

OBJECT RESEARCH



**Sarah Choate Sears (American, 1858–1935)**

## Portrait of Mrs. Julia Ward Howe

c. 1900

Platinum print

Alfred Stieglitz Collection

**AIC accession number:** 1949.861

**Stieglitz Estate number:** N/A

**Inscriptions:** Unmarked recto; inscribed verso, upper right, diagonally, in graphite: "Portrait / Mrs. H"; verso, right center, diagonally, in graphite: "Sears"; verso, center, in graphite: "Copy [?] title"; verso, lower center, in graphite: "[?] 3/8 flat white on / R 19 x 21 3/[?] / failure [?] on Jap. [?] Paper.

[?] / According to marks / on this Sheet. ["She" underlined] / Sears ["ar" underlined]"

**Dimensions:** 24 x 18.5 cm (image/paper)

**Print thickness:** 0.304 mm

**Mount:** Unmounted

**X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry:**  
See below

## CONTEXT

Trained as a painter, Sarah Choate Sears was encouraged to pursue photography by her friend F. Holland Day. She was elected to the Photo-Secession in 1904, and Stieglitz reproduced two of her photographs in the April 1907 issue of *Camera Work*—including this portrait of Julia Ward Howe, the author of the lyrics to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” which he acquired for his own collection. Sadakichi Hartmann, whose photography criticism was often published in *Camera Work*, wrote of this picture in June 1904: “She knew in this print precisely what she wanted to do and precisely what to do and what to leave undone in order to succeed. And the leaving of things undone is in no small part of the artist’s task with such a craft as photography.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Allen [Sadakichi Hartmann], “Pictorial Criticism: Constructive, Not Destructive,” *The Photographer* (June 11, 1904), pp. 104–05.

## X-RAY FLUORESCENCE (XRF) SPECTROMETRY

XRF spectral readings were taken from the recto of the work and from the mount when available. The elements listed below have been positively identified in the work; elements in bold have been attributed to the processing of the print.

Print: **Fe, Pt**

Mount: Ca, Ti, Fe, Zn, Sr

The graph below shows XRF spectra for three distinct measurement areas on the print: the darkest, maximum-density image area (Dmax, purple); the lightest, minimum-density image area (Dmin, green); and the mount, when available (orange). The background spectrum (gray) represents the characteristic contribution of the instrument itself as measured on a Teflon reference and is included in order to discount irrelevant elements from the print's signature. Elements were identified based on the presence of their characteristic peaks. Analysis was performed with a Bruker ARTAX air-path portable micro-XRF system equipped with a laser pointer, an integrated camera system, a Mo 12.5 $\mu$ m filter, and a Mo tube. Measurements were taken for 250 LT at 50 kV and 800  $\mu$ A. The spectrum below illustrates the significant peaks for this print in the energy range from 1 to 15 keV.

Figure 1. (right)  
Locations of XRF measurements



Figure 2. (below)  
XRF spectra from the Dmax, Dmin, mount,  
and background signal produced by the  
analyzer.

