



QUESTIONS

for Corine Norman McHugh

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You come from a long line of photographers. Could you please talk about your family's history?

My great-grandfather started a photography store in 1908 in the town where my family lived in Belgium. My grandmother eventually took on the store, and then she passed it on to my uncle, my mom's older brother. He retired five years ago, and his son Olivier now runs the shop. It's gone through a lot of transitions. My uncle had a video store associated with it. Olivier sells digital cameras and does a lot of digital commercial work.

But originally, my great-grandfather had a passion for printing using the bromoil process. Bromoil photography involves bleaching out the silver in a print, swelling the gelatin in water, and replacing the silver with oil-based inks. The result is a more permanent print, but it's done on photographic paper. It was a technique used by pastoral photographers primarily in the early 1900s. Some of my great-grandfather's artwork is now in the Musée de la Photographie in Charleroi, Belgium.

My mother is a photographer, too, and around the time I graduated from college, she also started getting into bromoil. That was when I became interested in the historical processes of photography and the techniques involved.

Are you a photographer?

Not since before graduate school! I used to have a dark room in my apartment, and I considered going to school for photography. Then I thought, "Oh, I don't want to do that because I'll spend all my days taking commercial photographs and I'll never have

time to do my own work." But it ended up that I don't have time to do my own work, anyway. I have a three-year-old son, so... maybe when he goes to high school I'll pursue photography again!

How did you get into conservation—and why paper conservation, with your background in photography?

I've always had an interest in history and general preservation. I spent a lot of time in Belgium as a child, visiting my mother's family in a small town where the church dates from the 12th century. Comparing it to where I grew up—in the suburbs in Virginia, where everything was from the '80s—really gave me an appreciation for the past.

In college, I majored in geography with a focus on cultural geography, and I minored in art history. And then after college, I worked at a frame store, making frames and matting and framing artwork. That's when I understood the importance of housing for artwork and became interested in conservation. I started taking chemistry classes at night to prepare for a graduate program in conservation and worked as a conservation technician for two years at the Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, MA.

I was initially interested in photograph conservation, but I chose to focus on paper because I found that there was a greater variety of media encountered. I enjoyed the tactile quality of paper, as well as the details—such as the way the media interacts with the paper support. I guess I'm coming to it not as an artist, but as an appreciator of fine art and historic objects.

Do you have a favorite treatment from your six years at CCAHA?

The *Mao* prints by Andy Warhol, from my first year here, were really fun. The whole collection had similar problems throughout, so Soyeon [Choi, CCAHA Senior Paper Conservator] and I were able to spend a lot of time on those, working together.

More recently, a gallery has been sending us a nice selection of objects by South American contemporary artists. One was a matte acrylic painting from the 1970s. Another was a screen print on plastic, and a third was composed of yarn attached to an etching, so these were more mixed-media pieces, which was challenging. Contemporary art is always fascinating because of the variety of materials used and the artists' untraditional approaches.

You spoke at CCAHA's *Out of the Ordinary: Preserving Paper-Based Ephemera* program last year. What interests you most about conserving ephemera?

They're always graphically so interesting, and I like that they're often produced using a variety of photomechanical printing processes. There tend to be a lot of materials in ephemera collections, so you get to see samples from over different time periods, or many examples from one. Ephemera really reflect their owners, which is fun, too.

Are you prone to collecting and keeping ephemera?

I wish I didn't, but I do.

—KATHERINE MAGAZINER