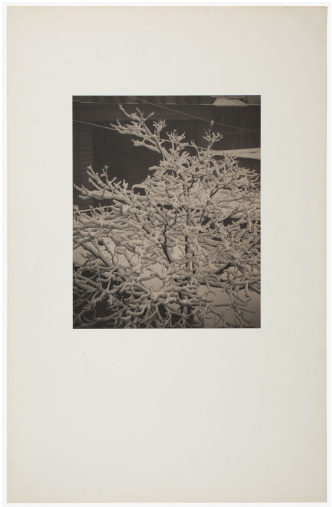

Alfred Stieglitz (American, 1864–1946)

From the Back-Window "291" Snow-Covered Tree, Back-Yard

1915
Platinum print
Alfred Stieglitz Collection

AIC accession number: 1949.709

Stieglitz Estate number: 12C

Inscriptions: Unmarked recto; inscribed verso, on mount, lower left, in graphite: "12C"

Dimensions: 24.2 x 19.3 (image); 25.2 x 20.2 cm (paper); 50.5 x 32.5 cm (mount)

Print thickness: N/A

Surface sheen: Low gloss (6.8 GU @ 85°)

Paper tone: L*86.21, a*3.04, b*20.27

Mount: Original; with original presentation window mat

Mount tone: L*84.44, a*0.44, b*12.01

Ultraviolet-induced (UV) visible fluorescence (recto): None

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry:
See below

Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometry: N/A

CONTEXT

Between 1915 and 1916, Stieglitz made a number of photographs of buildings and of trees visible from the window of his gallery, as well as portraits of friends and colleagues in its interior. Plainly energized by this new work, in which he fully left painterly Pictorialism behind, he wrote to his friend R. Child Bayley: "I have done quite some photography recently. It is intensely direct. Portraits, buildings from my back window at 291, a whole series of them, a few landscapes and interiors. All interrelated. I know nothing outside of Hill's work which I think is so direct, and quite so intensely honest. It is all 8 x 10 work. All platinum prints. Not a trace of hand work on either negative or prints. No diffused focus. Just the straight goods. On some things the lens stopped down to 128. But everything simplified in spite of endless detail."[1]

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This photograph is a platinum print on a thin cream paper. It is adhered at the corners to its original cream mount. The original window mat masks the white margins, showing the edge of the negative from contact printing. There is an inscription in graphite, "12C," on the back of the mount, which correlates to the estate or "Leica" number that Georgia O'Keeffe and Doris Bry assigned to mounted prints from the same negative that were in Stieglitz's possession at the time of his death. A strip at the bottom of the print, approximately one centimeter tall, is lighter than the rest of the image, suggesting that this area was at some point covered during the printing process (intentionally or not) and thus received less exposure than the rest of the image. When the surface of the print is viewed under high magnification, the fibers from the paper are visible, and the image sits directly on the fibers with no intermediary binder. The print does not fluoresce when exposed to long-wave UV radiation. Platinum, iron, lead, and trace amounts of gold were detected using XRF spectrometry. Common to platinotypes, the residual presence of light-sensitive iron ions could be due to improper washing of the print after processing. The presence of lead could have two sources: while lead could have been used during fabrication of the photographic paper itself, it was also commonly used during the processing of platinum prints, to increase uniform development. The presence of gold could be the result of the artist's use of a gold chloride toner during processing, to create a pink or purple tint in the final print.

[1] Alfred Stieglitz to R. Child Bayley, Nov. 1, 1916, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, box 4, folder 88.

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**, Au, Pb

Mount: K, Ca, Ti, Mn, Fe, Ni, 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 12.5µm filter, and a Mo tube. Measurements were taken for 250 LT at 50 kV and 800 µA. The spectrum below illustrates the significant peaks for this print in the energy range from 3 to 15 keV.

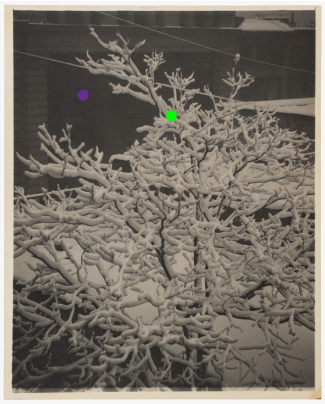

Figure 1. (right)
Locations of XRF measurements

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