

FAIC Hermitage Photograph Conservation Initiative

The Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (FAIC) launched a four-year initiative in the spring of 2010 to establish a photograph conservation department at the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Training in photograph conservation, collections care, documentation, cataloguing, digital imaging, and scientific research is being conducted in Russia, France, and the U.S.

The initiative is the outgrowth of a continuing series of collaborations between FAIC and The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In 2000, the Mellon awarded a grant of \$1.8 million to launch FAIC's professional development program and the FAIC Endowment for Professional Development. FAIC received a \$1 million grant from the Mellon in 2008 to sustain a series of collaborative workshops in photograph conservation. In 2009, FAIC was invited to submit a proposal for the Hermitage Photograph Conservation Initiative, a program which grew out of previous Mellon-supported photograph surveys of the Hermitage collections. The Mellon Foundation looked to FAIC as a trusted partner, based on its track record of solid financial management, respected professional development program and its long-term commitment to supporting conservation activities worldwide.

Of importance to FAIC and its mission is the exchange of ideas among Russian, French, and American colleagues and development of the international collaboration to transform the care of photographs at the Hermitage Museum. FAIC will document the initiative on Conservation OnLine (CoOL), its multi-faceted online library, as part of its strategic effort to present model programs in conservation. Documentation of the initiative on CoOL, which will include foreign language resources and images, will serve as an example for best practices in photograph conservation, cataloguing, and digital imaging, and will provide a lasting resource for the preservation community.

The project manager for the initiative is Paul Messier, conservator in private practice in Boston, who conducted the initial survey of the Hermitage photograph collections. He is assisted by conservator Karina Beeman, formerly of St. Petersburg, who has provided teaching and interpretation services. An advisory committee guides the activities, and is comprised of Paul Messier, Vyacheslav Fedorov of the State Hermitage Museum, Robert Burton of the Harvard University Library, Franziska Frey of the Rochester Institute of Technology, Debra Hess Norris of the University of Delaware, Bertrand Lavédrine of the Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation des Collections in Paris, and Eric Pourchot of FAIC.

This initiative represents a significant recognition and expansion of FAIC's ongoing professional development programs and its continued effort to engage and educate conservators in the United States and internationally. Partnering institutions to date have included Winterthur/University of Delaware, the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harvard University, and

the Centre de Recherche sur la Conservation des Collections. Staff members of the Hermitage will be returning to the U.S. in January for studies at the Harvard University Library Weissman Preservation Center, capped by attendance at the AIC Photographic Materials Group winter meeting in Ottawa in early February.

Tatyana Sayatina, a conservator who has been working at the Hermitage since 2005, has thrown herself into the study of photograph conservation, a specialty new to her as well as to the larger Russian conservation community. She appreciated how the training was structured: “The practical and theoretical knowledge were closely connected. I’m looking forward to taking the knowledge of conservation and then to do it in practice.” To her colleagues in the U.S., she says, “Thank you very much. I hope we will be working together for a long time.”