



Friday, April 08, 2022

Piecing Together a Damaged Relievo Ambrotype

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Abstract

This presentation will describe the reconstruction of a damaged sixth-plate relievo ambrotype conducted under the supervision of the conservators at the Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA). Relievo is a unique presentation method that gives an ambrotype portrait a sense of three-dimensionality by scraping away the collodion image layer around the sitter and painting the reverse of the glass support with black varnish. The glass support of the work in question was broken into six pieces with one area of loss. With Paraloid B-72 in toluene as an adhesive, it was stabilized using a vertical assembly method based upon reconstruction techniques used in glass conservation. Losses in the black backing were inpainted with pigments in Aquazol and adjusted for gloss. After treatment, the photograph and its housing components were rebound and reinserted into their case. The purpose of this case study is to share details of this treatment as well as considerations for adhesives and inpainting. This talk will also highlight ongoing research on the history of this ambrotype variation and present findings from a survey of relievo ambrotypes in the collection of the George Eastman Museum.