We have lost the ability to look at small things. And yet we get so much pleasure from our phones.

KELLER: But I think that that goes— Sorry, you can go ahead and then I'll—

MEISTER: Oh, no, go ahead.

KELLER: No, but I was going to say that to me, this goes right back to this question of why are we bothering to collect objects in the first place, and what it is that a museum does. Roberta and I have been talking a lot about this. And Sarah, when you let me have a sneak peek at your talk, we had this idea about if the museum's twin goals—and we'll put that out as a hypothetical—are to both preserve artwork and to disseminate it through exhibition or publication. And we might see that one of those goals is detrimental to the other goal. So how does one— I mean, how do you resolve that? And why does preserving the object become important, if the facsimile is an adequate substitute?

18:26: MEISTER: Well, I'll just say we're museums. We care for objects. Clement and I were talking about the daguerreotype, the first photograph that basically is just a mirror. But it still has an aura, as he said. You know, that we collect things because we

MEISTER (Cont.): believe that there is an experience that you feel when you're in front of that thing. And whether it's teaching an online course that's telling people to go to museums to look at works of art or helping people understand the difference between the materiality of a silver dye-bleach print or a chromogenic color print or a dye transfer print, I think we play a role is sort of helping commit to a dialog around things that begins with artists and is encouraged by us. And we have to sort of be open to where that may be lead. And the one caveat, I would say, to the idea that we have to follow the artist's lead is that artists change. So I get it that the two prints by John Divola, if he could've made the one on the right, whatever side that was, back in 1978 look just like that, he would've. And yet I will also say that our responsibility is to help apply historical specificity to these objects that we collect. So in that instance, I would be happy to have both in the collection, as an example of how he believes today that he would have liked that to have looked. But in the same way that we had this conversation with Paul Graham about what his pigmented inkjet prints should look like, I'm okay with telling him that the mood and the meaning of the work changes at a different scale, in a different materiality, with a different contrast. And the fact that it wasn't an option available doesn't negate what that was originally or who the person was who made it.

20:41: KELLER: Well, I keep thinking of what if, when Stieglitz decided to print everything as a gelatin silver print, we took all the Camera Work gravures and the platinum prints and the bum bichromates and threw those in the garbage because now Stieglitz sees his work as a gelatin silver? I hate to say it, but I keep coming back to the drawer full of penises, because why we have to save them in a drawer. It's a very interesting question because that—

ROSENHEIM: Why do we— Those of us who have collections where we actually have the negative or transparency material, what are they for? Has anyone come to the Met to

ROSENHEIM (Cont.): see Evans' 30,000 negatives and 10,000 transparencies? I acquired them in 1994. And the first thing I did was, I decided, well, people are going to want to see them, and how am I going to show them? So I spent hundreds of thousands—this is public—hundreds of thousands of dollars making a work print of all the negatives, so that I could transmit all of those negatives to you all.

MEISTER: I've done that, by the way. I've looked at the scans of those [inaudible].

21:53: ROSENHEIM: Okay, you looked at the scans, but I made prints.

MEISTER: Right.

ROSENHEIM: No one has ever, ever asked to see them. [inaudible voice]

KELLER: Okay, Janet's coming.

ROSENHEIM: Okay. So anyway, by the time we could do that, we had this digital thing. Why do we have them?

PIANTAVIGNA: Well, there's still value in what you have done. And maybe someone else in the future will appreciate that, in the same way that we appreciate maybe not the penis in the drawer, but we can, through that, interpret the way that we interpreted those sculptures at that time.

22:31: ROSENHEIM: Yeah. I get—

PIANTAVIGNA: It's important to keep track of those interpretations over time, so...

ROSENHEIM: I agree.

PIANTAVIGNA: ...so we can tell even our story as institutions and how we perceived those works.

ROSENHEIM: I agree. I think we cannot know what people in the future will want. And having them and doing them without knowing the reasons why we're doing them—and I think that's Richard's point, is a really good one. And we have different types of archives, they have different purposes. We use different things. We have manuscripts that have been discovered, we have unpublished manuscripts from writers that, you know, make it up.

23:09: MEISTER: But I think it does raise an interesting question of allocation of resources. And whether it's naming who we think are the twenty-five most important color photographers of the seventies or if that is— You know, it's something we grapple with a lot is, like, how do we align our institutional priorities and the artists whose practices we want to bring forward who we don't know? And it's a really— And my not-so-secret hope is that we can work together in the institutions that have the luxury of having access to resources, to carry out exhaustive artist questionnaires. You know, we do this photograph information record, which we actually, many of us, collaborated on, conservation and curatorial, to develop that. I hope that we do something similar with this, even if it's only coming up with a bunch of different artists the various institutions adopt and say, 'I'm going to work with you to understand just what matters most to you, so that in posterity, down the road, if SFMOMA wants to call me, we can share this information.' But it's too much to ask for all of us to do it for all of these artists. And what we also want to leave open is the possibility that there are under-known careers that have yet to be discovered. And that is an important part to think about, too.

24:41: KELLER: Do you think there's a danger in—and again, Roberta, maybe you want to speak to this because we were talking about this yesterday—but in our fear of loss, in our anxiety about change, that we might be losing something, in an attempt to preserve it in its presentness? I mean, I was just thinking about the restoration of Chartres Cathedral, for example, which if you have been to Chartres, it used to be quite black inside from hundreds of years of candles and— And of course, Chartres has been represented in hundreds of years of other artworks and experienced and described in literature and in poetry. And so Chartres is not just a building, but it is a series of accumulated experiences. The decision was made to clean it, to restore it to its original state, a state which probably hasn't been— How anybody would know what its original state is, I don't know, unless they were alive in 1200. But this idea that Chartres, it's an accumulation over time that has changed and accrued new meaning. And so in the sort desire to preserve things exactly as they were at the moment the artist made them, do we lose something else?

ROSENHEIM: I remember reading— Right, sorry.

PIANTAVIGNA: [inaudible]

ROSENHEIM: Sorry.

PIANTAVIGNA: I'll let you speak after.

ROSENHEIM: No, no. [laughter]

26:04: PIANTAVIGNA: To go back to the concept of fear of loss, I think we can look at loss from very different perspectives, according if you are a curator, if you are an artist, or if you're a conservator. And at this point, I don't know how the audience, the public

PIANTAVIGNA (Cont.): that we have at the museum, will consider loss. Do they look at a faded print thinking that it's faded and it's not exhibitable? So just keep that in mind, that we all have a different understanding of what is loss. And I think that yes, I've been thinking a lot about the idea of reprinting maybe from an anthropological perspective. And sometimes I think it reflects our fear of accepting change and decay. And as conservators, we struggle with that because we want to preserve either the object, but also the artist's intent. And sometimes it's difficult to balance both. And it's even more difficult when you have an exhibition coming up and you have to find a solution, and maybe propose reprinting as a potential option to that exhibition, but not to the very long-term preservation of the object. So I think that maybe we just need to find ways to address the issue of reprinting, deciding what is the final goal? Is it the exhibition or is it the long-term preservation of either the object and the artist's intent? And we might not have an answer today and in the near future, but I think that if we also think about how an artwork manifests itself, it's not just through one copy, one print. We have heard today that they are all different. And to me, that is a very powerful idea that makes me think that they are all unique, at the end of the day, and they are all worthy of being preserved. And maybe as well, exhibited. And when we look at the objects and perceive them as— For instance, for editions. And the publication of those works and the way that they now manifest themselves through social media, for instance. That's the whole work. It's always the same work that is just navigating our reality in different ways. And maybe a reprint, it is a solution. We just need to be aware of what is our goal and why are we doing it.

28:52: MEISTER: And maybe, Jeff, you'll talk about the— To try to resolve these two tensions between preserving and sharing, your autochrome solution that I cite all the time. But I'll let you talk about it.

ROSENHEIM: Sure. I'm trying to hold onto all of these.

MEISTER: Oh, sorry.

ROSENHEIM: No, no, trying to hold on. But okay. So autochromes are early color process. And they have a—the room filled with conservators—dyed potato starch. Are they dyed?

VOICES: Yes.

00:31:18:08 ROSENHEIM: Yes, they're dyed potato starches that are scattered in this unbelievable way on a glass plate. And it's an early twentieth century process, and they're very fugitive. But they're—

PIANTAVIGNA: And unique.

ROSENHEIM: And unique. Thank you. So when we had an opportunity to put an exhibition up and we wanted to include them, we made a decision that we would make a facsimile, which was presented during the most number of weeks of the show. But for one week, we would put the original up. Or for a few days, the original. And we used this to talk about these issues of conservation, fragility, preservation. And it was actually a media good thing to do. It talked about the nature of the medium and the role of the institution. And it was a very exciting thing. Some people—Sarah being one; she's our star visitor—came to see it on the day—

30:21 MEISTER: I think Lee Ann and I rushed up together.

ROSENHEIM: Yeah.

MEISTER: It was like, oh, my gosh, the real ones are on view.

ROSENHEIM: Yeah, which are never on view.

MEISTER: But it made me feel good that for the other fifteen weeks, you didn't have them on view. And frankly, for our Paul Graham A1, that's my goal is like, we might put them up for a week or a month, I don't know, for the people who really, really care and want to see them. But for the huge swath— You know, who are we kidding? Most of the other people don't know, and it's okay to represent—labeling properly—it through another means, because that's balancing those two incompatible, frankly, goals of—

30:56: PIANTAVIGNA: I'm looking at Sylvie, but—

MEISTER: Okay, Sylvie time.

PÉNICHON: It's a little problematic, too, because then that's elitist. You want people to appreciate or learn to appreciate what we value in a vintage or in an older print, as opposed to a reproduction. I think that the issue about vocabulary and how we call things is very important.

MEISTER: Can I just say one word to the elitist?

MEISTER: [inaudible] but I mean—

MEISTER: I just want to dig down a little bit because it may be elitist, but it's also thinking really about what's my job. And part of my job is to protect these things. And if I put them up there for four months, I'm killing them for the future. So it's about balancing those two things...

PÉNICHON: Yes, yes.

MEISTER: ...as opposed to elitism.

31:52: PÉNICHON: Yes, of course. I mean, I was going all the way, but—

MEISTER: It's okay.

PÉNICHON: We always have to...

KELLER: I don't know she wasn't going to let that slide.

31:59: PÉNICHON: ...walk these fine lines of sharing with the public and preserving. I mean, the mission of the museum, to start with, has this dichotomy that cannot be reconciled. So it's always— And—

MEISTER: We're okay. [laughter]

KELLER: Jeff, yeah.

ROSENHEIM: Just two things. One of the issues about printing or reprinting—and I think we need to discuss that—is that the issue of scale, which we've talked about in pretty much every panel, is an issue that I think institutions think about all the time. And it's not just storage. It is about the galleries in which we have. Some institutional galleries here are quite large, some institutional galleries at the Art Institute, at wherever, at the Met. And others are scaled for the history of photography, leading up to the 1970s, to be honest. I have the great pleasure of knowing William Eggleston and have a very large

ROSENHEIM (Cont.): collection at the Met. I think we have the largest institutional collection. And the new prints that he is producing with his family, and are available in the marketplace, are significantly larger than anything ever before. And they do not play well with all of the other works in our collection, and there's just no way we're going to be able to upscale everything in the collection. And in fact, they snub the other works, when they're placed side-by-side. Separately, it's all fine. And they're beautifully made, and we have at least one in the collection, and we will probably have others, to represent that moment in his production. But it's something that we have to sort out. So that's one thing about printing or reprinting.

34:00: ROSENHEIM (Cont.): And the second thing is, I remember reading— Those of you in the audience will help me, I know. the Menil museum collection produced a little book on Duchamp's Fountain. You know, that's the urinal that is signed R. Mutt. And there's this wonderful little book about it. And I think the work is 1916 or 1917, the original work, which is a conceptual work of art from the period. And the idea was that you go to the hardware store and you buy the urinal at your local hardware store and you put it up in the museum. The idea was that whenever anyone wanted to exhibit it, it wasn't to exhibit the one that was in MoMA's collection or in anyone else's collection. When you were going to represent that work, you were going to go to the hardware store and buy the one that was at your local hardware store. That was the radical idea. But institutionally, we fetishized the actual urinal. And that is the problem that we are now dealing with collectively, maybe this whole day. Which is, what is the original representation of that idea? And what is the scale of it? What does it look like? And photography, most of us went into it because it was a field of multiples. And this is something that is a really interesting problem. And I think it has market issues, and it also has social, political, institutional, museological, and curatorial issues. And it's what we think about every day.

35:40: PIANTAVIGNA: Can I add something to that, that you just said? It makes me think about the decision that curators make when they acquire something. Like a contemporary photograph that is made by a living artist, not by an estate. What are the decisions that are made for the acquisition? Why that work is coming to the collection? Are those decisions recorded and written? I think that those decisions can— And the reasons that explain, what does the curator see in that object that makes it worthy of being in the collection? I think that those decisions can tell and can help curators in the future, and conservators now, to understand, is that object reprintable? Can we go back to the artist and, at the time of the acquisition, ask, ‘What do you think about your object in the future? Because you printed it on a support that might not last more than ten years. Or something might happen in the future that we will need to consider maybe reprinting it. I wonder if there is something that we can do, at least with a living artist, as we have heard before, that had a better impact for the works that we are acquiring right now. Certainly, there is a lot to do for the works that we have already in the collection that certainly might have signs of deterioration; but what can we do next? And to go back to what Sarah, you mentioned, resources. How do we invest our resources in preserving better the works that we have in the collection already? Or can we invest those resources for the works that we are acquiring right now that are facing those issues still? I mean, we haven’t solved the problem of permanence for photography at all. I don’t think that it’s con— I’m not definitely on the same page with Erin, when this is a matter only for color and chromogenic prints. I think this is a problem for inkjet prints. Sarah, you described very well the history at MoMA with gelatin silver prints. And we have seen that happen with those, and with other processes, as well. So reprinting, I think it can be a preservation solution. But it has to be applied to more mediums, not just to chromogenic prints, I would say.

38:26: PÉNICHON: But I’d say it goes even beyond the preservation of the material. Because from what we heard earlier with the artists panel, it feels that even if we have

PÉNICHON (Cont.): a print in perfect condition from the seventies, that print is considered flawed, in a way, because from what I understand of what you were saying earlier, you couldn't get all you could from the negative, and that what you produced at the time was not satisfactory. So it brings a lot of more questioning. I don't know that we'll ever solve all those questions, but it made me think about how proud we are at the Art Institute for having this wonderful collection of early prints, because there was cold storage very early on and we have forty years of prints kept in cold that look still very good. But then there is this question, like this doesn't represent your vision of today. So it feels like we're chasing our tail.

ROSENHEIM: It's sort of sad. It creates a kind of melancholy that we are preserving finally in cold storage something that many of the artists that are working today that were working then feel was never good enough for their ideas. It's a pretty heavy problem.

40:09: MEISTER: But I do— First, let's call on Richard. But I think before that—

KELLER: We'll get to questions.

MEISTER: Okay. I think for me, it's a question of, this is where we as representatives of institutions need to help articulate for future generations, this is how this looked in 1978. This was, to the best ability of the artist, working in concert with us, this is what this looked like. We are a museum; this is what we collect. Now to me, there's nothing sad about acknowledging that, while also saying in 2019, there's this huge new realm— or whatever—huge new realm of possibilities, that also we have the luxury of speaking to these artists and understanding how they feel about them now. And I don't think those two things are in conflict. And while I'm hap— Not happy. While I accept that destruction and replacing prints is part of, can be part of this history— Because

MEISTER (Cont.): sometimes an artist demands it. You say, ‘Okay, you can reprint this, but then I want you to—’ Jan Groover wanted to destroy the originals, and we said, “Okay.” And I don’t actually feel sad about that either. I don’t know, I feel as if the important part is dialog and documentation, and not being afraid of change. And part of that is understanding how something, when you put a framework around it for what it looked like in 1978, there’re really good reasons for wanting to show and share that. And there are also good reasons for wanting to show and share something at a bigger scale and saying, ‘This artist, in 2019, feels—’ And this is our job.

42:01: KELLER: Yeah, I was just going to say, but to the point of— I mean, that objects tell us more than the artist’s intentions. And I actually would really, if we had more time, I would like to put a lot more pressure on that idea about the artist’s intention. But one of the things that— Let’s say we have a Martian comes down 250 years from now, and they’re looking. They’re going to say, ‘Well, Richard Misrach printed that same picture three different times. This tells me that at that moment, that there was discussion about that there were multiple processes available and that there was some tension about what the best result was, and that he as an artist was grappling with how he wanted his work represented.’ I mean you can look at Baldus, right? Who prints his work as a salt print and then as an albumen print, and then goes back to salt print, then he does an albumen, because he’s trying to figure out what it is he’s doing. And in preserving all of those manifestations, you learn not just about what that artist was thinking, but what possibilities were available to artists at that moment. I mean, it was really interesting. Erin made a point about how— She said you wouldn’t want to say to an artist, ‘Well, since you didn’t have any money then, you’re stuck with those pictures.’ But imagine if we said, ‘Well, Degas didn’t have any money so he was making his pastels on cheap cardboard, but he really should’ve done those on something else.’ But the fact that he had no money and was doing it on cheap cardboard is part of the story that we really wouldn’t want to lose. You look like you wanted to say something. No. Okay. Well,

KELLER (Cont.): I think since Richard was waving his hand back there and we're almost at five o'clock, that there are probably some questions. Unless there's something that you absolutely— I do not think we'll go into that whole artist's intention today, but over drinks, maybe. Is there anything that the panel really wishes that we had gotten out on the table, before I turn it over to questions? No?

MEISTER: Thank you for bringing us together today. And Erin and Robin, SFMOMA, and Clement, thank you.

KELLER: It was a big team effort. There's a lot of—

44:13: PIANTAVIGNA: May I add something to that?

KELLER: Yeah.

PIANTAVIGNA: Well, one thing. To the fact that we have colleagues in conservation that deal with this issue for other artworks that are not supposed to last that long. And maybe there are some ways to adopt their practices and their methodology and apply them to our practice in conservation of photography. And having definitely more conversations with even other curators that are in other departments that are acquiring photography can help us [in] understanding why they are acquiring photographs today. And does that matter to them, reprinting? And perhaps they are less concerned about changing the original support and having maybe a chromogenic print reprinted in an inkjet print. And does that matter? Well, yeah, that's what we have seen here, too. But there might be reasons why they do that. And we want to acknowledge that even if there are colleagues that are not in the photography field, there might be other ways that we can look at photographs, that we can use and perhaps think about. I just want to take a chance and say thank you to all my colleagues

PIANTAVIGNA (Cont.): here at SFMOMA in the conservation department. My dear colleague Theresa Andrews, photo conservator, who has been part of the Artist Initiative in the first part of this project, could not be here today. And I just want to thank her for her work. And our former head of collections, who had really the idea of addressing this issue five years ago, and invited experts and colleagues in the country to sort of start the conversation five years ago. Sylvie was one of them, Peter too, Nora, and Debby[sp?] [inaudible]. And I just want to say thank you to my more recent colleagues, like Clement, who was really a key factor added to the team, I guess, and pushing for us to think about a policy. And I hope we will continue discussing, especially with other colleagues in other institutions, how having a policy, a field-wide policy, could benefit us and the practice that we use here, and perhaps setting a more transparent relationship with photographers like Misrach and Janet and John Divola, but all the other ones that are now thinking about reprinting.

47:03: KELLER: The other twenty-two?

PIANTAVIGNA: Well, I guess there are more than that.

KELLER: Okay. Great.

MEREDITH REISS: Hi, I'm Meredith Reiss. I'm the collections manager for Metropolitan Museum of Art, and I wanted to clarify a couple of things. At the Met, we see a few different scenarios that involve reprinting or backup printing for photographs. You have the situation of a reserve print, which would be when— At the Met, we collect reserve prints for both chromogenic and inkjet works. If we're acquiring a work, we try to get a reserve print if the situation allows. And we talked a little bit about situations where that isn't possible. There's also the scenario where you're acquiring a conceptual work that is more of a print-on-demand scenario, like with a Tillmans that comes with a

REISS (Cont.): match print and a digital file. And we sort of treat that differently. And it gets into what Corey was saying about the idea of the object versus the image. And in terms of the reserve prints that we're bringing in, even though we used to use a fridge, we now do have the cold storage and we're in the process of moving all of our color works off site to cold storage. Which is great, it's just takes a lot of man hours to make that happen. But our reserve print policy— We only have a policy for the one scenario, which is we're acquiring a chromogenic work or we're acquiring an inkjet work which, in the eyes of the artist, is this finished product. We're acquiring that backup print; it's going into cold storage to extend the life of this photograph. And as part of that policy, we agree to destroy the first print when we put the second print into action. There have been scenarios where we've negotiated with the artist at the time to say, 'Can we save some pieces for conservation reasons? Or can we retain this for study purposes?' And on a case-by-case basis, an artist may or may not agree. But we've worked with a lot of artists that say, 'I want you to cut out that signature panel from the middle of the print and send it back to me,' because there are questions related to the market and editioning and things like that. So I feel like we've been talking about can we develop a policy for this, and I don't know that that's possible. Everything is such a case-by-case basis, depending on the institution, what their practices are, what the artist thinks, what the—

49:43: MEISTER: But that's also a policy. I mean, even if you...

REISS: Sure.

MEISTER: ...decide you have to go case by case.

REISS: Sure, sure, absolutely. But while I think it's a really great exercise and this has been an amazing day and the gears are really turning, I don't think it's going to be

REISS (Cont.): possible for a consortium of institutions to draft a policy, or even a set of guidelines, that we all agree to adhere to because everything is a case-by-case basis.

MEISTER: I guess so, but I would just offer that to think about resources and all of these things, I would be perfectly happy to accept you all, as you are for Arbus and Evans, let's name a few more color photo— And you all are the ones who lead the conversation, lead the documentation, lead what you have. And even if we have a difference of opinion and we can't come to a consensus about— Or we might do things differently than you do at the Art Institute or SFMOMA. But I think in the spirit of moving things forward, absolute adherence to a specific set of policies or guidelines or whatever, maybe that isn't the goal. But we can accept responsibility for making decisions, and I accept your decisions and I accept your decisions, even if I might have slightly different ones that we come up with. And in that way, at least we're sort of thinking about these things holistically, so that it's not only the artists who are the most high-profile who can have these conversations with each of us independently, but sort of thinking about let's adopt some artists and work with them to try to— So that, it's not exactly a policy, but maybe it's a path forward that's more productive than just saying, 'Gosh, there's so many different circumstances,' which there definitely are.

51:33: PIANTAVIGNA: At least I think that there is some principles that we can stick to. And one of them came up practically all the time at all the meetings that we had, not just here at SFMOMA, but with the colleagues in the US and in Europe, the concept of not destroying the original. And just having a policy to say out loud that, I think it will be important to have. And not just among photo curators and photo conservators, but also throughout the institution and having our colleagues in other departments sticking to that idea of pertaining and preserving the original [inaudible].

MEISTER: But we literally can't preserve everything. So it's like I really— I just don't think that should be what breaks us apart or keeps us together. In other words, we have been making decisions— We have things that we destroyed in the thirties, forties, ongoing. And actually, I don't— If we kept absolutely everything—

52:41: AUDIENCE MEMBER: We are not reprinting everything [inaudible].

MEISTER: But I'm talking about things that we have been reprinting thirty, forty— And it's like, I'm just not positive that getting hung up on whether we save everything is— You know, the idea that Janet was saying about putting an X through it, which is every bit as final as destroying something or taking a piece from it or whatever. I just don't know if that—

53:05: PIANTAVIGNA: But that goes against the value proposition of the museum to collect and preserve, if we destroy, right?

MEISTER: Well, I think you could make that argument, but I also—

PIANTAVIGNA: Unless it's a conceptual artwork, where the— Perhaps that iteration is not— The materialization of the object—

MEISTER: Or maybe it's inherent to the idea of the multiplicity of the medium.

ROSENHEIM: Okay. I mean, I think your institution is just so different. You have made so many prints. By the way, you have provided more prints for the market that you can ever imagine. And they're solid gold, and everybody out there, every institutional private collector, wants to have prints that you've deemed to be not your best prints.

53:49 MEISTER: [inaudible]

ROSENHEIM: Okay. Or hors de commerce okay. So it's a complicated thing. You're saying you can't preserve everything, but you're producing everything. [laughter] So there are a lot of issues here. Okay.

ERIN O'TOOLE: Can I weigh in just for minute? There are a couple things. This is Erin back here. Just a couple things that were bandied about earlier that I just wanted weigh in about. And one of the things— Hi, Jeff. It's just me, Erin. I'm just dying here to weigh in on a couple things. One is just to narrow it back down again, because I feel like everybody's like, 'Well, if you do this, then you can reprint that.' And we're not talking about that. We're talking about pictures that the artists feel are not representing their work anymore because of the inherent problems with the medium during their lifetime. We're not talking about pastels that were made on crappy material. Those things look better than those prints over there still, and Degas' been dead for a long time. And also, the whole— Like you're talking about, this is a medium of multiples, and these iterations are a part of that history. And so if we embrace that— And also, I feel like maybe the problem is that we're imposing ideas on photography that come from other mediums, and that they deny the inherent characteristics of this medium; and that we need to be more open to the fact that there are these possibilities to do this, and if we're shutting them down, we're denying what photography can be. And you're talking about Baldus and all these other people who printed before. And so I just want to say that I think we need to be thinking about it in terms that are about the specificity of photography, and not these mediums that have come before. So that's my piece.

55:40: KELLER: I think my interest in bringing up some of those nineteenth century ideas was to think about the decisions that we make in the present moment have impact in the future. That as a preserving institution, what we do today affects what

KELLER (Cont.): happens for generations of curators to come. I'm not sure that Degas would agree with you that those things look better than that. But—

O'TOOLE: But they're also unique.

KELLER: What?

O'TOOLE: They're also unique.

KELLER: Yeah, they're unique. So that's maybe not the particular example, it just is what came to mind. But I think that that's my concern about making a policy. We can limit ourselves to this present moment; but what we choose to do today affects what happens in 150 or 250, or if Henry Wilhelm has his way, a thousand years in cold storage, that those decisions have a lasting impact.

56:32: PIANTAVIGNA: And I just want to remind that the reason why we are talking about this and the reason why the Artist Initiative project, funded by the Mellon, gave us the opportunity to discuss this is because we had had experience with reprinting at this institution that made the conservators and the curators uncomfortable with the results later. Because at that time, there was not maybe the capacity, and even the understanding, on what could be the implication and the outcome and yeah, the implication on the market and to the public, through that process. So I think that the reason why we are doing this is because we don't want to go back and not have at least guidelines or a principle to adhere to. And we need to find them. I think that we had a sort of idea of what those are. One of them, as I said, is valuing the original, because that represents the manifestation of what was the original decision the curator made with the acquisition. And even though that print might not be on view in the next twenty or fifty years, or even never in the future, that is still valuable. We do have works

PIANTAVIGNA (Cont.): that might not see the light anyways, that don't have an issue but they just don't make it because—

ROSENHEIM: Then they're dead. Then they don't exist.

58:06: PIANTAVIGNA: Well, but so that's another issue about access and the use of the collection. And if we think about works that might not have faded, but that are not in our programming, that's also another issue that I think is worth discussing. Maybe not in this context, but— It has to do more, I think, with the way that we acquire work and the reason why we acquire work, and what we acquire that should lead the conversation, and then provide information for the preservation.

RICHARD MISRACH: If I can just— I've been wanting to jump in there for a while. Sorry. And Erin hit on it a little bit. No problem with you having the originals and keeping them for viewing and looking at. But one, if they're really badly fading, like those two, it would only be of interest if you put it in a show showing what happens, as a comparative thing, which you did with the Stephen Shore show. And seeing that, I think for that[?]

59:14: MEISTER: Not with ones that had degraded, by the way.

MISRACH: What's that?

MEISTER: Not with—

ROSENHEIM: [inaudible]

MEISTER: No. We wouldn't have shown those in the Stephen Shore. The show—
Anyway.

MISRACH: Okay. But anyway, the point is, if it was in a study kind of context— Anyway. But the problem is, is that even if the prints look really good, prints of mine thirty, forty, that still— And somebody just showed me one of that one that they have in the collection. I think it's Minnesota museum, just— And it looks great. That's great, but you're saying you don't want to put them up anyway, because they exposed to light, the old materials. So you've made it impossible to ever show anybody's work from the seventies, if you've got the old vintage prints. Now, what you can do is keep those prints, keep them as the objects, historic objects that they are. The good news is the new materials—the new papers, the new inks—as of the last year and a half, keep getting better and better. And you can now—again, according to Henry's brand new studies; dark studies light studies—in museum collections, a lot of these new materials will last virtually 2-, 300 years. You can show those. So not to take advantage of that— Because, as Erin said and I think it's so important, we have a unique medium. We can reprint things. We have multiplicity, we have multiple editions.

01:00:30: MEISTER: But are you willing to, as Paul Graham said, “dumb it down” to make something that might be considered to have a relationship to the mood and feel of the original? Because that—

MISRACH: No.

MEISTER: Right.

MISRACH: You can't.

MEISTER: There's a—

MISRACH: You can't. That'd be like saying if you took acrylic paints on canvas and it had to look like a watercolor painting on paper. You can't kind of do that. The new materials do have their own characteristics and are going to impact you. And similarly, we now have the ability to do scale that was unimaginable before. It would be insane to deny that possibly. Finally—I'll finish up—and going to Jeff's thing, yes, if you want us to all just do everything on the iPhone, then you might as well just close down the museum. What's really nice about having objects is that we don't have to look at everything that's mini and small and lit up by this device. Because photographic objects can have mini, small scale, and medium scale, and large scale, and be a completely amazing experience that you can't get on an iPhone.

01:01:31: ROSENHEIM: No. I don't like look at anything on my iPhone. Richard, have you ever put a roof on your house?

MISRACH: No.

ROSENHEIM: Okay. Well, for those of us who've put a roof on the house, it's like a thirty-year roof. Do they last thirty years? So if Henry tells me it's going to last me 1,000 years, I don't know about that, okay? I mean, I was told that whatever it was was going to last thirty years, and it didn't last ten. I'm happy to doubt it. But I want to show it. I don't want to have something I can't show and feel terrible about, feeling like I'm destroying the object by looking at it. That is something. And so this existential question about these conflicting things that Corey was talking about, preservation and...

PIANTAVIGNA: Presentation.

01:02:20: ROSENHEIM: ...presentation, we have to come to some terms about this. And that's why we're having this discussion. I like the moment that we're in.

KELLER: We have time for one more question up there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. As a photo curator who is also developing my institution's policies for time-based media art, just to go back to maybe a more practical level, I think there quite a few things for some of these cases that we can learn from what we for with time-based media art. There's a lot of work ahead of the acquisition. There's a lot of discussion with the artist, when this is an artist who's still alive. There are discussions about migration policies. What do they imagine they would want to do in the future or allow us to do in the future? There are various levels of quality of digital files that we are preserving and things like that, so— And I also feel like as an institution that did not have a time-based media policy, and I have been then working on it the last few years, there is a very nice and great community out there of institutions that I think have helped us develop policies. And so I think there is a framework, something for us to look at, as a way to start to develop the right kinds of questions to start thinking about, for us, deleting things. That was a very, very scary issue to talk about. So I think there's things to be gained, and maybe that can be a later discussion.

01:03:59: KELLER: I think on that note, we've exhausted— And thank you so much to everybody who spent the day with us, to the panelists, and to the field for entertaining these questions. And we look forward to putting forward some future thoughts. And the entire proceedings have been videotaped, so you can revisit this discussion in perpetuity. So thank you again.