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Article: Providing Access to ‘Overprotected’ Color Slides (Abstract)

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Providing Access to ‘Overprotected’ Color Slides

Diana L. Diaz-Canas

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

Arnold Newman (1918–2006) is considered the father of the *environmental portrait* and one of the most influential photographers of the Twentieth Century. He published numerous books and his photographs were frequently published in magazines such as LIFE, Time, Scientific American, Vanity Fair, Harper’s Bazaar, and The New Yorker, among many others. His work is part of major museums and private collections within the United States and around the world.

In 2006, the Harry Ransom Center, at the University of Texas at Austin acquired Newman’s archive. Composed of 307,923 items, the archive contains negatives, color transparencies, original contact sheets, and a selection of more than 2,000 prints. Also included are Newman’s original “sittings” or appointment books, business files, correspondence, early sketchbooks, photographic albums, and video recordings of interviews and lectures.

During the cataloging process several conservation challenges were brought to light. One such challenge is sixteen sets of Kodachrome color transparencies –with a total of 117 individual transparencies– wrapped with three different pressure sensitive tapes, and randomly labeled. This configuration blocked access to the images and allowed the tapes to be in direct contact with the film supports and emulsion layers, a definite conservation problem. Tests were performed to find the safest way to remove tapes and adhesive residues. Paper conservation techniques were successfully applied in the conservation of these color photographs, and their plastic supports.

Conservation treatments allowed access to the image content, thus enabling completion of the cataloging process and the pairing of the slide label information with Newman’s cataloging system. This process ultimately allowed scholars and researchers interested in his creative process access to the entirety of his archive.

Diana L. Diaz-Canas

Conservator of Photographs

Harry Ransom Center – University of Texas at Austin