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Article: The Re-creation and Conservation of Megalethoscope Slides (Abstract)

Author(s): Monique C. Fischer

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Compiler: Jessica Keister and Marie-Lou Beauchamp

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The Re-creation and Conservation of Megaethoscope Slides

Monique C. Fischer

Presented at the PMG session of the 2017 AIC Annual Meeting in Chicago, Illinois.

The rarity of Megaethoscope slides and their viewers provided us with a conservation challenge: How does a conservator treat an object when there is a lack of contemporary or historic information? Does one consult a photograph conservator or objects conservator to conserve an albumen print mounted onto a curved wooden frame? What type of collaboration is needed for this project? These are the questions that arose when the North Hampton (NH) Historic Commission brought in a collection of fourteen Megaethoscope slides to the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) to be evaluated and examined in early 2014.

The paper addresses the questions above and provides a multifaceted approach to the conservation and understanding of these lesser-known photographic materials by 1) re-constructing (re-creating) a Megaethoscope slide 2) adapting new techniques from other specialties such as mending procedures used for Japanese panel screens and 3) creating fills and inpainting for viewing in transmitted and reflected light.

The re-creation of the Megaethoscope slide was undertaken with Mark Osterman, Photographic Process Historian at the George Eastman Museum (GEM) in Rochester, NY with funding from FAIC Individual Professional Development Scholarship Award. There were no period instructions on making mounted Megaethoscope slides. As a result, this two-day tutorial was primary research into the construction of these unique objects.

Mending techniques used on Japanese panel screens were learned from colleagues with in NEDCC's Asian art conservation department and adapted to stabilize tears in the paper supports and dust covers of the slides. Aesthetic reintegration was carried out in transmitted and reflected lighting conditions.

The multi-faceted system, re-creating a slide, adapting new techniques and aesthetic work carried out in different lighting conditions provided the basis for the conservation treatment of these slides. This paper represents a significant contribution to an area of conservation that has very little existing literature. The recreation and conservation treatment of these slides provides a better understanding of these objects and, in turn, their future preservation and conservation.

Monique C. Fischer

Senior Photograph Conservator

Northeast Document Conservation Center