

Rethinking salvage methods for water-damaged photographic collections – preliminary investigations

Lydia Egunnike

During the floods and cyclones of 2011, some of the most poignant television footage was of victims standing in the wreckage of their homes heartbroken at the loss of precious family photographs. A staggering number of private collections were severely damaged or lost by prolonged immersion in contaminated water and inappropriate salvage methods. The research outlined in this paper is a direct response to the ongoing challenge of effectively disseminating salvage information to the community.

During the retrieval process of a large, historically significant private photographic collection in the 2011 Queensland floods, a number of photographic processes did not respond as expected and certain treatment processes had to be hastily adapted to allay further damage. This experience was invaluable and provoked the need to reassess current salvage recommendations for historical photographic processes.

A review of standard recommended priorities and treatment methods for contemporary and historic photographic processes was undertaken and commonly recommended salvage methods tested. The outcomes from this review were then re-evaluated using practical knowledge gained during the Queensland salvage operation. The main objective of this re-evaluation process is the development of a new easy to use salvage guide for use by caretakers of photographic collections. The guide will be available on the Queensland Museum's Museum Development Officer's website after testing and feedback from volunteers who have had no previous disaster training.

This paper will be available on the AICCM website <<http://www.aiccm.org.au>>

hopes to use her conservation experience to develop practical, economical preservation solutions for the long-term preservation of the state's distributed collections.

Author biography

Lydia Egunnike is the Museum Development Officer for Southern Inland Queensland at Queensland Museum. Prior to joining the Museum in September last year, Lydia was Senior Conservator at the State Library of Queensland from 1998. She trained in paper and photographic conservation at Camberwell College of Arts, London, and holds a Masters of Applied Science in Cultural Conservation from the University of Canberra. From 2003 to 2005, Lydia was an Andrew W Mellon research fellow in the Advanced Residency Program in Photograph Conservation hosted by the Image Permanence Institute and George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. In her current role, Lydia is embracing the challenges faced by regional collection custodians and

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