

Les Mémoires des Couleurs: Preserving the Color Works of Shoji Ueda and Creating the Digital Archives

Hitoshi Tanaka, Ryota Katsukura, Keiji Takashima, Kazuyo Kitase, Toru Ueda

Tokyo Polytechnic Univ., 2-9-5 Honcho, Nakano, Tokyo 164-8678, Japan
Shoji Ueda Museum of Photography 353-3 Sumura, Houki-cho, Saihaku-gun, Tottori, 689-4107, Japan

ABSTRACT

This study concerns preserving the original color works and creating a digital archive of the film works of Shoji Ueda (1913-2000), one of the Japan's leading photographers. We are undertaking this study based on the large collection of his photographic works left at his birthplace upon his death in 2000.

INTRODUCTION

Photographer Shoji Ueda was born at Sakai-minato City, Tottori in 1913. What makes him unique among his peers is that there is a large-scale photography museum dedicated to collecting and exhibiting his work. Even after his death in 2000, he has remained popular and continues to enhance his reputation by the continuous publication of photo books. Given the fact that Ueda's exhibitions in recent years are frequently held overseas, it is fair to say he is one of the Japan's leading photographers. Many of his works have been collected by the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Yonago City Museum of Art, and Shimane Prefectural Museum of Art, in addition to the Shoji Ueda Museum of Photography. Nevertheless, the scope of those collections is limited to prints, which are regarded as artworks, not to his original photo films in either negative or positive form. This study aims to preserve and create a digital archive of his color works, focusing on the original films left unorganized at his birthplace.



Shoji Ueda's birthplace

TEXT

Preservation:

Shoji Ueda's birthplace, Sakai-minato City, is a port town, located near the ocean. It is a traditional Japanese-style wooden house built in the Meiji era (1868-1912), which has been constantly extended and renovated over the Taisho (1912-1926) and Showa (1926-1989) periods. Because of its location, this makes the environment highly humid and unfavorable for the preservation of film works, resulting in the growth of mold on many of these original films. Additionally, they are not well organized; most are just piled up in cardboard boxes according to the approximate production period. In order to simplify the preservation procedures, we hierarchically stored them without identifying the exact production age at the time of removal. When the films were severely deteriorated due to mold, we physically removed these spots without the use of chemicals and stored them in acid-free storage boxes that also included mold mitigation materials. After categorizing them into the same size groups, we assigned a temporary serial number on each film. In some cases, a unit of several shots is stored in a preservation sleeve and in other cases a single shot is attached to a mount. For digital archiving, we converted them electronically by way of either shooting them with cameras or capturing them with scanners. Technically, we used a Phase One camera with a 100,000,000 pixel capture rate and a Canon EOS III camera with 23,000,000 effective capture pixels for shooting, and EPSON DS-G20000 (2,400dpi x 4,800dpi) for scanning.



Shoji Ueda Museum of Photography

Status:

Shoji Ueda started photographing in 1928, and began focusing on color work after World War II (1945). The earliest color films presently identified as his are from approximately 1949. There were some color films that have been identified as being produced prior to 1949, but their authenticity as being Shoji Ueda's is currently unresolved. Kodachrome, a Kodak product is a color reversal film, which is a coupler-developer type film with no coupler contained within the film emulsion. Images made on this type of film, still retain a high level of color saturation and image clarity. On the other hand, some shots on coupler-in-emulsion type film have severe discoloration with images barely recognizable.

Shoji Ueda used a variety of camera models, leaving his work in varied sizes and formats. These formats include many of the standard sizes, 6x4.5, 6x6, 6x7, 6x17, in addition to the traditional 35mm sizes, and 35mm Polaroid reversal film, which Polaroid produced for a short period of time. As no detailed shooting records exist, it is extremely challenging for us to identify the exact production date of many of these films.



Discolored original plate; date and location unknown



Shoji Ueda Photograph; Kodachrome Transparency Film; circa 1949

Next Steps:

We now plan to identify and categorize those stored color works and formulate data based on when and where they were photographed. If discoloration is severe, restoration work may be required. However, we should avoid handling these works of Shoji Ueda in an experimental manner. We have an obligation to both preserve for future generations and to pay respect to the nature of works. We need to discuss in depth with the stakeholders on the pros and cons of the preservation process. Furthermore, we would also like to consider how to fully utilize the digital archive that will be produced.