



Article: Camera Work: One-Size Treatment Does Not Fit All

Authors: Sophie Barbisan

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Camera Work: One-Size Treatment Does Not Fit All

INTRODUCTION

The magazine *Camera Work*, published between 1903 and 1917 by Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), is a crucial artifact to understand the development of American photography and its recognition as art. Numerous institutions in the United States hold a copy of the 50-volume set in their collection. However, the inherent vice of the materials makes the preservation of the journal a challenge. The yapp edges of the cover, the brittle text block, and the machine sewing of the journal contributed to its deterioration. Handling and housing are complicated due to the fragility of the magazine. Despite their historical importance, *Camera Work* sets are often in a poor condition, making exhibition and access difficult.

The Saint Louis Art Museum owns a complete set of the journal and selected two volumes for the exhibition "Architectural Photography from the Collection, 1850–2000" (July 2021–January 2022). To carry out the necessary conservation treatments, it appeared essential to survey what other museums did and why. Indeed, the object status of *Camera Work* changes depending on the institution type (museum, library, archives), which affected the preservation measures taken. This conservation treatment was also an opportunity to revise the housing of the magazine.

STIEGLITZ AND CAMERA WORK

As Green (1973, 7) states, "Camera Work is a portrait. It is a portrait of Stieglitz, for it documents each step in his transition from a youthful experimenter preoccupied with a range of subject matter and technique to a mature artist able to express the intimate and the spiritual through an extraordinary perception of the people and the places close to him." Stieglitz indeed played a central role in the conception of Camera Work. The photographer was the creator, main editor, and publisher of the magazine. It was an outlet for "The Cause," as he called it, which was proving photography as a medium of artistic

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expression. By the time the magazine was in the making, Stieglitz was already an internationally famous photographer. After studying in Berlin with Professor Hermann Wilhelm Vogel (1834–1898), he gained status by winning hundreds of medals in photography competitions. In 1890, after his return to the United States, he became a partner in a photoengraving business: the Heliochrome Company. The latter eventually became the Photochrome Engraving Company, with which Stieglitz maintained a close relationship. In 1896, Stieglitz became vice-president of the New York Camera Club and created the quarterly Camera Notes (Stieglitz and Margolis 1978, 9). The journal was successful in attracting serious photographers, but in doing so it created factions within the New York Camera Club. In 1901, Stieglitz created an exhibition at the National Art Club, titled "An Exhibition of Photography Arranged by the Photo-Secession." After several power struggles, Stieglitz finally resigned his editorship of Camera Notes in 1902. In the same year, he went on to found the Photo-Secession movement and created Camera Work.

In the early years of Camera Work, Stieglitz featured mostly artists of the Photo-Secession. These included James Craig Annan (1864-1946), Frank Eugene (1865-1936), Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), Edward Steichen (1879–1973), Frederick Evans (1853-1943), Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966), Clarence White (1871–1925), among others. In parallel, Stieglitz started running "The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession." The gallery later became "291," the name of which was based on the address of the gallery (291 Fifth Avenue in New York City). As 291's exhibition program moved beyond photography to include painting and sculpture, the journal began to cover modern art and took on a more international focus. With these changes and the advent of World War I, subscriber numbers decreased and the publication schedule became increasingly irregular (Plate 2016). The last issue of Camera Work, dated June 1917, featured early work by Paul Strand. The artist writes in an essay for the journal that "the whole development of photography has been given through to the world by Camera Work." He concludes, "Whether a watercolor is inferior to an oil, or whether a drawing, an etching, or a photograph is not as important as either, is inconsequent. To have to despise something in order

to respect something else is a sign of impotence" (Strand 1917, 3).

Camera Work represents a pinnacle of accomplishments for art publications and periodicals alike. The magazine is a combination of visual and literary art, in the service of an artistic ideal. In that sense, it followed in the tradition of *The Yellow Book, avant-garde* in England, and the pre-Raphaelite magazine *The Germ*. The influence of German magazines such as *Pan* and the Austrian *Ver Sacrum* should also be considered given Stieglitz's German background (Abid 1976, 101).

THE MAKING OF CAMERA WORK

Camera Work (fig. 1) was designed carefully, with materials that remain consistent throughout its publishing. The paper cover is applied as a case binding, with a yapp on the head, tail, and fore edge. These yapp edges are quite large, about 8 to 10 mm on average. The Yapp style, named after William Yapp, an English bookseller of the second half of the 19th century, is mostly associated with books of devotion (Etherington and Roberts 1981). This type of binding may have been chosen for that reason, as Camera Work was meant to quite literally be the bible on photography. The cover paper is adhered to the endleaves and glued onto the text block spine, with hide glue possibly modified with glycerin. The magazine has an unsupported machine sewing. It appears to have been bound together by two different binderies: the Knickerbocker

Bindery and Otto Knoll. They were both located in New York City, according to advertisements found in the journal. Stieglitz took the production of every issue as "a serious business" (Peterson and Knauff 1985, 30). In 1916, he wrote a complaint that the Knickerbocker Bindery delivered only 450 issues of the magazine instead of the 475 issues he was expecting. The loss of even a single copy of *Camera Work* was of great importance.

The cover of Camera Work is made of a gray, wove, heavyweight, machine-made paper. The typography was designed by the artist Eduard Steichen (1879–1973), who worked for a few years as a commercial printer and designer. Printed in light gray by letterpress, the design remains unchanged throughout the 50 issues. The layout of the magazine was conceived by both Steichen and Stieglitz. The text block is made of a heavy-weight, cream, laid paper, bearing the watermark ENFIELD S.CO 1887 (fig. 2). The edges of the text block remained untrimmed, retaining the delicate deckled edges. This is another reason for the yapp edges, which were likely meant as a protection to the deckles. The papers used in the making of Camera Work—the text block paper, cover paper, and other mounting papers found in the magazine—were sourced at the Seymour Company. At the time Camera Work was produced, the Seymour Company was the largest supplier of paper for books in New York City (Valente 2010, 69). The firm started as a printing establishment and bookselling shop. It became so successful that it purchased the failed Persee &



Fig. 1. Alfred Stieglitz, Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly (before treatment), No. 14, 1906; Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase and Gift of Dr. Paul S. Dewald; 212:1975.14.



Fig. 2. Watermark of the text block paper, in transmitted light.

Brooks Mills in Windsor Locks (Connecticut) around 1860 and renovated it to produce their own papers. The presence of the deckles and the laid lines were key in emulating the look of handmade paper. This was done in an effort to reference the Kelmscott Press (Peterson and Knauff 1985, 29), directed by William Morris (1834–1896). However, the visual features of the text block paper, along with the development of papermaking in the United States at that time (Clapperton 1967; Hunter 1943, 368), pointed toward a sulfite pulp, cylinder-mold, machine-made paper. This would explain why the text blocks of most Camera Work sets show severe brittleness. Gray Fabriano paper was also identified in some volumes. Based on the advertisement pages of the magazine, the text block was first printed at Fleming & Carnrick, which became the Fleming Press in 1907. In 1908, the Fleming Press went out of business (The Sun 1908). Frank Fleming, the previous owner, started working for Rogers & Company, which may have inclined Stieglitz to start using them (Stieglitz 1916). Rogers & Company printed Camera Work until the end of the magazine in 1917.

The 50 issues of *Camera Work* contain more than 500 illustrations, most of which are photogravures. This photomechanical process is printed in ink, in the same fashion as intaglio prints. The photogravures were printed on handmade Japanese paper. It is possible that Stieglitz sourced the Japanese papers from the Japan Paper Company, which was the main supplier of Japanese paper in New York City at that time. The photogravures were printed on several kinds of Japanese papers, and they were also used as mounting

papers. Comparison between papers from the Paper Sample Collection at the National Gallery of Art and *Camera Work* may indicate that one of the Japanese papers used for the majority of the photogravures is a kozo paper from the Gifu prefecture. Ms. Dewald, who donated her *Camera Work* set to the Saint Louis Art Museum as discussed in the following, remembers Stieglitz complaining about the difficulty of acquiring the particular Japanese paper needed for the photogravures.

The plates were grouped together, usually at the front of the magazine. They were set off by a blank facing page, creating the effect of a portfolio (fig. 3). Each photogravure was tipped in the magazine by hand often by Stieglitz himself. For the first two years of the journal, they were printed by the Photoengraving Company, where Stieglitz had previously worked. His brother-in-law, Louis Schubart, was still in charge and made sure that Stieglitz's voice was heard. The photochrome department eventually became the Manhattan Photogravure Company, which produced most of the photogravures for American contributors up until the last issue. Stieglitz also turned to foreign printers, such as T. and R. Annan and Sons in Glasgow, and the F. Bruckmann Verlag of Munich, particularly when dealing with European artists. Stieglitz was in close correspondence for decades with the printers J. Craig Annan for Annan and Sons, and Frederick Goetz, working at Bruckmann Verlag.

Camera Work's photogravures have a peculiar status. Stieglitz had incredibly high standards for their production and was constantly reminding his readers that they were



Fig. 3. Alfred Stieglitz, Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly (before treatment), No. 14, 1906; Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase and Gift of Dr. Paul S. Dewald; 212:1975.14.

acquiring original works of art in the form of photogravure illustrations. For example, Stieglitz announced in a special insert from Camera Work number 12 that the Societe l'Effort (Brussel), in lieu of the Photo-Secession section that was originally planned for their 1904 exhibition, mounted and framed photogravures from Camera Work instead. This event was used to further impress on his readers the importance of the photogravures. Most of the time, he secured the original negatives from the photographers, from which the copper plates were made (Peterson and Knauff 1985, 14). In his early studies of the Photo-Secession, Robert Doty (1960, 33) goes as far as saying that "the reproductions . . . quite often surpassed the quality of the original." His opinion is echoed by Estelle Jussim (1979, 81), who asks: "How is it possible for 'reproductions' to exceed 'original prints'? In what conceivable way might it be said that a reproduction could be finer than an original?"

Other methods of image reproduction were used for *Camera Work*, but they never received nearly as much attention as the photogravures. In that respect, the journal can be considered as a small encyclopedia of the mechanical printing processes available at the turn of the 20th century, containing duogravures, one-color halftones, duplex halftones, four-color halftones, and collotypes (Green 1973, 13). The Photochrome Engraving Company produced most of the halftones for *Camera Work*, along with Bruckmann Verlag.

CONDITION CHALLENGES OF CAMERA WORK

The Saint Louis Art Museum is fortunate to have received an almost complete set in 1975, from Ms. Elsie Dewald and her son Dr. Paul Dewald, through partial gift and purchase. Their set lacked four issues and 12 plates. However, it also contained eight duplicate editions of the magazine. Ms.

Dewald and her husband, Jacob Frederick Dewald, were friends of Stieglitz along with other modernist artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), Paul Strand (1890–1976), Stanton MacDonald-Wright (1890-1973), Thomas Hart Benton (1889–1975), and others (Abid 1976, 101). She was also a collector of their works. The relationship between the Dewalds and Stieglitz is evident in the portrait that the artist took of his friend Jacob Dewald, exhibited in 1921 at the Anderson Galleries (note 1). The Dewalds, along with the Strands, Paul Rosenfeld, and other members of the Stieglitz family helped backing financially "An American Place," a gallery Stieglitz directed between 1929 until his death in 1946 (Burke 2020, 206). After acquiring the Dewald set, the Saint Louis Art Museum sought to exchange its duplicates to form a complete run of the magazine. This goal was achieved in 1981 with the help of Dr. Paul Dewald.

The Saint Louis Art Museum set shows typical alterations often seen with Camera Work in their original case binding. An overall assessment of the condition issues can be seen in figure 4. Tears in the yapp edges are extremely common (98%), as well as losses (85%). The construction of the binding itself, as well as the brittleness of the gray cover paper, explains these issues. The machine sewing and the crystallization of the hide glue on the spine resulted in failed sewing and splitting text blocks in most of the volumes (96%). The adhesion of the cover paper directly onto the spine contributed to the mechanical issues as well. The images within the volumes are in a good condition, but most of the opposite pages (98%) show ghost images, due to the migration of fatty acids from the prints. PhotoTex tissue interleavings are currently in place to prevent further degradation. The paper of the text block shows signs of discoloration and brittleness in all of the journals.

The two volumes (numbers 14 and 32) selected for the exhibition "Architectural Photography from the Collection," curated by Eric Lutz, are no exceptions to the condition issues cited previously. Volume 14 shows losses, tears, and folds in the cover along the head, tail, and fore edges. Volume 32 has lost the majority of its yapp edges. The paper tore at the joint on volume 32, whereas the endsheet split along the joint on volume 14. The adhesive on the spines failed, causing the gatherings to separate. However, the sewing is in good condition on both volumes.

CAMERA WORK IN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

Camera Work is a crucial artifact to understand the development of American photography and its recognition as an art. As such, sets of this important publication are commonly found in institutions across the United States. However, their preservation is rendered difficult by the inherent vice of the materials used in their construction. Institutions owning Camera Work can be museums, libraries, or archives. These institutions have different needs that may result in different decision making when caring for the magazine. During this research, the author reached out to 20 institutions in the United States in the hope of getting an overview of condition issues, binding state, place in collections, and preservation methods.

These institutions included the Art Institute of Chicago, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the George Eastman Museum, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, the Harvard Art Museums, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Library of Congress, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery of Art, the New York Public Library,

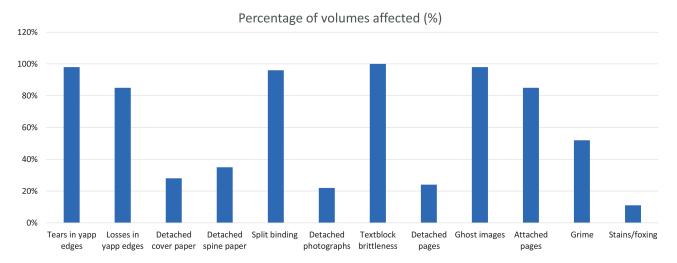


Fig. 4. Graph showing the types and percentages of alterations on the Saint Louis Art Museum set.

the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian Archives, the Toledo Museum of Art, the University of Virginia Library, and the Yale University Library. Additionally, the author was able to travel to four of these institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the New York Public Library. This was made possible by the FAIC Carolyn Horton Scholarship. This project was inspired by a survey of the *Camera Work* set owned by the Harvard Art Museums performed by the author in 2015.

Because *Camera Work* is at the crossroad of several disciplines, its status varies depending on the institution owning it. It became clear that understanding the place it had in collections was key. Whether it was considered an artwork, a research tool, or a housing for the photogravures within, the frame of reference would influence access and treatment approaches. About half of institutions surveyed reported having multiple *Camera Work* sets, whereas less than 10% had incomplete sets. For example, the New York Public Library owns three sets, and multiple duplicates, as well as detached plates.

In the museums surveyed, Camera Work was not systematically part of the art collection. About one-third reported that their set was part of their museum library's special collection. More often than not, sets in the art collection were transferred from the library collection at some point in the past. About one-third of institutions did not receive a complete set at once. Trade was happening among these institutions, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Stieglitz and O'Keeffe were integral to the dispersal of the magazine in American institutions. During his lifetime, Stieglitz intentionally donated or sold several sets to specific institutions. For example, one set was sold directly by the artist to the Ryerson Library at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1923 to serve as a reference for the art students coming to the library. A second set was donated by O'Keeffe in 1953 as she dispersed Stieglitz's collection.

Most of *Camera Work* sets are still in their original case bindings. However, about 20% are in bindings of historical significance as they were rebound during Stieglitz's lifetime. The *Camera Work* set owned by the National Gallery of Art is the most important example of this kind of rebinding. Several issues were bound together to form larger volumes with a suede cover, stamped with *Camera Work*'s mark. This set, donated by O'Keeffe in 1949, contains an inscription by Stieglitz's hand in volume 1. It states that all photogravures were signed by the artists in person and that no other equivalent volume exists. This further reinforces the importance of the photogravures and their status as independent works of art.

More than a third of *Camera Work* sets are in commercial bindings, generally dating from the 1930s and done before

acquisition by institutions. The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns two sets, including one that shows an array of commercial rebinding. This set was sold by Stieglitz in 1922 to the Watson Library. The volumes were eventually transferred to the Department of Prints and Photographs in 1976. The second set was gifted by O'Keeffe in 1953 and is currently in a conservation rebinding. Only about 10% of sets are currently in this configuration. Certain university libraries also undertook rebinding of the magazine upon acquisition to promote access.

All institutions surveyed that did not take treatment measures reported condition issues that rendered the magazine unexhibitable and inaccessible for researchers. More than half of surveyed institutions undertook a minimal treatment approach when caring for Camera Work. About 10% chose a more interventive approach: a complete dissociation between the magazine and the photogravures within. Some institutions kindly shared treatment reports from the 1970s that recommended that option and executed it. The peculiar status of the photogravures understandably led some institutions to prioritize their preservation over the magazine as a whole. To this day, numerous museums regularly decide to separate the photogravures from the magazine for exhibition purposes and do not reintegrate the gravures in the binding after the fact. In light of this survey, the Saint Louis Art Museum set that is still in its original binding appears to be in relatively good condition. This is a rare configuration, as most of Camera Work in their case bindings are today in a deteriorated and fragile state.

TREATMENT AND HOUSING OF CAMERA WORK AT THE SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

The treatment protocol was inspired by the ones gathered during the survey and was designed with accessibility in mind (note 2). The Saint Louis Art Museum is the only institution in Saint Louis that owns a set of Camera Work, and its strategic plan mandates accessibility. Therefore, availability of Camera Work for the Print Study Room is strongly desired. Treatment was started with dry surface cleaning of the cover and the text block, performed with cosmetic sponges and soft brushes. The yapp edges were then consolidated with wheat starch paste, cooked at 10% (w/v). The concentration of the wheat starch paste was chosen high to avoid darkening of the gray paper. The yapp edges were then flattened after a brief humidification under Gore-Tex. The crystallized adhesive on the spine was removed mechanically, with a combination of scalpel blades and tweezers. The adhesive was further removed from the threads with methylcellulose at 6% (w/v). The spines of volumes 14 and 32 were lined three times with Hanji paper (Hiromi Paper Inc., 13 gsm) and paste, cooked at 15% (w/v).



Fig. 5. Lining of the yapp edges (toned Usu-Gami, 15 gsm, and 10% wheat starch paste).

The method with which the yapp edges were repaired was given careful consideration. Simple tear repair was rejected, thanks to feedback from the Harvard Art Museums. These repairs were too strong, causing new damage to occur next to them due to the brittleness of the paper. To avoid this issue, the yapp edges were lined overall, without tear repairs first (fig. 5). An Usu-Gami paper (Hiromi Paper Inc., 15 gsm) was selected and toned to make the lining as discreet as possible. Most of the yapp edges were lost on volume 32. To re-create them, a Teflon spatula was inserted between the pastedown and the cover paper. The same Usu-Gami paper was inserted and adhered with paste (10% w/v). Inserting the Usu-Gami repair between the pastedown and the paper cover was not attempted on volume 14, as their adhesion was too strong and the risk of further damage was too great.

Once the yapp edges were lined, the losses were filled. Because of the number of volumes in each set, the methodology employed was designed to enable the treatment of an entire set at once. A traditional toned Japanese paper fill can be time consuming, and it was important to create a fill that would be weaker than the original paper. To achieve the desired texture and color, a blend of Canson paper was used (note 3). The Canson Mi-Teintes Felt Gray, Dark Gray, and Sand were selected, and different blends of pulp were tested. A close match was obtained with a mix 1:2:2 of Felt Gray: Sand: Dark Gray. The papers were torn into small pieces and soaked

overnight in water. They were then blended into a pulp. The pulp was used to make small sheets of paper with a paper mold. They were dried on a wooden board overnight (fig. 6).

Small adjustments were still needed to be a perfect match with the cover. This was attained by adding a wash of viridian green and bone black watercolors to the custom paper. The losses were then filled and adhered on top of the lining paper with paste (10% w/v). Adjustments will likely always have to be made, as numerous institutions reported differential fading of the paper cover. Finally, detached fragments of the yapp edge that could be tied to a particular loss were reattached (figs. 7–9).

Housing also represents a challenge in caring for *Camera Work*. The Saint Louis Art Museum set was initially stored in a cabinet, in five-wall clamshell boxes. These boxes may have been contemporary to the acquisition of the magazine and stored on average seven to eight magazines per box. Individual volumes were wrapped in Photo-Tex tissue. Clamshell boxes cannot be considered appropriate housing for *Camera Work*. There was little space around the volumes to handle them safely and get them out of the box without damaging the yapp edges. This is a common problem that was reported by most of the institutions surveyed during this project.

Feedback from the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies at the Harvard Art Museums enabled

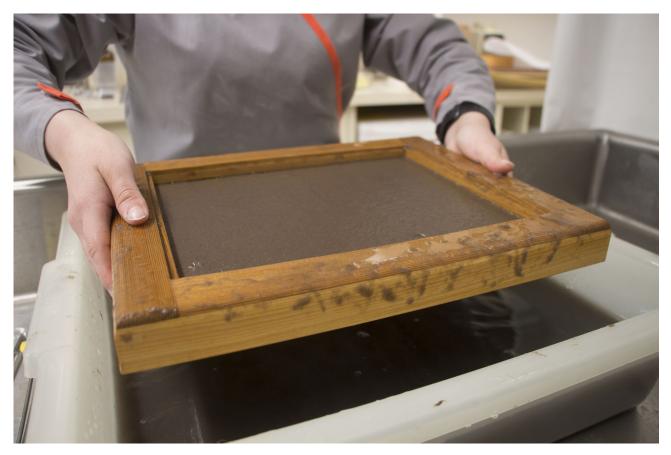


Fig. 6. Small sheets of paper were casted with the paper pulp mix and dried on a wooden board.



Fig. 7. Before and after treatment, front cover of Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly, No. 32, 1911.



Fig. 8. Before and after treatment, back cover of Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly, No. 32, 1911.

the development of better-suited housing. After treatment of the Harvard set, the use of clamshell boxes was initially planned, with a foam insert to compensate for the thickness of the text block and support the yapp edges. However, this system resulted in new damage, as one can be tempted to tilt

the box and create pressure on the yapp edges. A tray system was created by Adam Baker, senior conservation technician, with the idea in mind to make the fragile state of the object immediately noticeable to art handlers. The Saint Louis Art Museum's project preparator, Nathan Poetzcher, took



Fig. 9. Before and after treatment, side view of Camera Work: A Photographic Quarterly, No. 32, 1911.



Fig. 10. Housing designed by Nathan Poetzscher, project preparator at the Saint Louis Art Museum (based on the Harvard design).

inspiration from that design and adapted it to suit the specific needs of the museum (fig. 10).

This resulted in a more compact tray that could be stacked to fit the current cabinets. The Saint Louis Art Museum, like many other institutions, is dealing with a shortage of storage space. It was paramount to improve housing while not significantly increasing occupied space. Trays can be stacked eight high, with clear labels on two sides to help identify where individual volumes are stored (fig. 11). To get a volume out of its housing, the hinge on the right side is used to tilt the board support onto which the magazine lies (fig. 12). The board support has a small edge to maintain the spine and prevent sliding. It is taken out of the tray and directly placed on a book cradle (fig. 12). This board should not be separated from the magazine while handling, as it helps prevent any contact with the yapp edges. The Saint Louis Art Museum art handlers and curators will receive training on proper handling for Camera Work that will enable safe access of the treated volumes to staff and researchers at the Print Study Room.

CONCLUSION

Camera Work itself "is a work of art: the lover's touch having been lavished on every aspect of its form and content. Spacing, printing, and quality of the paper, the format of the pages, the format of the advertisement, even, are simple and magnificent" (Rosenfeld 1934, 82). Here, Rosenfeld explains clearly the importance of Stieglitz's endeavor, which was beyond the publication of a magazine. Thanks to Camera Work, the status of photography was irrevocably changed. Despite its challenging materials, the journal should be preserved as a whole. Although the photogravures within often received more attention, separating them from their original binding should be discouraged. It is important to develop appropriate housing to alleviate most problems encountered when accessing the magazine. Treatment should consider the original structure, with consolidation and reinforcement of the yapp edges. Camera Work was conceptualized as a work of art from start to finish, and it is the hope of the author that this research has given some pointers toward its care.



Fig. 11. View of a stack of trays. Shifting is prevented by a board insert on the bottom of the tray, slightly smaller than the tray itself.



Fig. 12. From left to right: The hinging system is used to lift the board support; the board support is removed from the tray; the board and the magazine are placed on a book cradle, and the magazine can be opened while keeping the board underneath.

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NOTES

- 1. The Anderson Galleries, "An Exhibition of Photography by Alfred Stieglitz [145 prints, over 128 of which have never been publicly shown, dating from 1886–1921]," opened February 7, 1921, in New York City. The portrait of Jacob Dewald is dated from 1920 and was placed in the section "A Demonstration of Portraiture."
- 2. The author would like to acknowledge feedback from the Harvard Art Museum with regard to treatment done by Liz Sorokin, Laura Panadero, and Victoria Bunting. Eliza Gilligan also generously shared her experience treating the magazine at the University of Virginia Libraries.
- 3. Complies with ISO Standard 9706, acid-free and without optical brightness additives.

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SOURCES OF MATERIALS

Usu-Gami and Hanji paper Hiromi Paper Inc. 9496 Jefferson Blvd., Suite 117 Culver City, CA 90932

Canson paper Canson Grand Murier, 67 rue Louis et Laurent Seguin 07100 Annonay, France

SOPHIE BARBISAN Associate Paper Conservator Saint Louis Art Museum Saint Louis, MO sophie.barbisan@slam.org