Madeline Heuer: Um, it's noon over here in Chicago. So I'm going to begin. My name is Madeline and for the past year, a little over a year I have been so lucky to be the collections assistant and the assistant to the registrar at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Madeline Heuer: I'm a senior at Columbia College and I am majoring in arts management and cultural studies. And so working at the museum was a really fantastic way to experience art, managing art, and culture in so many different ways. I learned so much. So let's get into this.

Madeline Heuer: See if this works.

Madeline Heuer: So this first image here is a self portrait by Marcia “Red” Adams and she's a multimedia artist from California.

Madeline Heuer: She worked at Sonoma State University, and she's a feminist artist and this portrait was one of my absolute favorites, mainly because the giant taxidermy moth in the center of the image. And I can't think of any other taxidermy work that I saw throughout my time working with the collection.

Madeline Heuer: So it's really beautiful. And it's a really large piece; so the moth is not small at all. And when you look at the frame there's a little bit of aging; a little bit of yellowing, but there is absolutely no aging on the moth, or the print itself. So that was one of my favorites.

Madeline Heuer: This next piece is a really, really interesting piece. It's actually a nine foot scroll. And this was also one of the first things that I looked at when I started working here.

Madeline Heuer: But you may not find it on the museum website because it's actually quite difficult to condition and to take photos of it because it's double sided. And there's a video that I took, which we will play right now.

Madeline Heuer: So as you can see there's a lot going on here. There's a lot of stuff on both sides. There's marker writing, pen writing, glitter. There's pasted on photos. There's an identification card. There's a transparent window, which is my favorite part of it. There's the fruit to represent the womb.

Madeline Heuer: Joanne Leonard is an artist from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and she's a retired, University of Michigan professor

Madeline Heuer: She's a feminist artist and a lot of her work has themes on motherhood and womanhood, and the family and illness and I'm going to play this video again actually just so everyone can see it again.

Madeline Heuer: So we can look at it again and think about those themes

Madeline Heuer: Running in the Family is the title of it.
Madeline Heuer: A lot of everyday objects.

Madeline Heuer: Really beautiful stuff. And so my supervisors this past year, Karen Irvine and Kristin Taylor were actually lucky enough to drive up to Michigan and they were able to meet Joanne. Which is really special. The museum has quite a few of her works. There's a lot of collage work that she's done and it's a lot of these similar themes.

Madeline Heuer: And a lot of her work that we have is much easier to store than this scroll, which is so delicate and you don't want to touch it and accidentally rub something off. Or rather rub a word out of it. And so this piece is pretty challenging. And when you think about how it's going to be viewed in a gallery, that's another challenge. Whether it would be in a clear panel, so you can see both sides, or if it would be hung up.

Madeline Heuer: But you don't want to leave any sort of marks on the piece. These are the sort of challenges that the collection people run into with works like this. But if you have a really, really long table, you should definitely unroll it and appreciate it.

Madeline Heuer: Let's go on to the next one. Well, we'll play it again once.

Madeline Heuer: I love that transparent window.

Madeline Heuer: So this next piece was one of the first images that I conditioned at the museum. And this is Marlborough Country, excuse me, from Joel D. Levinson, who's an American artist and this piece is a color print on CIBA Chrome, which is the type of paper that it's in, but it's not really paper. It's very flimsy, it's really thin you kind of have to hold it like that.

Madeline Heuer: It's very susceptible to fingerprints getting on it.

Madeline Heuer: And because it's color. It also has to go and sort of the mini vault in the big vault that the museum has. So every piece at the museum that is in the vault-It's a temperature controlled room.

Madeline Heuer: And a lot of pieces are either in boxes or their frame. So they're hanging but within the vault, which is where I worked is a smaller miniature vault, which is for color pieces like this one, which are really sensitive to heat and light.

Madeline Heuer: And that was the first thing I learned that week that I began, and this image is a lot of images from magazine articles and advertisements, whereas the other work that I conditioned from Joel Levinson right here is black and white images and those are typically multiple exposures of TV shows, whether that be advertisements on TV or game shows or talk shows, or even just the news. And they are from the Mass Media series which this collection, or this series, is black and white. So it did not have to go into that miniature vault. This one just sticks around in the regular vault.
Madeline Heuer: So this next photo is one of my favorites. And it's a Bruce Davidson photo.

Madeline Heuer: And Bruce Davidson is an American photographer and he was, Well, he didn't; so the museum received a donation of work—all Bruce Davidson's—that was around 400 or so photos and I was so lucky to be tasked, solely tasked, with conditioning all of those photos so I conditioned over 400 Bruce Davidson images like this one.

Madeline Heuer: And that means that I was taking the photo out of whatever plastic sleeve. It was in and I was looking really close at it. I was looking for any sort of scratches, any sort of bends or fingerprints, etc. Just reporting the condition and then writing a one page report about that. So I did that process for over 400 images like this.

Madeline Heuer: And this is one of my favorites because it just felt so timeless to me. Especially as a college student, I felt like I could witness this photo happening anywhere. I could witness it in a bar, in a college party, in the classroom. It just felt so timeless, which I loved. And there's so much art in the background that's detailed that doesn't really catch your eye at first glance, but the longer you look at it, the more it appears.

Madeline Heuer: So this is another Bruce Davidson photo. And this is from 1962 and a lot of Bruce's photos were then ending up as photojournalism and really capturing the history of the time. He did a lot of photos from the civil rights movement from the Freedom Riders to the March on Selma, in Alabama. And he was not in the front. He was on the side. He was just taking photos of everything happening.

Madeline Heuer: And I really love this photo after the previous one, because of the gaze of the subjects. They're both not completely looking at the photographer, but kind of out of the corner of their eye. And we don't know what the relationship between the subjects are, we don't know where they were going in that truck or where they were coming from in that truck, but we are thinking a lot just because of the image.

Madeline Heuer: This is another Bruce Davidson and this is from New York and Coney Island, and I've never been to Coney Island, but I've seen a lot of photos of it.

Madeline Heuer: And I've seen that it's very colorful and that there's a lot of rides and this is not that Coney Island. This is from 1966 and you can see the mid century inspiration in the clothing of the women in the photo, the hairstyle and even the signage of Mrs Mary’s Handwriting Analysis & Card Reading, even the signs on the wall that you can't really read and the curtains on the wall. And we can see that it's clearly New York City in the background with the subway and the brick buildings behind, but this is such a special part of New York that he was able to capture.

Madeline Heuer: Just like that, another photo of beautiful New York. And this is from Harlem and from the 100th Street series.
Madeline Heuer: Davidson did a lot of photographs in New York and there's several series like the 100th Street series, which is, um, a lot of photos in Harlem in the 1960s and there's the Brooklyn Gang series in the 1950s.

Madeline Heuer: He did so many series that we received this past year from the 50s, 60s to the 90s, 1990s and a Central Park series in 1990. So not only was he able to capture so many people as moments in time, but he was really able to capture a city and how a city changes throughout time.

Madeline Heuer: And just like that, here's another one from 1992 in New York and I love this one because I wish I was there, I wish that I could go to the park and see a group of women, I think doing Tai Chi?

Madeline Heuer: And there are several photos from this moment, and they are all in different angles or different poses.

Madeline Heuer: And it's one of my favorites because many of Davidson's photos, cause you to think about larger issues like poverty, racism, and this one, we don't really know anything about the background of these women, but we can just see that they're living in the present in the moment. And what they're doing is for exercise.

Madeline Heuer: So this is another Davidson photo and I'm unsure of the location of this photo. However, I know that it was from the series Circus.

Madeline Heuer: And this series is vastly different from our circuses today. There's a lot of photos of the person on the left, the little person, who we can see is being treated as an animal as something to be gawked at or a person in a freak show which, as we know, didn't end up until the mid 1900s. And so Davidson was also able to capture a lot of really horrific parts of American history throughout his photography and there are there's so much to look at in this photograph from the way that the children are looking down on him to the way that the Father is looking down on him and the upper left.

Madeline Heuer: And to take a break from Bruce Davidson. I'm going to go into this photo. Another photojournalistic image from Donna Ferrato who is an American photo journalist and activist and this photo is Roe v. Wade, Washington DC in 1989, and the woman to the left is actually the real Jane Roe, AKA, Norma McCorvey who participated in the court case Roe v. Wade next to a cardboard cutout of President George Bush Senior. And the reason I chose this photo was when I saw it for the first time, I immediately recognized the button that this woman was wearing because I have the same one.

Madeline Heuer: This is the March for Women's Equality and Women's Lives in Washington DC in 1989 and my grandmother was at the same march and she had the same pin.

Madeline Heuer: So when I saw this photo. I was so taken aback, uh, but it was also really, really special for me to see that.
Madeline Heuer: And to see that Donna Ferrato saw someone else wearing this and that someone else happened to be a real champion in women's rights in America in this country and for so many people across the world really. And Donna Ferrato, she's a real feminist photographer who has documented a lot of domestic violence, actually, which is not a light subject at all and extremely hard and heavy to witness and to photograph other people dealing with that situation.

Madeline Heuer: But because of her work, through that she has gone on to raise a lot of awareness and she's been on national TV. She's been in so many museums, specifically with the domestic violence work.

Madeline Heuer: But this photo Roe v. Wade was chosen for the pin.

Madeline Heuer: And this next photo is from Ai Weiwei, who is a Chinese artist and the museum actually had a solo exhibition of his a few years ago.

Madeline Heuer: But this photo was acquired a couple years after and it's- we can see the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, which, as Americans, we typically do not ever see the Eiffel Tower with this sort of negativity. But Ai Weiwei has this serious study of perspective, in which he is just giving the middle finger to prominent Western places that represent so much of colonialism, Western expansionism. He's seen doing this in front of the White House in America as well as the Parliament building London, UK.

Madeline Heuer: And I just really love this photo for not only that, but also for the colors and that we can see that there's a person behind it, but we don't know anything about the person unless you know the artist but that's what I love.

Madeline Heuer: So this next photo is a photo from Rondal Partridge, who is an American photographer, who's well known for being the assistant to Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange, as well as the son of American photographer Imogen Cunningham, who is a fantastic photographer. All those are very famous fantastic photographers that I just mentioned, but the special part about this photo is that the child Meg, the baby.

Madeline Heuer: I actually met her this past year, and so did the registrar and my supervisor. She came to visit us at the museum and was in the vault.

Madeline Heuer: And Meg Partridge is now living in Seattle. She is an artist herself. She's actually won an Academy Award for doing a short film about her grandmother, Imogen Cunningham. And so the interesting thing about this photo was that before she came in we had it attributed to someone else.

Madeline Heuer: And then she came in and she was able to tell us "Actually, my father took that photo" and that was her in the photo so obviously she's not a baby anymore. But that was a really, really cool experience to witness.
Madeline Heuer: So this next one is another Dorothea Lange photo and Dorothea Lange, who we just mentioned was the godmother of that baby Meg and the boss for Rondal Partridge.

Madeline Heuer: And so Dorothea Lange is really well known for her works from the Farm Security Administration which was a government program.

Madeline Heuer: Put into place in the Great Depression era to provide jobs for photographers to document the country and document what was really happening.

Madeline Heuer: And she was able to humanize a lot of parts of America that either weren't being treated fairly, or we're just not being talked about at all in the news.

Madeline Heuer: And this image here is a photo of a beautiful young woman of Japanese ancestry, who is unfortunately having to register for evacuation and housing in the War Relocation Authority centers. And so as we know in America in the 40s. Everybody of Japanese ancestry had to go to internment camps in the western United States and Dorothea Lange was able to capture some people who either from the beginning, from before being in the camps or during or after

Madeline Heuer: And this photo, it really shows the glamour and the beauty of the 1940s and the way that everyone is dressed and to know that that's about to be stripped away from them and they're about to go into a dehumanizing process, it is really horrific. But she was able to capture this moment.

Madeline Heuer: And this is another Dorothea Lange photo. She's very well known for the portrait Migrant Mother, who is the mother on the right there.

Madeline Heuer: And this photo is the migrant mother's family; seven hungry children, mother, age 32, the father is a native Californian, destitute in a pea pickers camp, because of the failure of the early pea crop these people had just sold their tent in order to buy food.

Madeline Heuer: Most of the 2,500 people in this camp were destitute. In Nipomo, California in 1936

Madeline Heuer: So she took this photo, as well as the very famous portrait of Migrant Mother, but there's also some variations to that, where we can see the photos of the mother, but with a couple of more kids, similar to the really famous portrait. And so this photo was not acquired on the collection recently, but I was able to condition it because of a very large Dorothea Lange show that was happening in Australia at the Australian National Maritime Museum, but it was a show all about World War Two.

Madeline Heuer: And a lot of the work that was already in our museums collection was chosen to go on alone to this museum in Australia. So my boss was able to visit Australia in October, but before she went I helped
her condition these photographs, just to make sure that they were in the same condition that we believed they were to be in. And so that we would have a record of that before they were shipped off to go to the museum.

Madeline Heuer: So this is not a Dorothea Lange, this is a Kurt Weston photo. And I love this photo White Wedding. It's from 1983 and Kurt Weston is an American photographer.

Madeline Heuer: He is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and has taken a lot of photos of that community like this one here.

Madeline Heuer: And a lot of the photos that we have from Kurt Weston are that and Kurt Weston is actually an AIDS survivor himself. He's still alive and he has actually been legally blind since the mid 1990s as a side effect of an AIDS medication that he was on. So his work is really incredible especially today with his different experiences of disability and vision and we can see a lot of the photos that he took that there's a real difference in the subjects' emotions and expressions from the early 80s versus the late 80s, especially some photos of his from 1988 which came after the emergence of the group Act Up, which was an AIDS activism group. And so with this photo.

Madeline Heuer: I just sense a real sense of hope and I love that our bride is not a traditional bride. Who knows, maybe this is a drag queen, maybe this is just a person in their daily makeup, we don't know. But there's a real sense of love behind this photo with the veil and knowing that there was a community behind this.

Madeline Heuer: And so this photo is not a portrait, I decided to throw in a couple landscapes here at the end. My favorite photos tend to be portraits.

Madeline Heuer: This is a photo by Lucas Foglia who is an American photographer and this is New Crop Varieties for Extreme Weather, Geneva Greenhouses, New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, New York. So this is a greenhouse on Cornell University's campus, which is a research center and it's just for new plants and dealing with maybe temperature changes that we will be anticipating.

Madeline Heuer: And Lucas Foglia says of his own work that it's an intersection of human belief and the natural world.

Madeline Heuer: And I really love a lot of Lucas Foglia’s work because there's such bright colors and they're really, really large framed photos. They're definitely larger than this.

Madeline Heuer: And when you're looking at it you're just drawn into those really vibrant bold colors. And I love this one because we can see the snow on the ground and the gray skies but then we see this almost burning fiery looking plant life going on in the center. And I, it just makes me want to open the door and see what's inside. So that's, that's what I have to say about that.
Madeline Heuer: And then this is the last image that I'll be talking about and I decided to include this one after the Lucas Foglia because it was a landscape photo that reminded me of the same sort of shape and composition.

Madeline Heuer: And I also wanted to choose this one as the last one because I wanted to say that not every piece in the museum is a musing or analysis of the god awful systems in the world that are, like poverty, but sometimes photographs can just be fun or cute or just make you smile or think about something else. And that's what this photo does to me.

Madeline Heuer: And this is a photo that is such a beautiful landscape, but then it's such a beautiful image of the cat and the center which is so kind of silly compared to so many other serious themes that we've seen. But I love this one.

Madeline Heuer: And that is my last photo but I can take any questions in the Q & A portion or the chat portion, whichever.

Madeline Heuer: But before I go into any questions, this Friday, there will not be any programming for the museum because this week is Manifest. And if you're unaware of what Manifest is. It is a year end celebration for all of the graduating seniors and it's a collection of our work and awards and photos documenting the last four years. The last year. And so I would highly recommend going to colum.edu/manifest, I believe, but if it's not there. Just Columbia.edu and there will be a place to click on Manifest.

Madeline Heuer: So tonight, there is more programming and at 6pm the Curator of Photography at MoMA, Sarah Meister, will be coming in. And if you haven't registered for that but you're interested, I would highly highly recommend signing up for that now. I believe there's already around 2,000 people signed up to be a part of that. So definitely don't want to miss that.

Madeline Heuer: And then on May 20 the Photos at Zoom like at noon, like I'm doing right now, will be in the vault that I was referring to with the director of the museum Natasha Egan. So I would really highly recommend tuning into that one. If you have never been to the vault on campus. It is so special and it is just such an intense collection of beautiful art in one tiny room.

Madeline Heuer: So if you've never seen what the vault looks like or you're interested at all. I would highly highly recommend checking that out. And then on the 22nd Behind the Lens on Friday with Vera Lutter herself.

Madeline Heuer: So let's see if there's any Q&A...

Madeline Heuer: Okay, “what advice would you give to someone interested

Madeline Heuer: In curating but has minimal photography experience?” This is an interesting question. I am- I don't consider myself a curator, but I do feel lucky to have curated some images of photos that I loved for
this and I also felt that I had minimal photography experience at the beginning of my job at the museum. And to that I would just say that you learn so much every single day by being surrounded by other people who like photography, by being surrounded by photographers. And I would say to talk to as many people as you can to try and learn as much as you can. And to try and notice trends of what you love yourself. That's what I would say if you're interested in curating.

Madeline Heuer: Let’s see...

Madeline Heuer: I believe that that is the only question. Let's see.

Madeline Heuer: If there's any more questions or comments, I would love to hear any feedback or any questions at all about my experience any of the photos that I got to condition.

Madeline Heuer: But if there aren't any. I just want to say thank you. Oh, "what is a, what is your day like in your job at the MoCP?" my day in the job with MoCP was I would get to work and I would have a stack of photos or printed photos that my boss printed out for me to condition that day. And so typically, I would go into the vault and I'd be by myself; conditioning photos and or if there was a new acquisition and the work needed to be numbered, that would be a part of it.

Madeline Heuer: Or if there was any database entry work that needed to be done. I would do that.

Madeline Heuer: “Loved the cat image, are there any more by that artist?” there is, I know at least one more by that artist, Chiari Endo, who's a Japanese artist, but is now in California.

Madeline Heuer: And there is a photo of a globe and it's Cat with Globe, which is, I know, available on the MCP website. If you're interested in seeing any more images from that artist.

Madeline Heuer: Hillary's question “what is conditioning?” and Olivia's question “what is conditioning?” Yeah. So, conditioning was definitely the task that I did the most out of my time with MoCP and so let's say there is a print like that one. And so we would take that one out. And I would have gloves on and I would look at the frame of it, and I would see if there's any sort of etchings on the frame any marks on the frame and then I would look really, really close and see as much detail as you can on the print itself and see if there's any sort of markings; If there's any sort of fingerprints, any yellow spots. And then you would draw on a printed out image of the print of the photo any of those mistakes, any of those yellowings.

Madeline Heuer: That's what conditioning is, so thank you so much.

Madeline Heuer: And one more question, “does working with photography inspire you to want to make photo work of your own?” It definitely does. And I think that photography can be an intimidating field because there's so many specific people who are good at doing certain things like alternative processes or still lifes. And so I think that when you get to
see the huge variety of photos that there are it definitely is inspiring and it makes you want to do as much photography as you can.

Madeline Heuer: Okay.

Madeline Heuer: Another image or another question. “What types of images, besides nine foot long scrolls, are difficult to preserve? Is age the major difficulty or other delicate printing processes?” That's a really good question.

Madeline Heuer: There are definitely images that are difficult to preserve and age is a factor, but it's also a big factor is what the photos are printed on.

Madeline Heuer: And in the collection. There's some really interesting pieces, actually, that are like photographs printed on leaves. So something like that would be even if it's in a framed box. If it's under glass that is still pretty difficult to preserve because of just the delicate nature of leaves, and I mean sort of natural fibers like that.

Madeline Heuer: And another question. “Why were the Bruce Davidson photos untitled?” I'm unsure why they were untitled they did come in a very large donation and they were all attributed by series and year but they did not have titles, some of them had titles, but many of them did not.

Madeline Heuer: The purpose of conditioning is to make sure that if a photo is going to be on display a year prior or if it's going to be moved on a loan to a different Museum two years from now, we would take a conditioning report to make sure that there's no inconsistencies with the traveling life of the piece and the actual condition of the piece. So it's really just a record to make sure that no sort of mistake like a drop or a real crack has happened.

Madeline Heuer: “Because of your experience, do you notice things now that you didn't before?”

Madeline Heuer: Yes. I absolutely do. I have a real appreciation for photography, much more now and I love to think about the details and the staging of photos. Now, which and composition, which I don't think I thought of as in depth. Before beginning this job.

Madeline Heuer: Thank you for all your questions and thank you all for coming. I really, really appreciate it. This and this was so much fun for me. Um, There's one more question.

Madeline Heuer: “Does conditioning exist in all forms of art mediums?” I have not worked with all forms of art mediums, so I can't give a definite answer, but I'm going to assume, yes.

Madeline Heuer: Or at least if it's in a museum or an institution where the condition of that does matter, especially if it's traveling, I would say yes.
Madeline Heuer: So that's all the questions. Oh, someone said yes all objects and museums are conditioned. So thank you so much for that information.

Madeline Heuer: And with that, thank you everybody.