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## Rebinding of the Camera Work Collection

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### ABSTRACT

*Periodicals of Camera Work were published in the USA between 1903 and 1917, generally in quarterly editions with occasional special editions in some years. Each edition comprised articles concerning the photographic arts and featured photography of several artists. Each edition had been bound by link stitching of sections and attachment of a limp paper wraparound cover.*

*The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) had a complete set of this valuable publication. However, the editions had been pulled down from their original bindings and rebound into annual collections. In rebinding, all edges (including covers), and in most cases the spine folds, had been guillotined and the pages restitched by overcast stitching on to sawn in cords and completed as case bindings.*

*The NGA wished to exhibit some of the collection but very poor leaf flow resulting from the rebinding made this extremely difficult. A decision was made to rebind the collection to allow safe exhibition. In doing so, it was decided to rebind them as individual editions as they had been originally. A methodology was developed that combined good leaf flow with bindings as sympathetically aligned with those of the originals.*

### INTRODUCTION

January 2003 marked the centenary of the launch of the journal, *Camera Work*. Conceived by the legendary American photographer, Alfred Stieglitz, and designed by the equally famous Edward Steichen, *Camera Work* aimed to promote and support the work of the newly formed American Photo-Secession movement of art photographers. *Camera Work*, a

quarterly publication, was initially a vehicle for advancing the cause of Pictorialism and those pictorialist photographers selected by Stieglitz. By 1910, Stieglitz had largely lost interest in photography and the focus of *Camera Work* shifted to other art forms, especially French Impressionist art. The last issues, which appeared in 1917, saw a return to photography but now supporting a new form of hard-edged modernism featuring the work of Paul Strand.

Across its 50 issues, *Camera Work* would become the most important American art journal of the first half of the 20th century.

From a technical viewpoint, *Camera Work* exhibits a number of interesting features. Unlike many earlier photographic journals, it was the first photographic journal to emphasise visual and intellectual content rather than just providing technical advice. The great proportion of illustrations was hand-pulled, photogravures of the very highest quality, often made by the photographers themselves. These photogravures, almost entirely printed on Japanese tissue to preserve the maximum tonal quality, are among the finest examples of this art form.

Stieglitz, himself one of the foremost exponents of photogravure in America, considered it to be the perfect vehicle for disseminating photography to a wider audience. With few exceptions, all the gravures were made by just three firms in America, England and Germany. The paper stock for the text pages for *Camera Work*, while not of exceptional quality, was maintained across all fifty issues. This same stock was also used by Stieglitz for other exhibition catalogues of the work of the Photo-Secessionists.

Throughout its life *Camera Work* functioned on many levels. It began as the vehicle for the very best Pictorialist work. It provided aesthetic commentary from the foremost critics of the day in the fields of photography, painting, sculpture and literature while serving as a catalogue and review of exhibitions at Stieglitz's gallery, 291. Perhaps more importantly,

as the former Curator of the Royal Photographic Society in England, Pam Roberts observed, '*Camera Work* served as an autobiography of the creative life of one man, its creator, editor, financier and inspiration, Alfred Stieglitz.

Recognising the seminal role of the journal and its influence on both 20th century photography and art, the National Gallery of Australia acquired a complete set in 1976 from Ex Libris, a New York gallery devoted to the fine art of printing design, run by the prominent author/designer partners, Arthur A. Cohen and Elaine Lustig Cohen, both of whom were involved in book arts. It is the only set known in Australasia. Roger Piatt-Hull (1970) identified a reference to one Australian subscriber to *Camera Work*, a Mr Ernest L. Brown of Melbourne. Sydney Pictorial photographer, Harold Cazneaux owned a single copy from 1909 on the back cover of which he apparently sketched a draft logo design for The Sydney Camera Circle which formed in 1916, and was thus most likely modelled, at least in part, on the canons established by Alfred Stieglitz.

In the early 1990s, the NGA, wishing to exhibit a number of the photogravures from its holdings, recognized that the collection as it constituted on purchase did not allow sufficient leaf flow to allow this. Consequently, it was determined that work should be carried out to ensure that they could be safely and adequately exhibited and accessed. Over ensuing years, this work was extended to encompass the entire collection. This paper describes the conservation work undertaken over that period.

#### THE ORIGINAL CAMERA WORK PUBLICATIONS

*Camera Work* was originally published as individual editions. The text paper was of a laid machine made western paper. In the earlier editions, the photogravures were printed on Japanese handmade tissue, tipped onto text paper at the spine. For later editions, coloured photographic prints were introduced. These were typically tipped near the corners onto a backing paper to form a border around the

print and tipped to the text paper. In some later editions, the prints were on calendared paper.

The text block comprised folios gathered into sections which were link stitched and the spine of the text block (unlined) was adhered with animal glue. Blocked printed limp covers completed each edition. These had large yap edges (about 8 – 10 mm) and were adhered to the end leaves and glued to the text block spine. From the evidence of original bindings sighted, both the poor paper quality of the covers and their construction made them relatively short lived. The extended yap edges deteriorated mechanically both from use and storage and the spines of the covers broke apart with use as a result of their being glued to the spine of the text block.

#### THE *CAMERA WORK* PUBLICATIONS AS PURCHASED BY THE ANG

The set purchased by the ANG in 1976 had been rebound in annual volumes comprising four editions per volume, or five per volume where a special edition had been published in a particular year. In all but a few volumes, the original spine folds of the publications had been guillotined. In all volumes, the head, tail and fore edges had been cropped (presumably after sewing). The covers had likewise been cropped with most being discarded other than the front cover of the first edition within the annual volume and (presumably) its mating back cover. These two covers had been guarded in with cloth guards at the front and back of each volume. The cropping of the covers at the fore edges more often than not passed through the printed edition number.

The annual text blocks had been overstitched into sections and subsequently sewn on sawn in cords with kettle stitches at head and tail. The text blocks were case bound into green cloth covered coverings with gold stamping on the spines showing the title and the year of publication. The combination of the overstitching and sewing methods, together with the relatively poor quality

and flow of the paper ensured that the opening ability of the volumes was limited in the extreme. It placed excessive strain on the text paper at the spine and was inadequate for exhibition and general accession purposes.

#### INITIAL REBINDING THE *CAMERA WORK* COLLECTION

It was obviously necessary to reverse the inadequacies of the forwarding of the volumes if exhibition were to be possible. In short, the volumes would need to be pulled down and rebound. In these circumstances, it seemed prudent to consider rebinding back in something akin to their original formats, i.e. as individual editions. This would have the twin virtues of not having such cumbersome annual volumes and allow for a greater variety of exhibitable materials in future circumstances (rather than only one leaf of an annual volume). It also suited the looming deadline for the exhibition in question in that only the selected materials needed rebinding within the timeframe.

It was further decided that, if binding as individual editions was to be done, it was appropriate that it should be in sympathy with that of the original publications, albeit, not as an exact facsimile. For material for the exhibition and in consultation with the conservation Department of the NGA, the following procedure was adopted.

The covers and added end leaves of the annual volumes to be pulled were removed and the spines of the text blocks were cleaned of animal glue and residue using a methyl cellulose poultice to soften. The volumes were then collated and all stitching removed. In regard to the latter, the process was laborious; it did not ever fully become clear how the stitching had been carried out. There appeared to be an interweaving between the overcast stitching and that relating to the sawn in cords. The printing inks were tested and proved highly fugitive to water. As a result, all hopes of aqueous treatment and de-acidification were abandoned. The text was separated into the individual editions.

For the few volumes where the spine folds

had not been guillotined, the spines of the folios were reinforced with kouzo paper guards using starch paste and reassembled into their original sections. For the other volumes, the individual leaves were guarded to form folios using kouzo paper guards and assembled into sections. It was not possible to ensure that the sectioning formed was that of the original publications as few were available to consult. However, attempts were made to follow the pattern demonstrated in those that had not been cropped at the spine. Moreover, there seemed to be a reasonably consistent and logical pattern established by the formatting of the material within the text.

The new individual text blocks were link stitched with linen thread. Loose guards of kouzo paper were incorporated around the first and last sections of each for later attachment to end leaves. Single folio end leaves were made, front and back for each, from grey bugra paper and sewn onto the text block with grey silk thread anchored to the linen stitching of the text block. The loose guard was adhered to the end leaves using starch paste.

In order to maximise the opening quality, it was intended to have a non-adhesive spine. However, the text block spines showed a tendency to become concave with opening. As a result, following starch paste washing, the spines were glued using buffered EVA moderated with the addition of approximately 25% methyl cellulose. A great deal of attention was given to adhesive control at this point so that only the minimum amount necessary to control concavity penetrated between the sections without inhibiting the opening of the text. After application, the text block spine was thoroughly cleaned of all glue residues. A light aero linen liner was then adhered over the text block spine.

Pieces of Canson Bristol board (0.4 mm) the same size as the text block were cut and adhered to the front and back fly leaves. Each volume was then full covered with grey bugra paper with the covering paper extending over the head, tail and fore edge to form a similar sized

yap to that of the original publication. Unlike the original bindings however, the covers were not adhered to the text block spine.

**SUBSEQUENT REVIEW AND FURTHER WORK**  
After these initial bindings were done for the exhibition, the NGA decided to proceed over time to extend the work to encompass the entire *Camera Work* collection. Before doing so, a review was made of the work already done. The covers were exhibiting some minor cockling of the yap edges. In addition, it was felt that, despite the use of good quality materials, the covering process was to some extent building in a number of the structural deficiencies of the original publications, namely, relatively flimsy yap edges that in time would be susceptible to mechanical damage, a covering that was in effect a case binding which relied almost solely for its durability on the strength of the spine fold of the end leaves and the potential of the covering spine material to become dislodged.

Following that review, a proposal was put to the NGA (and accepted) to provide a more robust and long term structure while still retaining the form of the original publications. The early preparation remained the same, up to the guarding and sectioning of the text. From there it diverged.

Rather than link stitching, the text blocks were stitched with linen thread on to three 20 mm wide, equally spaced fine Dutch linen tapes with kettle stitches 15 mm in from head and tail. Loose guards of kouzo paper were still incorporated. Single folio end leaves were made, front and back for each, from grey bugra paper and an extended flange of the same paper was tipped to the inside of the end leaves extending outwards from the spine and folded around them. These were sewn onto the text block with the stitching passing through the fold of the extended flange and loose guards adhered. The spine of the text block was glued as before with careful attention to adhesive control but no liners were added.

The covering method was greatly

modified. New split board covers were made from two thicknesses of Canson Bristol board the inner board having been lined with grey bugra paper. (About half way through the project the Bristol board became virtually impossible to access in feasible quantities and a switch was made to buffered library board of the same gauge.) The boards were sized so as to provide a book square around the head, tail and fore edge similar in size to that of the yap edge of the original publication and a gap of some 5 mm was allowed at the spine for hinging. The boards were attached by sandwiching the linen tapes and the extended flange between the two thicknesses of board. The insertion of the extended flange, apart from providing greater strength to the covering structure, having been anchored by stitching through its fold, ensured that on opening there was a continuation of the grey paper from the end leaves over the hinge area to the grey lining on the inside board. The end result of these processes was a robust split board binding still retaining a relatively limp board quality and with yap edges similar to those originally envisaged.

The bindings were completed by the making and fitting of non adhered paper coverings around the split boards and spine to provide a similar external appearance as the originals. This covering was adapted from that used by Clarkson (1982) on his limited edition book. It totally covers the external and internal faces of the boards and the spine and is structured so that it remains permanently in place without adhesive while also flexing adequately on opening and closing.

The volumes bound for the 1990s exhibition were redone in this manner at the end of the project.

#### EXHIBITION AND GENERAL ACCESS

Since the project was completed, the NGA mounted a major exhibition of its *Camera Work* collection in February, this year. The rebound editions were able to be exhibited opened at pages of choice almost totally flat and without the need for support beneath. No strain was placed on

their structure in doing so. Likewise, for normal accessioning, the bindings can be treated similarly.

#### REVERSIBILITY

It is common to claim that one's processes in binding can be reversed without danger to the original materials. During this project, one occasion transpired to test this assertion. Some material had not been incorporated into one of the volumes and to do so required disassembling the binding and reworking it. Totally pulling of it was achieved with losses only to the added guards of the outermost folios of each of the sections. The remnants of these were removed by slight moistening and were renewed for rebinding after adding the new material. We believe that the major factor relating to this reversibility was the strictness of the adhesive control on the text block spine, ensuring that no glue penetrated beneath or beyond the starch pasted guards.

#### REFERENCES

- Roger Piatt-Hull, 1970, *Camera Work: An American quarterly*, Northwestern University, unpublished thesis.  
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#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Heather McPherson trained in conservation and fine bookbinding at Guildford County College in the UK, completing the course in the early 1980s. On return to Australia, she worked for a short period at the NSW State Records Office and then established her own private conservation practice specialising in archives and rare books. That practice has continued since. For the past ten years she has also held a part time position with the Australian Museum as Archives and Rare Books Conservator.

Darryl McPherson commenced in conservation following a 17-year career in engineering and business. He joined with and trained under Heather McPherson from 1987 and has

continued as a partner in that private practice since then. Their area of specialization is in archives and rare books.

**Heather and Darryl McPherson**

Bookbinders

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