

Connecting to colour slide film

Lénia Oliveira Fernandes, Élia Roldão and Sanneke Stigter

Boosted by vibrant marketing campaigns, and especially popular in the 1960s and 1970s, slide film ended up in many personal and institutional collections worldwide. For decades, manufacturers of photographic materials have produced an immense

variety of these chromogenic films through major advances in chemical, material and industrial engineering. Nevertheless, those same technological improvements were insufficient to guarantee their long-term stability, yielding images with noticeable

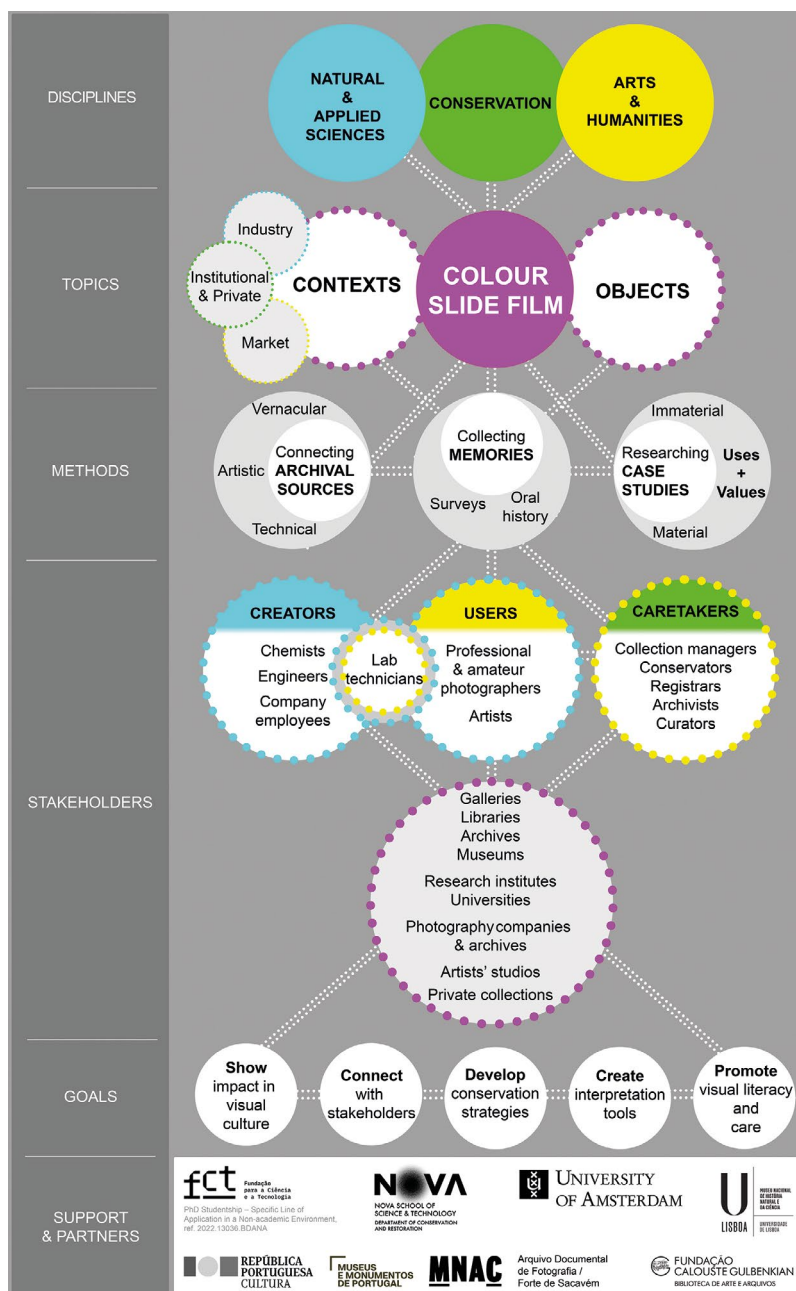


Figure 1 Overview diagram of the approach taken to study colour slide film. (Diagram: Lénia Oliveira Fernandes.)

colour shifts. In earlier films, this issue became visible shortly after their use and chemical development, leading to a misperception of the image and a risk of total loss (Pénichon 2013: 161, 219). As it continues to be manufactured by a few companies, in-depth knowledge about slide film seems easily attainable (Shanebrook 2016). However, patents and corporate secrets obstruct access to further details. Understanding these objects' complex photochemical decay mechanisms is essential to grasp the changes they have gone through and find possible solutions to their preservation. As time goes by, various other types of deterioration continue to challenge heritage professionals working with colour slides, including mould growth, vinegar syndrome and exuding plasticisers (Oliveira Fernandes 2021).

The photographic industry shifted towards digital technology in the early 2000s, as have its consumers. It is undeniable that the heyday of slide film is over. How can we understand the intricacies of dying technologies if they are vanishing before our eyes? Who will be able to explain this photographic process and surrounding industrial and artistic context 50 years from now? If no action is taken, we are at risk of losing an unrecoverable amount of highly specialised information, making an obsolete technology progressively ambiguous. In light of this scenario, it is imperative to create interpretation resources to overcome this expanding knowledge gap.

This project aims to explore the materiality and sociohistorical context as well as the cultural significance of colour slide film using examples that made their way into Portuguese cultural heritage institutions. As an example of a nation without strong connections to the photographic industry, Portugal personifies an end-user of an array of chromogenic films. To provide a better overview of the international cultural significance of these objects, selected case studies display the use of these photographs in artistic, commercial, cultural, documental, educational and scientific practices (Fig. 1). The context of each case study will be examined, through oral histories and survey responses of the stakeholders responsible for their creation, use and care, to analyse both professional and vernacular use of colour slide film. Artistic, technical and vernacular sources will provide further insights into the material and immaterial values held by slide film in each scenario.

This study represents an interdisciplinary approach and the goals of a project that maps the technical, social and artistic impact of colour slides through their different uses. Ultimately, this project

strives to challenge the way slide film is perceived and valued and intends to promote its visual literacy and connoisseurship, aiming at improving conservation strategies applied to colour slide collections. This interdisciplinary approach can potentially be used as a sample model for cultural heritage research which focuses on technologies that are prone to disappear.

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Back cover illustrations: *Left:* Mark Manders, *Room, Constructed to Provide Persistent Absence* (2001–2002): detail. (Photo: Mathias Johansson.)

Right: Bernt Notke's altarpiece in Tallin: three faces of the Virgin Mary from the 15th, 17th and 19th century (before, during and after conservation treatment). (Photos: Martin Siplane.)

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Bridging^{the} Gap

Synergies between Art History and Conservation

Edited by Birgitte Sauge, Thierry Ford, Tine Frøysaker
and Klaas Jan van den Berg



Collaborative research across diverse fields of expertise and institutional boundaries can lead to new insights and hence dust off long-held beliefs. Although challenging, pursuing this goal can yield surprising results when accomplished. This volume of peer-reviewed papers and poster texts is the result of the international conference *Bridging the Gap: Synergies between Art History and Conservation*, held at the National Museum of Norway. The papers, which explore artworks created over a span of more than 1,000 years, discuss topics ranging from abstract concepts to molecular details.

The research presented in this volume originates from both small-scale collaborations within museums and larger projects involving specialists from museums, universities and research institutions. In both fields of conservation and art history, the use of primary historical sources and archival material enhances our understanding of artistic processes and individual works of art. Chemical and technical investigations have increasingly become an integral part of our methodology. This volume highlights the different perspectives and methodologies which are crucial to bridging the gap between disciplines and generating new knowledge.