**About the Lens Media Lab**

At the heart of the Lens Media Lab is its unparalleled reference collection of over 7,500 photographic paper samples, spanning from 1890 to 2010. This collection, the largest of its kind globally, serves as a critical resource for materials-focused inquiry. It facilitates provenance research and authentication, providing invaluable insights into the history and care of photographic collections.

The lab uniquely integrates the sciences, arts, and humanities. By combining traditional art historical and darkroom practices with cutting-edge techniques from data science and artificial intelligence, the lab creates a comprehensive approach to the study of photographic materials that ensures the legacy of analog photography continues to inspire and inform.

In an era where darkroom practices are becoming increasingly remote, the Lens Media Lab is an essential source of knowledge that influences preservation, teaching, and learning. Photography is a vital medium for understanding twentieth-century visual culture, and as paper-based photography declines, the lab’s role in maintaining and interpreting these materials becomes ever more crucial. Through its interdisciplinary approach and commitment to education and community engagement, the lab not only preserves the tangible aspects of photography but also enriches the academic and cultural understanding of this vital medium.

[Link to some of our projects](https://lml.yale.edu/projects)

**Bios**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Damon Crockett | **Damon Crockett**  Lead AI Engineer, Lens Media Lab, Yale University  ***Paperbase*** data science, app and site design  Damon Crockett is an AI engineer and data scientist in the Lens Media Lab at Yale’s Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage. Previously, he was a postdoctoral associate in computer science working in the Yale’s Digital Humanities Lab, as well as a researcher in the Cultural Analytics Lab at UC San Diego. He has a PhD in Philosophy and Cognitive Science from UC San Diego. |
|  |  |
| Paul Messier | **PAUL MESSIER**  Director, Lens Media Lab, Yale University  ***Paperbase*** collection, concept, data model  Paul Messier is the founder and Pritzker Director of the Lens Media Lab.  A conservator of photographs, he holds patents for materials characterization and was the 2018 recipient of the Award for Distinction in Scholarship and Conservation from the College Art Association and the American Institute for Conservation. With Martina Droth, he is the co-editor of Bill Brandt | Henry Moore published in 2020. He is the co-founder and co-director of the “View From Here” an introduction to photography via the cellphone for New Haven area high school students. |

**Logo**

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Description automatically generated**

**Video**

The[**Lens Media Lab’s YouTube channel**](https://www.youtube.com/@LensMediaLab/playlists)features presentations from its recent symposium [“Darkroom to Data”](http://www.darkroomtodata.org/) as well as tutorials to [paperbase.xyz](https://paperbase.xyz/).

**Product/service fact sheet**

**THE COLLECTION**

**Our reference collection of gelatin silver photographic papers.**

Throughout the twentieth century, photography was fundamentally a paper-based medium, and photographic papers have played a crucial role in shaping the medium's history and practice. However, little research has been done on how the material, technical, and visual properties of these papers impacted the work of photographers. This lack of scholarly attention stems partly from the difficulty of accessing and analyzing the physical characteristics of historical photographic papers.

To address this gap, the Lens Media Lab at Yale University's Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage has undertaken an extensive project to document and characterize its collection of over 7,200 dated and identified gelatin silver papers manufactured between 1890 and 2010. This is believed to be the largest reference collection of photographic paper samples in the world. From this collection, the lab has constructed a rich and comprehensive dataset that combines traditional catalog information with extensive material analyses. [**This dataset is now public**](https://paperbase.xyz/).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **95,368**  measurement trials | **6,898**  measured samples | **6,456**  package images | **4,266**  products |
| **4,506**  sample book images | **2,391**  packages | **788**  backprints | **388**  brands |
| **231**  sample books | **209**  surface descriptors | **120**  years | **100**  manufacturers |

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Yale's Lens Media Lab Unveils Groundbreaking Tool for Studying Black and White Photography

**Paperbase: Revolutionizing the Study of Photographic Materials**

The Lens Media Lab at Yale University is proud to announce the launch of Paperbase, an innovative online platform designed to transform the study of black and white photography's material history. This cutting-edge tool provides unprecedented access to the world's largest collection of photographic papers, offering researchers, conservators, and photography enthusiasts a unique opportunity to explore the expressive language of black and white prints.

**A New Era in Photographic Research**

Paperbase is an interactive web application that allows users to:

- Explore the key physical and visual attribute of gelatin silver photographic papers

- Analyze both material characteristics and traditional museum metadata

- Access a variety of image assets, including package captures, texture micrographs, and processing instructions

- Compare data from print collections to the reference collection

Paul Messier, Director of the Lens Media Lab, states, "Paperbase represents a significant leap forward in our ability to understand and preserve the rich history of black and white photography. By making our vast collection accessible through this digital platform, we're opening new avenues for research and appreciation of photographic materials."

**Empowering Scholarship**

To introduce this groundbreaking tool to the academic and conservation communities, the Lens Media Lab is excited to announce a series of regional workshops across the United States and Europe. These workshops will:

- Demonstrate Paperbase's unique features and capabilities

- Provide hands-on training for scholars and conservators

- Showcase case studies highlighting the platform's research potential

- Foster collaboration and knowledge-sharing among photography experts

**Workshop Schedule**

1. **Northeast United States:** Yale University, New Haven, CT - November 2024

2. **West Coast:** Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles, CA - January 2025

3. **Midwest:** Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL - March 2025

4. **United Kingdom:** Victoria and Albert Museum, London - May 2025

5. **Continental Europe:** Centre Pompidou, Paris - July 2025

**About the Lens Media Lab**

Founded at Yale in 2015, the Lens Media Lab is dedicated to the material history of photography. Through innovative research methods and cutting-edge technology, the lab aims to preserve and understand the expressive language of black and white photography, making this knowledge accessible to scholars, conservators, and the public.

For more information about Paperbase or to register for upcoming workshops, please visit www.lml.yale.edu or contact:

**Contact**

**Paul Messier, Director**

[paul.messier@yale.edu](mailto:paul.messier@yale.edu)

**Damon Crockett, Senior AI engineer**

[damon.crockett@yale.edu](mailto:damon.crockett@yale.edu)

**Hannah Caputo, Engagement Manager**

Lens Media Lab

Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Yale University