

Inventory of the photography collections of the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie

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I took charge of the museum's photography collections in April 2000, a little more than two and a half years before the museum closed definitively.

1. State of the collections

I made four observations:

–□The collections were widely dispersed among the different offices, reserves, disaffected museum galleries and various cupboards.

–□Generally speaking they were badly conserved: unprotected glass plates mingled with prints, prints stored at best in brown paper envelopes or in acid-paper folders.

–□The old collections (from the Musée des Colonies/Musée de la France d'Outre-Mer, prior to 1960) and a few recent collections (from the Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, after 1960) had been split up subject areas, so that their history had been lost.

–□The collections (with a few exceptions) had never been documented (no information on the circumstances of their acquisition, the context in which the photos were taken or the photographer).

2. Objectives

In view of the size of the task and the little time I had before the museum closed for good, there was no question of undertaking an exhaustive inventory, either materially or intellectually, instead I decided I needed to prepare this undertaking, to be able to answer a few “simple” questions (how many photos, what subjects...), to be able to give the public a minimum of information, to be able to allow the public to consult certain collections and finally to prepare the removal of these collections to the Musée du Quai Branly in the best possible conditions.

Concretely, the objectives I set myself were:

- 1) **I** assemble all the museum’s photo collections in one place;
- 2) **I** classify the holdings so as to reconstitute the sets of photos that had been dispersed into various places or files;
- 3) **I** in many instances, to match up the negatives, prints (sometimes in several copies) duplicates of the same photo, which had also been dispersed;
- 4) **I** describe all these sets, listing their main characteristics;
- 5) **I** store them as well as possible so as to ensure their conservation or at least better storage conditions, and to be able, after having established a cataloguing system, to locate them easily;
- 6) **I** create databases for certain collections selected on the basis of varied criteria (request frequency, project to reproduce certain collections in collaboration with the Réunion des Musées Nationaux, etc.);
- 7) **I** leave a text describing the MAAO photographic archives, as the Museum was about to shut down for good.

To the inventory of the photography collections I have added that of the films, most of which I was unable to view. I also indicated the existence of several postcard collections.

3. **Iimits of this undertaking and special cases**

I must nevertheless point out the limits of this undertaking.

1) I have not included the photos kept in archived folders. It would no doubt be best to remove them at some later time so as to conserve them in optimal conditions while indicating their existence in the original folder.

2) I proceeded in the same way and for the same reasons with the many photographs of objects in the MAAO collections, taken after 1960.

Two categories of special photos were found:

1) Photographs touched up with watercolors or gouache: Germain Viatte, the director of the Museum, had wished them to be considered as watercolors or gouaches and therefore “managed” by the curator in charge of engravings, drawings and paintings (the “historical collection”). I nevertheless indicated in my inventory the existence of all photos belonging to this category that I had been able to find.

2) The glass plate positives inserted in the display case windows in the Musée de la France d’Outre-Mer: these were not removed. I nevertheless recorded the captions of all these photos, together with their source when mentioned. This work could be of use to researchers interested in the educational policy of the Musée des Colonies and more specifically in the role of photography in their approach.

4. The method used

First of all there were material problems to be resolved:

- Find storage space (a hallway)
- Find storage cabinets (some old metal cupboards)
- Obtain the necessary funds from the Museum to purchase the conservation material, in particular for the prints
- Establish an analytical grid for describing the collections. This grid was divided into the following headings:
 - circumstances of acquisition

number of photos
date
type of support
format
numbers / stamps
subject area: continent, country, subject
captions
initial protection
material processing carried out
documentation
state of conservation
location

Finally I also had to go through the Museum's archives in order to reconstruct the history of the photography archives as well as that of the special collections.

5. Results

5.1 The major stages of the history of the photography archives

Photography was a part of the museum from 1931; mention is found in the inventory records.

Nevertheless, it was not until the closure of the Agence Générale des Colonies, in 1934, and the arrival of Marguerite Verdat at the Musée des Colonies that true photography archives were created. In a document discovered in the MAAO archives, Marguerite Verdat gives a detailed description of how she organized the archives. This document proved to be most useful in reconstituting the old collections.

Marguerite Verdat, it should be noted, arrived at the same time as the collection of the Agence Générale des Colonies. She occupied her post from 1934 to 1939. I was unable to find any information on the history of the photo archives between her

departure and 1961. A few indications suggest that this service continued to operate for several years using the organization she had set up.

In 1961, two very important collections, the Binot and the Bernard collections, were turned over to the Museum.

1964 was the start of a black period that lasted until 1985, during which time old collections and even recent ones were jettisoned in catastrophic conditions.

In 1964–65, the Asian collections were separated: part were turned over to the Musée Guimet, but the bulk went to the CeDRASEMI, now the Southeast Asia and East Indies (ASEMI) library, at the University of Nice-Sophia-Antipolis (France).

Towards 1970, another part of the Asian collection was turned over, together with collections concerning other regions, to the Overseas department of the National Archives (Rue Oudinot, Paris). A second batch followed in 1985. Each time a very large number of photos were involved. The second transfer was carried out in great haste. Some inventory lists were left behind at the MAAO, while others were sent to the National Archives. Moreover, some collections were split up, with one part going to the National Archives and the other remaining at the MAAO.

In 1987, the Overseas department of the National Archives in Paris merged with the Overseas archives repository in Aix-en-Provence. Today the bulk of the photography collections from the former Musée de la France d'Outre-Mer can be found at the Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence.

Attempts were made in the 1980s and '90s to reconstruct photo archives at the MAAO, but unfortunately were not successful.

6. The figures

The photography collection of the MAAO contained 57,000 photos, to which must be added a few collections which, for various reasons, could not be counted. The MAAO therefore possessed over 60,000 photographic supports. For the most part these

were black and white prints (26,452), glass plates (19,500) and negatives (4,000). I counted only 3 autochromes.

7. Subject areas

I have listed the main subject areas represented in the collections plus a short description of the largest collections.

Two collections stand out for the variety of subjects they cover:

– **The Binot collection**: the main body is comprised of 13,845 glass plate positive stereoscopic photographs, taken by Dr. Jean Binot (1867–1909), a physician from the Pasteur Institute, between 1898 and 1909. This collection was willed to the MAAO by his widow in 1961. Binot took many photos in France and Europe, but also Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey and the Indian Ocean. A variety of subjects are represented: museums, archeological sites, buildings and monuments, scenes of everyday life, life in the colonies, the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris, the Marseilles colonial exposition of 1906, etc. Around one fourth of the collection concerns regions other than Europe (Djibouti, Egypt, Reunion Island, Madagascar, Mayotte, Tunisia, Tanzania [Zanzibar], Turkey), as well as pictures taken in museums and at the 1906 Marseilles colonial exposition.

* **The inventoried collection of the Musée de la France d’Outre-Mer**: 3,796 photos according to the inventory list found in the museum’s archives, of which the MAAO possesses around half, the rest very likely to be found in Aix-en-Provence. These are photos of objects that were displayed in the museum, museum rooms, archeological sites, scenes of everyday life in the former French colonies.

– The colonial exposition

* **The Petropoulos collection**: purchased by the museum in 1995 from M. Petropoulos. The collection consists of a set of five boxes each containing 12

stereoscopic plates, all held in the cardboard box in which they originally came. These were probably photos that were sold during the colonial exposition by the Maison Bruguère.

–Musée des Colonies et de la France d’Outre-Mer

*The Barré-Laprade collection: 93 photos donated by Arlette Barré-Laprade, daughter of Albert Laprade, who built the colonial museum. This collection holds photographs of the construction, furnishings and inauguration of the Museum as well as others taken by Laprade in Morocco.

–Sub-Saharan Africa

*The Haardt collection: the body of the collection is comprised of 3,854 photographs all bearing captions and dates, and glued into albums, as well as books and archives concerning the Citroën “Croisière Noire”, acquired in 1967 from Claude Haardt, the son of Georges-Marie Hardt, who led the three Citroën expeditions (“Traversée du Sahara”, “Croisière Noire” and “Croisière Jaune”).

*The Harter collection: in 1992, the MAAO received the bequest of Dr. Pierre Harter (1928–1991), containing 53 pieces of his collection from Cameroon (Grassland) together with photographic and film documentation (3,900 prints, 1,300 slides, 1,500 negatives). The bulk of the documentation concerns Grassland and Ivory Coast (Gueré and Goh).

*The Besnard collection: André Besnard was a police employee who had worked in French West Africa in 1948. In 1994 he gave the MAAO a set of 258 black-and-white prints made in 1930–1940 in what is present-day Mali. These seem to be photographs commissioned by the administration on a variety of subjects: landscapes, portraits, and traditional and colonial architecture.

*The Verger collection: In 1999, the MAAO acquired 188 black-and-white prints by Pierre Verger (1902–1996), a photographer and anthropologist. These photos are all those that were published in the book entitled *Dieux d'Afrique* in 1995 as well as some photos displayed in the 1993 exhibition “Le Messager”. The bulk of the photos concern Benin (religious cults of the Fon and Yoruba countries) and Brazil (Voodoo).

*The Buffet collection: Paul Buffet (1864–1914) was a painter trained at the School of Beaux-Arts, who obtained a fellowship in 1894 to visit Ethiopia, where it seems he spent over a year. He was received by Menelik II, whose portrait he painted. He brought back photos of this journey on glass plates, 38 of which were discovered at the MAAO. The subjects of the photos are Menelik, landscapes, gatherings. This collection was probably left to the Museum by Madame Binot, the artist’s sister.

*The Christol collection: Reverend Christol had lent his glass plate negatives, taken sometime around 1925, to a curator of the museum so that he might make prints, which have been recently discovered. There are 136 of these, which deal with Cameroon (Grassland). Anne-Laure Pierre (photo archives of the Musée de l’Homme) was kind enough to provide me with the notices taken from the Micromusée database on the Christol collection at the Musée de l’Homme, which enabled me to compare the two collections and to discover that the MAAO held 82 prints not in the possession of the Musée de l’Homme. Both collections together total 176 different photographs.

*The Houlet collection: Gilbert Houlet wrote at least three travel guides (“Guides Bleus” collection) on West Africa, published in 1958 and 1962. In 1986, he donated his photographs to the MAAO, in all some 1,400 6x6 contact sheets and their negatives as well as 400 color slides. These photos were clearly taken in the late 1950s and show various aspects of Africa (portraits, landscapes, architecture, everyday life...).

*The Parisel collection: the Philippe Parisel collection was acquired by the MAAO in 1994. It is a collection of 35 color prints presenting signs photographed in Congo-Zaire. The Rodrigues collection (346 slides) also deals with this subject.

–**Maghreb/Machrek**

*The Bernard collection: Louis, Jean-Baptiste, Maurice Bernard (1876–1947) was an army man who spent 16 years of his life, from 1904 to 1920, in Algeria and Morocco. Some 1,900 photos were donated to the MAAO in 1960 by his widow. These concern essentially Morocco (architecture, street scenes, market scenes).

*The Foulon collection: this collection, composed of 1,100 glass plate positives, donated to the MAAO by Madame Foulon in 1999, concerns essentially the Islamic architecture in the Maghreb and Machrek. For the Maghreb, there are also a few group portraits as well as images of craftsmen at work.

* The Dumoulin collection: Louis Dumoulin (1860–1924) was a painter, a pupil of Gerveix, who set up the Tananarive Museum in the former palace of the Queen in 1913. He traveled in China, Japan, Russia and the Middle East, among others. The MAAO owns part of his collection, comprised essentially of photos taken in Egypt by such photographers as Zangaki, Arnoux or Lekegian (83 photos in all). The rest of this collection is divided between Nice (ASEMI), Aix-en-Provence (CAOM) and Paris ((Musée Guimet).

*The Besancenot collection: Jean Besancenot (1904–1992), a photographer and anthropologist, sold 106 photos illustrating Moroccan jewelry and costumes to the MAAO.

–**Sahara**

*The Haardt collection: 458 photographs glued into two albums illustrating the first Citroën Sahara crossing in 1922–23.

*The “Sahara” collection: some 2,300 pictures of unknown origin, taken between 1898 and 1919, and illustrating the conquest of the Sahara and the life of French soldiers in this region. The collection contains photos of General Laperrine, the chief

architect of this conquest and several other figures close to him, among whom Father Foucauld.

–☐The South Pacific (Oceania)

*☐The Barlin collection: 86 photos by Todd Barlin acquired by the MAAO in 1996 concerning Papua New Guinea and more specifically the Asmat and the Mimika.

* ☐ The Gallet collection: Gustave Gallet, born in 1856, was the Directeur de l'Intérieur in Tahiti in 1885, then interim governor of Oceania from 1896 to 1897, and then governor from 1898 to 1902. The MAAO acquired three albums that had belonged to him, containing 144 black-and-white photos of Tahiti: traditional architecture, landscapes, portraits of Tahitian men and women, colonial life and traditional life.

*☐The Guiart collection: this collection contains 8,200 photographs of Oceania assembled by Jean Guiart. Most are photographs of objects from various museums, sometimes reproduced from books; and a few photos taken in the field.

*☐The Muller collection: over 200 photographs (color slides) were bought by the MAAO in 1972 from Kalman Muller. They concern Vanuatu.

–☐Madagascar

*☐The Damville collection: this was a donation by M. Damville in 1997 of 101 nineteenth-century photographs printed on albumin paper. The bulk of the photographs are of Madagascar: studio portraits, landscapes, scenes of everyday life.

*☐The Richard collection: a gift from Madame Richard of 45 photographs, in particular studio portraits of Malagasy subjects.

There are also several fine portraits of historical figures.

*☐ portrait of Behanzin: donated by Madame Motais, of Narbonne, in 1936.

* A portrait of Samory donated by General Réquin, nephew of General Archinard, who took part in conquering Western Soudan.

As well as a photograph representing the landing of Ranavalona II on Reunion Island on 10 May 1897, left to the Museum by Madame Durand, wife of Alfred Durand then assistant administrator of Madagascar.

In conclusion, I would like to indicate the existence of a no doubt rich collection which I was unable to examine: this was constituted by Bohumil Holas former director of the Musée de Côte-d'Ivoire, who died in 1979, and was donated to the MAAO by the Republic of Ivory Coast in 1995.

ASEMI Asie du Sud-Est et le Monde Insulindien

CAOM Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer

MAAO Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie