Scientific Rediscovery of Hercule Florence Arrives at the Epicenter of the Photography Bicentennial in France



Photo: Érika Beraldo

Analyses confirming the inventor's pioneering use of gold and silver will be presented by the Getty Conservation Institute at the prestigious "Le temps des épreuves" conference in Paris.

SÃO PAULO, OCTOBER 29, 2026 — The scientific discoveries repositioning Hercule Florence (1804-1879) as one of the world's great pioneers of photography are crossing yet another border. Following a successful presentation at the ICOM-CC (International Council of Museums – Committee for Conservation) in Oslo in September 2026, the project now heads to Paris. From November 9 to 11, researcher Art Kaplan of the Getty Conservation Institute will present the analyses of the inventor's images at the conference "Le temps des épreuves. 50 ans de préservation des photographies" ("The Time of Trials. 50 Years of Photographic Preservation").

View the full conference program

Held at the French National Museum of Natural History, the event is organized by the Conservation Research Center (CRC/CNRS) and is part of the official celebrations of the Photography Bicentennial, promoted by the French Ministry of Culture. The conference takes place precisely in the year France marks the 200th anniversary of the first image fixed by Nicéphore Niépce, gathering the global elite of photographic conservation. The momentum of the Bicentennial is reverberating across various fronts in the country: alongside in-person events, academic publications are also celebrating the milestone. This includes the French journal *Photographica*, which dedicated a special edition to the 200th anniversary of the invention, featuring an article by historian Maria Inez Turazzi on Florence's contribution.

Learn more about the Photographica publication



Hercule Florence, painting by Oscar Pereira da Silva | Museu Paulista Da USP

REDISCOVERING A PIONEER

HERCULE FLORENCE was an artist and inventor who, in 1833, in the interior of São Paulo, independently developed a process for capturing images through the action of light. He was the first to employ the term "photographie" to describe the process — six years before Daguerre's announcement in Paris — yet his work remained on the margins of official photographic history for decades.

The historical recovery of his legacy gained momentum in the 1970s through the fundamental work of historian, photographer, and professor Boris Kossoy. In his book *"Hercule Florence: The Isolated Discovery of Photography in Brazil"* (1977), Kossoy was the first to systematize and bring to the academic sphere the full scope of the inventor's discoveries. Now, nearly five decades later, the scientific analyses conducted by the Getty and the University of Évora provide the definitive material proof that historiography had been waiting for.

The invitation to include Florence's work in the Paris program came from Bertrand Lavédrine, one of the world's leading authorities in photographic conservation and a member of the French Ministry of Culture's commission for the Bicentennial.

THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE

The analyses led by **Art Kaplan** at the **HERCULES Laboratory of the University of Évora**, in partnership with the **Instituto Hercule Florence** (IHF) and the **Instituto Moreira Salles** (IMS), brought unprecedented material evidence regarding Florence's 1833 experiments.



Photo: Jorge Simão

Using non-destructive techniques such as X-ray fluorescence and electron microscopy, scientists analyzed three historical objects: two pharmacy labels and a Masonic diploma. The results confirmed the use of gold and silver salts as image-forming metals, and demonstrated the effectiveness of ammonia as a fixing agent through laboratory reconstructions. These specimens were the first photographic artifacts in the Americas and, possibly, the oldest in the world still visible to the naked eye.

Learn more about the scientific analyses

FROM OSLO TO THE WORLD

Unlike Oslo, where the presentation was oral and formal, the format in Paris will be a Poster Session. The research will be displayed on a high-resolution panel, and during breaks, the scientist will stand by the poster to engage in direct dialogue with attendees. This format allows for close contact and in-depth discussions with the world's leading experts, fostering strategic connections for the future of the project.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTO HERCULE FLORENCE

The **INSTITUTO HERCULE FLORENCE** (IHF) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation, research, and dissemination of the legacy of Hercule Florence (1804–1879) — artist, inventor, and one of the pioneers of photography. The IHF maintains the inventor's archive and promotes various initiatives around his work, including exhibitions, publications, and educational projects.

PRESS INFORMATION

Marcele Rocha | +55 11 99417-0169 | marcele.rocha@ihf19.org.br
Cecília do Val | +55 11 99932-2699 | cecilia.val@ihf19.org.br
www.ihf19.org.br

Photo: Jorge Simão

