Ansel Adams (American, 1902–1984)

Architecture, Early California Cemetery

1932/36, printed 1936
Gelatin silver print
Alfred Stieglitz Collection

AIC accession number: 1949.662

Stieglitz Estate number: N/A

Inscriptions: Signed recto, on mount, lower right, below image, in graphite: "Ansel Adams"; printed and typed verso, on sticker affixed to mount, in black ink: "A PHOTOGRAPH / BY / ANSEL ADAMS / SAN FRANCISCO [printed] / ARCHITECTURE, EARLY CALIFORNIA / CEMETERY [typed]"

Dimensions: 14.7 x 18.1 cm (image/paper/first mount/second mount); 27.9 x 35.6 cm (third mount)

Print thickness: N/A

Surface sheen: Medium gloss (67.6 GU @ 60°)

Paper tone: N/A

Mount: Original

Mount tone: L*92.02, a*-0.61, b*4.88

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

X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry:
See below

Fourier transform infrared (FTIR) spectrometry:
N/A

CONTEXT

Ansel Adams considered the prints he prepared for his 1936 one-man exhibition at Stieglitz's gallery An American Place—including *Architecture, Early California Cemetery*—among the finest he ever made.[1] In the exhibition pamphlet he described the photographs, which he printed on glossy gelatin silver paper, as "individual experiences integrated in black and white through the simple medium of the camera."[2] This work shows the entrance to a mausoleum in Laurel Hill Cemetery, San Francisco, and its matter-of-fact view was typical of the straight photography practiced by Group f/64, which Adams had cofounded. By reducing the image's perspective and depth he encouraged the viewer to focus on the effects of sunlight across the planes of the building's architecture as captured by the tonal range of a black-and-white photograph.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This photograph is a gelatin silver print on a fiber base paper thought to be Agfa Brovira Glossy double weight paper.[3] It is mounted to a glossy off-white bristol board, coated with either a clay or baryta layer, containing optical brighteners that fluoresce when exposed to long-wave UV radiation. Adams signed the work in graphite, just below the bottom right corner of the print on the front of the mount. On the verso of the mount is the artist's label, designed by Lawton Kennedy, with the title of the photograph.[4] When the surface of the print is viewed under high magnification, fibers from the photographic paper are not visible, indicating the presence of a thick baryta layer beneath the emulsion. Silver, barium, and strontium were detected using XRF spectrometry. Barium and strontium are present due to the baryta layer typical of gelatin silver prints; this was used to create a smooth surface upon which the gelatin emulsion was applied during manufacture. The lack of retouching and the pristine quality of the print demonstrate the precision for which Ansel Adams's work is so well known.

[1] Andrea Gray, *Ansel Adams: An American Place, 1936* (Little, Brown, 1982), p. 22.
[2] Ansel Adams, *Ansel Adams: Exhibition of Photographs*, exh. brochure (An American Place, 1936), n.p.
[3] Andrea Gray, *Ansel Adams: An American Place, 1936* (Little, Brown, 1982), p. 22.
[4] Ibid.

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: Sr, **Ag**, Ba

Mount: Ca, Fe, Cu, Zn, Pb

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/Keymaster Tracer III-V+ energy-dispersive handheld XRF analyzer, equipped with changeable Ti and Al filters and a Rh transmission target. Measurements were taken for 120 or 180 LT at 40 kV and 10 µA. The spectrum below illustrates the significant peaks for this print in the energy range from 2 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.