DigitalCustom-Alinari Model Ethics Guidelines

For The Use Of Digital Photo Restoration, Repair and Reconstruction Techniques For Archival and Preservation Purposes

(Comment Draft 1.0 - March 1, 2003)

These proposed guidelines are sponsored by DigitalCustom Group, Inc. and Fratelli Alinari to assist individuals and institutions who are involved in formulating policies for the ethical, accurate digital restoration of historical photos and other images that are maintained as part of historical and/or artistic archives.

The sponsors seek comments on these guidelines so that, over time, they may be improved, clarified and grow with the technology and industry thought.

DigitalCustom Group, Inc. and Fratelli Alinari sponsor these guidelines as part of a joint mission to advance the art, science and profession of digital image editing and the appropriate use of digital image restoration by archives.

Please provide your comments to feedback@digitalcustom.com.

1.0 The Object of Photo Restoration and Repair for Archival and Preservation Purposes

1.0.1 These ethical guidelines are intended to be applied by archivists who are involved in the restoration or repair of damaged or deteriorated historical images. The purpose of the guidelines is to create a clear set of standards for archival image restoration, and thereby preserve the integrity of visual history and avoid inaccuracies created by the use of digital editing technology.

1.0.2 A fundamental distinction exists between **original imperfections** in an image, due to the photographer's judgments, actions or errors, lighting circumstances, capture technology, printing and emulsion technology and happenstance, and **after-acquired damage, deterioration or injury** to the image.

1.0.3 The object of archival photo restoration, repair and reconstruction is to counteract the impact of after-acquired damage, deterioration or injury, while retaining original imperfections in unmodified form.

2.0 Repair of After-Acquired Damage, Deterioration or Injury

2.0.1 Original imperfections may not be repaired, unless there is evidence that the imperfection was repaired when the image originally was created. For example, if the archivist holds the negative of an image and there is evidence that an imperfection in the image was repaired in the original prints, the archivist may digitally execute the identical repair prior to printing.

2.0.2 After-acquired damage, deterioration or injury may be repaired, provided the repair is executed consistent with the principles set forth in these guidelines.

3.0 Use of Enhancement and Reconstruction Techniques to Repair After-Acquired Damage

3.0.1 **Enhancement Procedures:** Damaged image elements may be reconstructed by digitally enhancing an element to recover definition that has been lost or obscured due to after-acquired damage, deterioration or injury. Example: If fading has caused a loss of contrast and definition in the leaves of a tree, adjustment of contrast, brightness and other levels may be performed.

3.0.2 **Extension Reconstruction:** Damaged image elements may be repaired by extending a part of an element to an area that is presumed from the context to have been in the original, but which is lost as a result of after-acquired damage, deterioration or injury. Example: If part of a fence has been lost to water damage, the undamaged parts of the fence may be used to complete the fence if there is enough information to determine the original appearance.

3.0.3 **Symmetrical Reconstruction:** A damaged element may be reconstructed by grafting into the damaged area part of an undamaged element that is presumed to be symmetrical (or nearly so) to the part that requires reconstruction. Example: If half of a human face is obliterated, but the other half is visible, the visible half may be used to reconstruct the damaged part.

3.0.4 **Reference Reconstruction:** A damaged element may be reconstructed by grafting from a reference image that is a fair representation of the damaged element. Reference reconstruction should be used cautiously and care should be taken to ensure that any reference image is a reliable match.

4.0 Modifications of Image Composition

4.0.1 Modifications of image composition are disfavored and should be disclosed. The cropping of an image to exclude damage constitutes a modification.

4.0.2 Cropping, rotation or image enhancement beyond the repair of after-acquired damage or deterioration (including contrast change) are substantive modifications of an image that should be applied to archival images only when necessary to achieve a proper archival purpose (e.g. analysis of a particular architectural feature) and in a manner that is consistent with the principles herein.

4.0.3 Cropping of the secondary support, frame or vignettes in the original should be avoided when possible. Secondary supports, frames and vignettes should be considered an integral part of a photographic artifact and may carry valuable historical information, such as watermarks, signatures, stamps and studio names. A digital image of a secondary support, frame or vignette may be restored in a manner that is consistent with the photo restoration.

4.0.4 Reference To Journalism Ethics: It is impermissible to modify a historical image in a manner that would violate ethics pertaining to manipulation of journalistic images. Reference is made to the "DigitalCustom Model Rules To Preserve The Integrity of Images For Journalistic Purposes" (Release Version #2.0, March 1, 2003)(available at

5.0 Restoration and Recolorization of Original Handcoloring,Tinting or Other Colorization

5.0.1 Archival images that were captured on monochrome media, and were handcolored, tinted or otherwise colorized, should be restored to their colorized state.

5.0.2 In restoring originally colorized images, care should be taken to apply a palette that is consistent with the colors that were used in the original.

5.0.3 Care should be taken to ensure that colors in the restored image do not have unrealistic saturation that is inconsistent with the age of the image.

6.0 Colorization of Originally Monochrome Images

6.0.1 A colorized image is not a fair archival rendering of an image that was captured and printed solely on monochrome media. Colorization of an originally monochrome image should be disclosed and a non-colorized version should be retained as the sole as excusive archival rendering of the image. Likewise, the decolorization of an image or removal of original tinting is a fundamental alteration of the original image and should be disclosed.

6.0.2 Sepia: There is a distinction between "browning" due to aging/deterioration and sepia toning or tinting added by the creator of the image. On detection of sepia toning or original colorization, the original work should be restored to an approximate of the original toning to the extent ascertainable.

6.0.3 No position is taken in these guidelines on the appropriateness of colorizing an originally non-color image for personal or creative purposes. The digital colorization of non-colored images may dramatically enhance the aesthetics and impact of an image in the eyes of a viewer and does not involve alteration of the original image. The digital and non-digital "handcoloring" of black and white images is a longstanding, well-respected art form separate from photography, in which the selection of color palette, color selection and the application to particular areas largely defines the art form.

7.0 Preservation of Historical Print Media and Handling of Textures

7.0.1 Original Texture. Retention of original media texture in a digital image often creates a poor visual result when the image is printed. The print typically is not a likeness of the original because the original texture was part of the print media, not part of the composition of the original image.

7.0.2 It is permissible for a digital editor to remove the texture from the image, thereby creating a digital master that more closely approximates the negative.

7.0.3 It is appropriate to print the restored image on the same or similar textured media, and the better practice is to do so when media is available.

8.0 Disclosure of Restoration and Colorization

8.0.1 **Archivist's Disclosure of Restoration:** A restored image should contain an restoration disclosure (such as "This image was originally created by _____ (photographer, if known) in _____ (year or time period of photograph if known), and was restored in ____ (year or time period, if known.") under the direction of (archivist individual or institution).

8.0.2 **Archivist's Disclosure of New Colorization and Colorization Artist:** When an originally non-color image has been colorized or tinted after-the-fact, it should not be displayed by an archivist as original work and should include an appropriate colorization disclosure (such as "This image was originally created in black and white by _____ (photographer, if known) in _____ (year or time period of photograph if known), and was digitally colorized by _____ colorization artist, if known) in ____ (year or time period of the colorization, if known.").

9.0 Preservation of Source Images In Pre-Restored and Post-Restored Conditions

9.0.1 Digital image editing does not require alteration of the original ("source") image. Source images (including negatives and other source media) should be retained and preserved according to sound preservation practices.

9.0.2 The archivist should retain records of restoration procedures, including digitalized versions of the source and restored image at the time of restoration.

9.0.3 The digital "watermarking" of archival images to index, track copyright protect, or otherwise manage, the image is ethical so long as the technology permits a non-watermarked image to be rendered by an authorized party. The placement of a copyright notice on a border is permitted.

Additional Questions For Comment