

Memory of the World Register - Nomination Form
Venezuela - Collection of Nineteenth-Century Latin American Photography

Abstract

This is the most comprehensive historical collection of nineteenth-century Latin American photography in existence anywhere in the American continent. The collection takes the form of 8,000 titles depicting a great variety of subjects. These include, urban development in major populated centres, ports, landscape, rural life and important personalities. All the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are represented.

Identity and Location

Name of the Documentary Heritage:

Collection of nineteenth-century Latin American photography

Country: Venezuela

State, Province or Region: Caracas - Federal District

Address: Zona Industrial de La Trinidad - Calle Soledad cruce con Las Piedritas, Edificio Rogi, planta baja, Zona Postal 1081

Name of Institution: National Library of Venezuela

Legal Information

Owner: Venezuelan Nation

Custodian: (National Library of Venezuela, Audio-visual Archive Dept) Photography Division

Legal Status: Autonomous Institute set up by means of a law dated 27 July 1977, published in Official Gazette No. 31,298 dated 16 August 1997. Answerable to the Ministry of Education, this organisation is a legal entity in its own right with its own individual public funding.

Category of ownership: Public institution

Details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage: The Audio-visual Archive of Venezuela, part of the National Library of Venezuela was set up by Decree 2719 of the National Executive, dated 27 June 1978, with the purpose of collecting, organising and preserving the country's non-bibliographic and audio-visual documentary heritage.

Accessibility: The collection is open to visitors. No type of restriction applies. The collection may be accessed through the National Library's computerised system, indexes and manual catalogues.

Copyright status: Held by the National Library of Venezuela.

Responsible administration: This collection forms part of the Audio-visual Archive of Venezuela and the Audio-visual Archive is therefore responsible for its administrative organisation, operational plans, budget, preservation, restoration

and dissemination. The collection's immediate area of operations is the Division of Photography. This collection is given priority with regard to identification, organisation, preservation and dissemination.

Identification

Description: This is the most comprehensive historical collection of nineteenth-century Latin American photography in existence anywhere in the American continent. The collection takes the form of 8,000 titles depicting a great variety of subjects. These include, urban development in major populated centres, ports, landscape, rural life and important personalities. All the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are represented.

Most of the techniques used in the NINETEENTH Century are represented in this collection i.e. daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes, platinotypes, albumen printing, salt paper, bromide paper, gelatin paper and collodion processes. The dominant technique used in the collection is, however, albumen printing. The four traditionally-used formats (sizes) are represented: visiting cards (10 x 5.5 cm) used mainly for portraits, cabinet prints (16 x 11 cm), negative plates of indeterminate size (13 x 18 and 20 X 25 cm) used to establish standards for the size of paper to be used and imperial standard measurement, i.e. copies made from 27 x 35 cm negative plates.

Examples of these formats in the collection are visiting cards taken by Prospero Rey and cabinet prints by Salas and Martinez in Venezuela. Examples of the intermediate size include fine photographs of Guatemala taken by Edward Muybridge and images of the Argentinean Pampas taken by Benito Panunzi. The photographic work of Marc Ferrez in Brazil provides an example of the imperial size. It is important to note that these media are in a stable condition of preservation, which ensures the fidelity of the photographic image.

Bibliographic details: The collection may be accessed from the National Library database (NOTIS). Manual indexes also exist for each country and a manual catalogue is also being prepared which includes a contact print of each work described in addition to technical information and a physical description.

Visual documentation: A video has been produced on the collection by Professor Robert Levine of the University of Florida.

Technical file: Robert Levine and Bill James, Images of the Kingdom: Video-recording - University of Miami, 1986; ¾ pgl; b/n, 35 minutes

Narration: Ray Murrazzi

Translation: Carlos Monje.

History: This collection spans three (3) stages.

1. - The central section of the collection was tracked down to New York as the result of information given by the photographic custodian Mr José Oraca to the current Head of the National Library Photographic Department, Jorge L.

Gutiérrez. This great collection was in private hands in 1982. Once the entire collection had been reviewed and its importance was realised, Arq. Gutiérrez - curator of the collection - took a year to carry out research into photographers, subjects and techniques used in the collection. In February 1985, an exhibition of 150 significant photographs from this collection was put on jointly by the National Library and the Museum of Fine Art. This exhibition then travelled to Peru, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Spain.

2. - Due to the interest shown in this interesting resource, the National Library began negotiations to purchase approximately 3,000 photographs. Due to the special interest and support given by the Director of the National Library, Mrs Virginia Betancourt and the "Directorio de la Epoca", it was possible to introduce a policy of collecting and restoring this major resource which would otherwise have risked being lost.

Interestingly enough, in 1985 the recently created Paul Getty Museum of California negotiated to buy this resource through its curator Weston Neff. The National Library were so determined to succeed in their collecting project, however, that in the end the collection became part of the Audio-visual Archive of the National Library, where it became an essential point of reference for research into nineteenth-century Latin American photography. This prompted several South American collectors to donate their collections to the National Library of Venezuela.

3. - This collection continues to grow through new acquisitions which still continue to the present day.

Bibliography: This collection is widely covered in the following publications.

1. H.L. Hoffenberg, Nineteenth-Century South America in Photographs: Dover Publications, New York, 1982

2. Fotografic Lateinamerika: Erika Billiter; Kunstaus Zurich, 1981.

3. Jorge L. Gutiérrez: Fotografía Latinoamericana del Siglo IX; Biblioteca Nacional/Museo de Bellas Artes; Caracas, 1985 (exhibition catalogue).

4. Jorge L. Gutiérrez: Imágenes del Caribe: Segunda Mitad del Siglo IX: Biblioteca Nacional; Caracas, 1985 (exhibition catalogue).

5. Jorge L. Gutiérrez: Fotografía Latinoamericana del Siglo IX: El Paisaje, La Fascinación Tecnológica y el Sueño de progreso: Biblioteca Nacional; Caracas, 1993 (exhibition catalogue)

6. Jorge Gutiérrez: La Habana 1850 - Una visión de Charles De Forest Fredricks: Museo de Artes Visuales Alejandro Otero; Caracas, 1992. (exhibition catalogue).

7. Ennio Jiménez. Nostalgias del Paraíso. Un crucero fotográfico por el Caribe Decimonónico - Fotografía Caribeña del Siglo IX. Biblioteca Nacional, Caracas, 1993 (calendar).

This collection has also been mentioned in various catalogues published by Sothebys and Christie's auction houses in New York, and also by the Center for Interamerican Relations in New York, where it was exhibited and described during the years 1976 and 1985.

Management Plan

The collection of nineteenth-century photography in the National Library of Venezuela is the most comprehensive collection on the subject of Latin America in the world. It provides the widest and most complete pictorial expression of the newly forming Latin America nations. The photographs deal with ideas of community, progress and technological change as applied to the transformation of land and urban centres. It stands as an unwritten history of photography in Latin America, documented by authors (masters of photography) recognised at world level. It is made up of vulnerable material unique due to photography (albumen, bromide, salt printing, cyanotypes, daguerreotypes and tintypes, among others).

Because the National Library of Venezuela is a public service institution, access to the collections is free, with no cultural or political restrictions. Due to the fragility of the material in the collection of nineteenth-century photographs and the unique nature of the items, however, a plan exists to copy the entire collection photographically to allow unrestricted access to users. Access to the original will only be allowed in a specialised research room. In the future, the photographs will be put on to contact disks to be distributed to various photographic research centres throughout the continent. The cost of photographic copies to users will be maintained below market rates.

The collection of nineteenth-century Latin American photography in the National Library of Venezuela nominated for the Memory of the World Programme is provisionally housed in an air-conditioned space. Relative humidity is controlled and the temperature is maintained at 20°C with some small fluctuations. This building has its own maintenance unit staffed by specialized personnel responsible for keeping the equipment and physical structure in optimal conditions. It is fitted with a fire detection system. This consists of smoke and heat detectors connected to a central system and fire extinguishers located in strategic, visible sites.

The disaster prevention and recovery plan covers all possible contingencies and includes stages of prevention, preparation, response and recovery. Trained personnel is present for this purpose.

This collection is under the custodianship of the Audio-visual Archive of Venezuela, part of the National Library of Venezuela. Preservation assistance is

offered by the National Centre for Paper Conservation. This was set up in 1981 as an additional service. Its function is to help in the preservation of bibliographic and audio-visual material with special emphasis on paper media. In 1986 it was designated a Regional Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean under the Programa de Preservación y Conservación (PAC) [Preservation and Conservation Programme] promoted by the International Federation of Library Institutions and Associations.

The physical area is currently 500m², but will increase four-fold when the collection is housed in the new site currently under construction. The preservation budget is \$50,000 per year. It is made up of the Division for the Conservation of Antique Works, the Division for the Conservation of Two-Dimensional Works, the Division for the Conservation of Works Post-1850, the Micrography Division, a test laboratory and a registration unit.

This Centre runs a pilot programme for the training and updating of human resources in modern conservation techniques. In 1990, this programme became a three-stage basic course in the preservation of graphic works. The first stage lasts 12 months. The new programme involves practical teaching and is based on internationally recognised principles which emphasise preservation rather than conservation. Students are also taught techniques for the preservation of complete collections or isolated works. Special conventions have been drawn up with international institutions and organisations to enable the programme to invite distinguished American and European conservationists to meetings and seminars. These are organised to bring Venezuelan conservation personnel up to date, and also National Library ABINIA members in some cases. The staff includes 24 officers, most of whom have received their technical and professional training in Spain and the USA.

The National Centre for Paper Conservation has laid down strict rules and policies to safeguard of the National Library's documentary heritage. These include the monitoring and control of environmental conditions in stores through the use of a central air-conditioning system. The system controls air temperature and quality through particle and gas filtering systems. Relative Humidity is controlled by the use of de-humidifiers. The collections are also kept in the dark. The light is turned on only when an item is located for a loan or materials are replaced in their shelves. The lights are tungsten, which emit less ultraviolet radiation. The collection is stored on stoved metallic shelves. Individual photographs are placed on special mounts with protective covers made out of acid-free top-quality stable materials. Handling is carried out by trained personnel, who supervise the user at the time of the loan and ensure cotton gloves are worn.

Users use the same route to enter and leave the room as a security measure to prevent theft.

Round the clock security is provided by specialised personnel.

Facsimile copies are used by preference when this collection is exhibited to the public. If the original is required, appropriate environmental conditions must be provided for exhibition with relative humidity control, temperature, lighting, protection, use of showcases and appropriate instruments and a permanent guard.

Due to the world importance of this collection, it is given priority in preservation programmes.

Copying is carried out using techniques such as permanent quality black and white photography, cibachrome and negativisation. In the future, digital copies of the originals will be made to improve access.

Assessment against the Selection Criteria

Time: This collection provides a wide and comprehensive pictorial expression of Latin America as the new nations were formed. The photographs deal with ideas of community, progress and technological change as applied to the transformation of land and urban centres.

Photography is a representation of the truth, and as such was used to record various aspects of life. For example, all social strata used portraiture as a permanent record of their own existence.

Each social class had their own approach to portraiture, however, and the final results reveal telling differences in attitude, style and forms of social interaction. The development of cities, social life and the economy were also widely recorded. Economic activities (urban and rural) were recorded not only as records but also as advertising, mainly for business.

Pre-photojournalistic social photography depicts events and activities of significance from various countries. Other records include images of war, geographical disasters, presidential visits, etc.

Place: This important heritage is made up of images from throughout Latin America. They provide a record of many historical events connected with changes experienced during the second half of the Nineteen Century in the American continent. This collection is important because it transcends national boundaries and belongs to the entire region.

Subject / Theme: This collection stands as an unwritten photographic history which nevertheless contains images with important documentary value. This record documents the development of the historical and cultural process in Latin America.

Form and style: This vulnerable resource is unique due to the media used (albumen prints, platinotypes, salt papers, bromide papers and gelatin,

daguerreotypes, tintypes and cyanotypes, to name but a few). This collection is a pictorial record of the development of photography in Latin America during the Nineteenth Century.

Integrity: this unified body of work almost all relates to the Nineteenth Century and represents a unique collection of international stature. Although other archives contain works which are important due to their authorship, subject or location in North America and Europe, none of these is devoted solely to Latin America or covers the wide range of authors and countries represented in this collection. The almost unique works have hardly ever been seen and are grouped by country.

Contextual assessment: If we compare this documentary heritage with other collections of international stature, we may see that the collection is unique due to its content and also due to the number of authors and countries represented. It is the only archive in the world which represents all South American countries.

Authenticity: The body of work represented in this collection has been investigated and examined by researchers of international renown. For example, research has been carried out and publications produced by Weston Neff, curator of photography of the Getty Museum in California and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; Hack Hoffenberg, a recognized collector of Latin American photography; Gilberto Ferrez, a private collector and historian of Brazilian photography; Pedro Vasquez, recognised historian of Brazilian photography; Douglas McElroy, lecturer at the University of New Mexico; Jorge L. Gutiérrez, former curator of the photography collection of the National Library and specialist in Latin American photography of the Nineteenth Century; Eduardo Serrana, deputy director of the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá; Lord Blanco, ex-director of the National Library Conservation Centre; Boris Kossoy, Brazilian researcher in to the history of photography. Tests were also carried out on certain items of this collection before they reached the National Library by recognised auction houses and galleries.

More than twenty (20) reputable international publications have carried out research to ascertain the authenticity and importance of these works. Their contents have been checked and tests have been carried out to ensure that they were produced by the authors to whom they are accredited.

Some of the works have been exhibited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Public Library of New York and the Centre for Interamerican Relations of New York, the Schonnberg Centre for Black Art in New York, the Museum of Art in San Paulo and in Caracas, the Museum of Fine Arts, the National Library and the Alejandro Otero Museum of Visual Arts.

Rarity: Despite its relevance, the history of Latin American photography has not been discussed in standard texts on the history of photography. This may be due

to the specific nature of photography during the Nineteenth Century. Not only does the collection contain many images, it also contains examples of work by little-known photographers of extraordinary quality and major photographs recognised in classic texts on the history of photography. It is undoubtedly a missing part of world photographic history. As stated elsewhere in this nomination, this collection represents an important part of the pictorial history of Latin America due to the quality of the images, the subjects examined, the photographic techniques used and the unique nature of the collection.

Consultation

Owner: National Library of Venezuela

Custodian: Audio-visual Archive of Venezuela

Regional or National Memory of the World Committee: Venezuelan Memory of the World Committee

Independent institutions and experts:

1. Hack L. Hoffenberg, 40 East 62 th Street, New York, NY 10021. Private Collector.
2. Jorge L. Gutiérrez. Avenida principal Urb. La Bonita. Res. La Loma B # 66 La Trinidad - Caracas, zp 1081. Architect, photographer, historian of nineteenth-century Latin American photography.
3. Lourdes Blanco. Calle Guárico. Colinas de Bello Monte. Res. Loma Verde PHA - Caracas, zp 1041. Consultant in Conservation and Art.
4. José Orraca. 32 East 68 th Street, New York, NY 10021. Photographic Custodian and Restorer.
5. Gilberto Ferrez. Rua Abelardo Lobo 74/302 Lagoa Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Private Collector, historian of Brazilian photography.
6. Klaus Hendricks. Archivo Público del Canada Wellington St. Ottawa, Ontario K1A0N3. Paper Custodian.
7. James M Raily, Rochester Institute of Technology, One Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, NY 14623 - 88 87. Specialist in nineteenth-century techniques.
8. Pedro Vásquez. Fundación nacional de Arte (FUNARTE). Rua Araujo Porto Alegre 80 Rio de Janeiro, RJ 20.030 - Brazil. Photographic custodian and historian.
9. Grant Romer, International Museum of Photography/Eastman House, 900 East Avenue, Rochester NY 14607. Photographic custodian.
10. Robert Levine, Departamento de Historia, Universidad de Miami, P.O. Box 248194 Coral Gables Fla. 33124. Photographic historian.
11. Boris Kossoy, Rua Bento Freitas. 158 Sao Paulo - Brazil. Architect, writer, Brazilian photographic historian.

Nominator

Name: Virginia Betancourt Valverde

Relationship to documentary heritage: Director of the National Library of Venezuela

Contact person: Milvia Villamizar B., Director of Audio-visual Archive Public Service, Collection Manager

Assessment of Risk

Venezuela is a democratic country with a stable political system. The system respects the country's fundamental institutions and therefore represents no threat to the documentary heritage. The economic situation is undergoing a process of recovery following a period of depression and inflation. This affects everyone and has determined a drop in government funding for the country's basic institutions, such as the National Library of Venezuela.

Despite the fact that the tropical climate in Venezuela, and particularly Caracas, is not extreme, the National Paper Conservation Centre of the National Library of Venezuela has introduced rules and procedures for controlling the environment in collection stores. The store containing the collection of nineteenth-century photography contains a system for constant monitoring of relative humidity and temperature. An air quality control system has also been introduced, which involves the use of filters in the air conditioning system. Light exposure has been minimised by keeping the store in the dark. A periodic cleaning programme has been introduced in order to avoid a build up of dust to aid insect eradication. The industrial building where the collection is housed is of modern construction. It is designed to house collections. The photography collection is located on a mezzanine floor in a windowless store. It is placed on stoved metal shelving and stored in appropriate containers such as acid or polypropylene-free protective boxes.

The system is equipped with a fire detection system consisting of smoke and heat detectors connected to a central system. It also possesses fire extinguishers located in visible sites, which receive periodic maintenance. Specialised personnel carry out constant cleaning of the stores, offices and user areas. A prevention and recovery plan against disasters such as floods and fires also exists.

The collection is made up of 8,000 items, which are all kept in individual protectors. Most are placed on special mounts. They have been subject to dry cleaning and the mounts have undergone minor repairs where necessary. In general, the collection is in good condition, although occasional damage has been caused by ageing or due to unfavorable conditions experienced by the photographs before they reached the National Library. The storage conditions lessen the effect of natural degradation.

Access to the collection is permitted. Because the items are unique and fragile, the National Library has introduced a plan of copying to facilitate access. This consists of negativisation, black and white copying, and cibachrome copying. Digitalization is being considered for the future. The techniques used in the preservation process are based on state-of-the-art technologies.

The institutions allocate an annual budget of \$50,000 for the preservation and conservation of its collections: 40% of this is used for staff expenses and 60% for servicing the collections.

Preservation Assessment

An assessment of the preservation of the documentary heritage :

The collection of nineteenth-century photography in the National Library of Venezuela consists of 8,000 items, mostly unique, which must be maintained in their original state. We have therefore adopted measures for conditioning the environment by controlling relative humidity and temperature. Individual protectors and good quality storage boxes have also been provided.

Items with some physical damage are protected by a regular dry cleaning and minor mount repairs. Fortunately, most of these photographs are in good condition.

Since it opened in 1985, this collection has been preserved as described previously. Before this date, the photographs belonged to private collectors and their storage conditions are unknown, although we may suppose they were acceptable due to their physical condition at the time of acquisition.

As a means of preservation and to ensure better access by users to the collection, copies are being made by negativisation, black and white paper copying and cibachrome copying. In the future, a process of digitalisation will be introduced of individual copies. Negativisation and black and white copying both ensure permanent quality.

This collection is maintained by personnel of the National Paper Conservation Centre. They produce a written and photographic register of interventions carried out, which are minor in most cases.

The National Library of Venezuela has introduced policies for loaning its collection to exhibitions.

The strict rules laid down for transport, handling and display require control of relative humidity and temperature, appropriate exhibition lighting no brighter than five bulbs/foot, the use of closed show cases and plexiglass frames designed to ensure the safety of the exhibited work - and also a permanent guard. Handling must be carried out by trained personnel under the supervision of conservation centre officials.

The methods adopted by the National Paper Conservation Centre of the National Library of Venezuela are up-to-date because its personnel has attended courses and seminars held in recognised US and European institutes and has also been trained by international experts visiting the Conservation Centre. A programme

has also been introduced to translate important conservation literature into Spanish in order to ensure our technicians are kept up to date.

Bibliography: The bibliography of the Photographic Collection is produced in accordance with Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules 2, 1978 (AACR). A MARC computer system is used. This runs NOTIS software developed by the North Western University, Illinois, USA and sold by Ameritech.