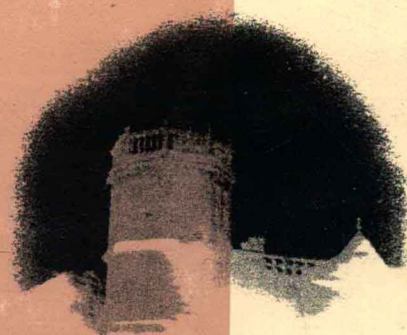


PHOTOGRAPHY

Discovery and Invention



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Papers Delivered
at a Symposium Celebrating
the Invention of Photography
Organized by the Department
of Photographs and Held
at the J. Paul Getty Museum

January 30, 1989

The J. Paul Getty Museum
Malibu, California
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Foreword

This book celebrates the discovery of photography, which was announced just a century and a half ago. How brief a time this seems!—briefer still when we realize that it is our great-grandparents' contemporaries who look out at us from the photographs of Fox Talbot and Daguerre. In 1839 not even the greatest visionary could have predicted how quickly photography would evolve from a novelty into the commonest form of picture-making. No one could have known that it eventually would dominate visual culture throughout the world.

These eight essays also celebrate five years of collecting and exhibiting photographs at the Getty Museum. Having built a collection of some sixty-five thousand photographs since 1984, we have developed an exhibition program and begun to promote scholarship in the history of photography. Through shows and related publications, through catalogues and books, and through meetings of specialists like the one that resulted in this collection of papers, we hope to make a lively contribution to this burgeoning field.

I am grateful to all eight authors and also to Weston Naef, who conceived the symposium on the discovery and invention of photography as part of a year-long observation in Los Angeles of the sesquicentennial. His restless creativity lies behind everything the Getty Museum does in the field of photography, and for this we owe him a special debt of thanks.

John Walsh
Director

Acknowledgments

For their essential contributions to the realization of this book and the symposium it commemorates, I wish first to thank the authors for presenting their scholarship with verve and imagination. The symposium and this publication would not have been possible without the counsel and aid of numerous colleagues at the J. Paul Getty Museum: Deborah Gribbon, Associate Director for Curatorial Affairs; Barbara Anderson, Collections Projects Coordinator; Charles Passela, Head of Photographic Services; Ellen Rosenberg, Photographer; Minnie Batch, Staff and Facilities Coordinator; Stepheny Dirden, Audio/Video Coordinator; Cathy Klose, Special Events Coordinator; and, in the Department of Photographs, Judith Keller, Peggy Hanssen, Jean Smeader, Gordon Baldwin, Joan Dooley, and Louise Stover. I also would like to thank Christopher Hudson, Head of Publications; and to acknowledge the work of Andrea P. A. Belloli, Consulting Editor, who has skillfully preserved in print the liveliness of the spoken word; and of Sheila de Bretteville, whose concept for the arrangement of the text and illustrations maintains the diversity and momentum of the original slide lectures.

Weston Naef
Curator of Photographs

Introduction

For a number of reasons 1989 proved to be the right time for an international symposium concerning the discovery and invention of photography. It was the 150th anniversary of the first public display of a photograph by William Henry Fox Talbot – in late January 1839 – and his simultaneous announcement of details of his process. It was also the 150th anniversary of the first public display of daguerreotypes by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre – in August of the same year. Not since the mid-fifteenth-century explosion of engraving had a new visual medium become public that so radically transformed visual communication and creative expression. “The miracle happens instantaneously, quick as thought, rapid as the ray of the sun,” wrote Jules Janin when he first saw a daguerreotype, in a sentence that describes some of the reasons why people have been transfixed by photography ever since.¹

Photography, not surprisingly, stands apart from the other visual arts for a number of reasons. Painting, sculpture, and architecture do not have birthdays, nor can we estimate by better than perhaps a millennium when the first picture was drawn by a human being. The anniversary of photography, however, has been celebrated for over a century. Very early in its history, the medium assumed an anthropomorphic aspect, perhaps as a result of its being more closely connected with nature than the other arts are. Photography has continued to evolve and grow more like a living force than a mechanical construct. It is, however, in cadence with the other arts in one important respect. The advance in our understanding of it has been guided by a few scholars whose theoretical or practical contributions have been outstanding. Essays by a number of those individuals are collected in this volume.

It has been less than twenty years since the first doctoral degree in the history of photography was awarded, an event that heralded a new generation of scholars and critics. During the past decade undergraduate and graduate programs have encouraged the serious study of photographs as works of art and as cultural artifacts. New methods and a vocabulary and syntax tailored to the subject have emerged alongside traditional ones. Although the analytic methods

created for the history of art have proven useful and resilient, they gradually have been complemented by other approaches. Scholars and critics have turned to science, linguistics, poetry, music, and literature in their quest for new analytic models. The papers published here reflect different approaches to the study of photographs and bring to their subjects intimate knowledge of particular photographers or bodies of work. The unifying thread is a commitment to studying original photographs; each author starts with an object or group of objects around which a story is allowed to unfold. Both these historians and the pioneer photographers seem to have modeled themselves as servants of light.

The earliest thinkers about photography considered its arrival as the fulfillment of a dream. In 1889 John Werge, one of the medium's earliest historians, defined this notion very eloquently: "For centuries a dreamy idea occupied the minds of romance-writers and alchemists that Nature possessed the power of delineating her features far more faithfully than the hand of man could depict them and all sorts of impossible and impracticable processes were imagined and described by the ancient novelists." Werge published these words in the earliest history of photography to be rigorously chronological.² In this study he was the first to lay out the mystery that would not be known in all of its details until almost eighty years later, when Beaumont Newhall tied the threads together in his book *Latent Image*.

The pattern of celebrating the anniversary of the invention of photography was established in 1889, which was designated a jubilee year. Since the medium had at least two birthplaces and two – or more – sets of parents, celebrating its birth presented a dilemma in 1889, as it did in 1939, the centennial year, and in 1989. When it came time to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary, the British and Americans honored Talbot, while the French and Germans paid homage to Daguerre. One of the principal results of this jubilee was to make people aware that photography had a history with a diverse pantheon of heroes and that during the course of this history some rare and beautiful pictures had been created that deserved to be studied as objects and preserved for the edification of future generations. Our objective in 1989 was to continue the process of increased understanding that unfolds over time and to underscore the fact that photography has no single inventor or place of origin. As is typical in the history of science, it was the product of multiple interlocked discoveries.

On January 31, 1889, members of the Glasgow Photographic Association in Scotland met to hear a lecture by Mr. W. Lane, Jr., entitled "Fifty Years of Photography."³ Lane projected copies

made from *The Pencil of Nature* in the recently perfected lantern slide format. Several of the same images are discussed in Larry Schaaf's essay in this volume.

In New York on the same evening, the Society of Amateur Photographers convened in their rooms at 122 West 36th Street to hear a lecture by Professor L. H. Laudy of Columbia University. They also examined photographs from the collection he had formed for the university's department of geology, a collection believed to be the first institutional gathering of photographs in America. Laudy's lecture, printed in *Photographic News*, is prefaced by the following elegant statement:

We are assembled here to-night to celebrate the fiftieth year of one of these many inventions, the greatest of all discoveries – photography – and to pay homage to the illustrious names of Néipce [sic], Daguerre, and Talbot, not forgetting our own countryman, Dr. Draper. The name of each is associated with that which he accomplished – names that will forever shine forth as fixed planets in the shrine of invention [emphasis added]. They will be everlasting on the tablets of memory, monuments in themselves, the best that can be erected to everlasting fame, and will never cease to be heralded to all the world.⁴

Professor Laudy brought with him for display a copy of *The Pencil of Nature* and some framed Talbotypes. Present on that evening was the distinguished photographer Abraham Bogardus, who brought with him for display an even rarer artifact: a daguerreotype portrait of Daguerre himself, one of six made by Charles Meade in Paris in 1846.⁵ "The meeting will be long remembered as one of particular historic interest, since so much was said and shown regarding the birth of photography," wrote a member of the audience in a subsequent report.⁶ An important change in attitude had begun to occur, in which photography was considered as a history of objects that invited study and not just as an accumulation of patent office records or personal memoirs.

The most tangible results of the jubilee celebration were the publication of John Werge's *Evolution of Photography*⁷ and a great exhibition held in Berlin, where a substantial number of rare and important photographs were gathered and displayed for the first time. Alfred Stieglitz attended because his own work was displayed – possibly for the first time – in a section devoted to contemporary photographs. He purchased a catalogue in which he marked the displays that particularly interested him.⁸ The Berlin exhibition was directed by Dr. Wilhelm Zenker in collaboration with Stieglitz's mentor, Dr. Hermann W. Vogel, Germany's most accomplished research scientist and scholar of photography and one of

the authorities cited by Lane in his Glasgow lecture. The exhibition was devoted largely to scientific photography, since it was this branch that Germans had done most to advance. Zenker managed, however, to gather many incunabula of photography which had never been seen in one place and which Stieglitz – and many others – carefully studied.

Exhibition item one in Berlin was Daguerre's own daguerreotype of the Palais Royal which shows a tiny figure of whose existence we are reminded by Beaumont Newhall in this volume. Newhall points out that this image – a man having his shoes shined – is the earliest human figure to survive in a photograph. Talbot was represented in exhibition item two, which included a group of Talbotypes, yet another copy of *The Pencil of Nature*, and modern reproductions of Talbotypes made in the laboratories of the Technische Hochschule, where Stieglitz was a student.

The great strength of the Berlin exhibition was the display of objects pertaining to the “modern” aspect of photography. From the viewpoint of Zenker and Vogel, Lewis Morris Rutherford's plate that first captured the violet and ultraviolet ranges of the spectrum was as important to the history of photography as Talbot's and Daguerre's contributions. Looking back to the early years of the nineteenth century from the perspective of 1889, we see that the discoveries of the preceding five decades constituted a single continuous thread of evolution, as John Szarkowski suggests in his essay in this collection.

The public exposure of his own work and the opportunity to see the first comprehensive gathering of rare and unusual photographs in 1889 launched Alfred Stieglitz on his career. He learned the unique role that exhibitions have played in focusing attention on the photograph as an object for display, and his own natural collecting instincts,⁹ which materialized a decade later, may have been reinforced by the experience. The lesson to be learned is that anniversaries are not just hollow ceremonies but rather opportunities to record and digest the experience of history. How privileged we were to be witnesses, indeed participants, in the 150th anniversary of photography. Let us hope that the celebratory research, exhibitions, and publications inspired individuals who will influence the course of future events in photography just as Alfred Stieglitz was inspired to do a century ago.

W.N.

Notes

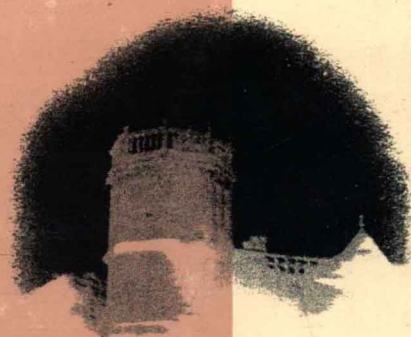
- 1 Erich Stenger, *The History of Photography: Its Relation to Civilization and Practice*, trans. Edward Epstein (Easton, Pennsylvania, 1939), p. 181.
- 2 J[ohn] Werge, *Photography: Its Origin, Progress, and Practice. A Lecture Delivered before the Lewisham and Blackheath Scientific Association* [March 2, 1880] (London, [1880]), p. 3.
- 3 W. Lane, Jr., "Fifty Years of Photography," *Photographic Times and American Photographer* 19 (March 8, 1889), p. 121.
- 4 L. H. Laudy, "The Discovery of the Daguerreotype Process," *Photographic Times and American Photographer* 19 (March 8, 1889), p. 131.
- 5 *The J. Paul Getty Museum: Handbook of the Collections* (Malibu, 1988), p. 194. The Meade daguerreotype now in the Getty's collection (84.XT.953), once owned by a man who worked for Bogardus, may be this very image.
- 6 "Report of the Committee on Papers and Publication of the Society of Amateur Photographers of New York," *Photographic Times and American Photographer* 19 (March 8, 1889), p. 84.
- 7 John Werge, *The Evolution of Photography. With a Chronological Record of Discoveries, Inventions, Etc., Contributions to Photographic Literature, and Personal Reminiscences Extending over Forty Years* (London, 1890).
- 8 Wilhelm Zenker and Hermann W. Vogel, *Catalog der photographischen Jubiläums Ausstellung*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Königl. Kriegs-Akademie, 1890). Alfred Stieglitz's copy is in the Watson Library, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- 9 Weston J. Naef, *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz: Fifty Pioneers of Modern Photography*, exh. cat. (New York, 1978).

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