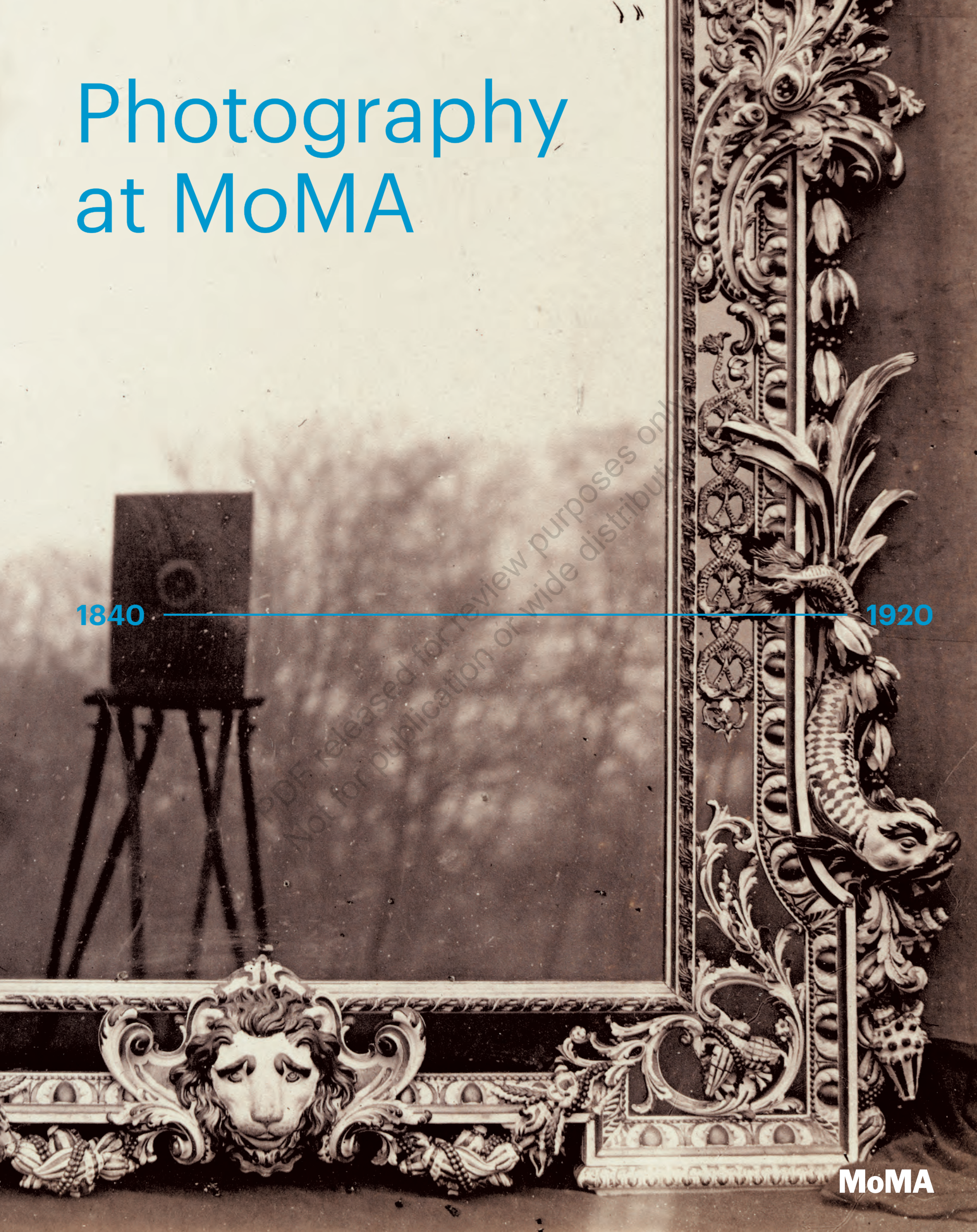


# Photography at MoMA

1840

1920



MoMA



# Photography at MoMA

Edited by

Quentin Bajac  
Lucy Gallun  
Roxana Marcoci  
Sarah Hermanson Meister

1840

1920

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Glenn D. Lowry

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Robert Adamson Anna Atkins Julia Margaret Cameron Lewis Carroll Charles Clifford Alfred Capel Cure Francis Edmond Currey Hugh Welch Diamond Roger Fenton Clementina, Lady Hawarden David Octavius Hill Fallon Horne Robert Howlett Calvert Richard Jones James Mudd William Henry Fox Talbot Charles Thurston Thompson Benjamin Brecknell Turner Unknown photographer	Olympe Aguado de las Marismas François Aubert Charles Aubry Édouard-Denis Baldus Auguste Belloc Bisson Frères Bruno Braquehais Adolphe Braun Étienne Carjat Eugène Cuvelier André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri Guillaume-Benjamin-Armand Duchenne de Boulogne Herman Heid Alphonse Le Blondel Gustave Le Gray Henri Le Secq Charles Marville Nadar Charles Nègre Henri-Victor Regnault Louis-Rémy Robert Louis Rousseau Adolphe Terris Adrien Tournachon Unknown photographers Auguste Vacquerie Julien Vallou de Villeneuve	James Anderson Felice Beato Paul-Marcellin Berthier Bisson Frères Samuel Bourne George P. Critcherson Louis De Clercq Maxime Du Camp John L. Dunmore Roger Fenton Francis Frith Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey John B. Greene Gustave Le Gray Robert Macpherson Auguste Mestral John Murray Charles Nègre William Henry Pigou Carlo Ponti James Robertson Auguste Salzmänn John Shaw Smith Giorgio Sommer William James Stillman Félix Teynard Linnaeus Tripe Underwood and Underwood Unknown photographers	George N. Barnard Charles M. Bell William H. Bell Henry Hamilton Bennett James Wallace Black Brady & Company Solomon D. Butcher William England Alexander Gardner Alfred A. Hart Frank Jay Haynes William Henry Jackson Darius Kinsey Eadweard J. Muybridge Timothy H. O'Sullivan William H. Rau John Reekie Andrew Joseph Russell Underwood and Underwood Unknown photographers Carleton E. Watkins	Charles Dudley Arnold Jessie Tarbox Beals Arthur P. Bedou Ernest J. Bellocq Henry Hamilton Bennett Wilson A. Bentley Brown Brothers Charles H. Currier Lewis W. Hine Clifton Johnson Frances Benjamin Johnston Edwin Hale Lincoln William H. Martin Eadweard J. Muybridge Pach Brothers Jacob August Riis John Runk Charles Schenk William J. Shew Charles Norman Sladen H. William Tupper Underwood and Underwood Unknown photographers Carleton E. Watkins John Adams Whipple Joseph Janvier Woodward Willard Worden Yerkes Observatory	Thomas Annan Ottomar Anschütz Eugène Atget Alphonse Bertillon Hippolyte Blancard Committee on Public Information Georges Demenÿ Louis-Émile Durandelle Gebrüder Haeckel Heinrich Harmsen Edward Hoole Enrico Imoda Eduard Jacobi Jules Janssen Charles Harry Jones Georg Koppmann <i>London Daily Mirror</i> Étienne-Jules Marey Paul Martin Charles Marville Emil Mayer James Nasmyth Herbert G. Ponting Prefecture of Police, Paris Press Illustrating Company Henry Ruschin Otto Schmidt Paul Thompson John Thomson Underwood and Underwood Unknown photographers Léon Vidal Hugo van Warden	Zaida Ben-YúsuF Alvin Langdon Coburn Edward Curtis Hilaire-Germain-Edgar Degas Robert Demachy Eugène Druet Peter Henry Emerson Frederick H. Evans Arnold Genthe Frank Hurley Gertrude Käsebier Heinrich Kühn Jacques-Henri Lartigue Léonard Misonne George H. Seeley Edward Steichen Alfred Stieglitz Félix Thiollier Adam Clark Vroman Eva Watson-Schütze Clarence H. White	Paul L. Anderson Karl Blossfeldt Anton Giulio Bragaglia Arturo Bragaglia Anne W. Brigman Gertrude LeRoy Brown Clarence Sinclair Bull Alvin Langdon Coburn Arthur Wesley Dow Marcel Duchamp Hugo Erfurth Laura Gilpin Bernard Shea Horne Walter R. Latimer, Sr. August Sander George H. Seeley Charles Sheeler Edward Steichen Alfred Stieglitz Paul Strand Karl Struss Margaret Watkins Orrin Wightman Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz

# *The Pencil of Nature:* Great Britain

1840

1870

Robert Adamson  
Anna Atkins  
Julia Margaret Cameron  
Lewis Carroll  
Charles Clifford  
Alfred Capel Cure  
Francis Edmond Currey  
Hugh Welch Diamond  
Roger Fenton  
Clementina, Lady Hawarden  
David Octavius Hill  
Fallon Horne  
Robert Howlett  
Calvert Richard Jones  
James Mudd  
William Henry Fox Talbot  
Charles Thurston Thompson  
Benjamin Brecknell Turner  
Unknown photographer

Entirely Modern:  
Early British Photography

Geoffrey Batchen

Emerging within a confluence of industrial capitalism and Romantic sensibilities, photography began as the very archetype of modernity, automatically generating chemically induced pictures that articulated new configurations of time, space, and subjectivity. These examples from photography’s first thirty years were all made in Britain using paper as a substrate (excluding, therefore, the millions of copper daguerreotypes made during this same period).<sup>1</sup> Making no attempt to be comprehensive, this selection instead offers an instructive cross section of images by a variety of practitioners. Together, they reveal the extraordinary diversity of themes, motivations, and aesthetic choices adopted by nineteenth-century photographers—and with them, the complex nature of modernity itself.

This diversity is evident even in the work of a single photographer. The renowned William Henry Fox Talbot invented both photogenic drawing and the later calotype process, thus providing the technical platform from which was derived all subsequent paper-based photography. The pictures presented here were produced in the mid-1840s, when Talbot was anxious to promote his inventions in the face of competition from the daguerreotype, introduced in France in 1839 by its namesake, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre. With that goal in mind, in early 1844 Talbot financed the establishment of a printing business in Reading, operated by his former valet, the Dutch immigrant Nicolaas Henneman. This business produced more than thirty thousand photographs from calotype negatives in its two years of operation.<sup>2</sup>

Three of MoMA’s photographs were printed for Talbot’s illustrated book, *The Pencil of Nature*. Issued in installments between 1844 and 1846, this pioneering publication was intended to showcase paper photography’s many and various capabilities, offering its buyers twenty-four images in all, each of them accompanied by an explanatory text written by Talbot. *Articles of Glass*

(taken prior to June 1844, plate 5), for example, demonstrated photography’s ability to capture transparent objects, along with the light they reflected and refracted, but also, as Talbot put it, the fact that “however numerous the objects—however complicated the arrangement—the Camera depicts them all at once.” Deadpan and dispassionate, the image records Talbot’s own material possessions with an accuracy at once scientific and juridical, the photograph promising to become, should any of these goods be stolen, “evidence of a novel kind.”<sup>3</sup> The contact print *Lace* (published in December 1845, plate 4), the only negative and only photogenic drawing to appear in this book, was one of more than a hundred images printed from the same machine-made piece of fabric. A paean to both industrial progress and mathematical geometry, this photograph is animated by creases, folds, and stray threads, giving it both depth and a sense of contingency, no mean feat in an otherwise flat and static depiction.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, *The Open Door* (taken prior to May 1844, and published in January 1845, plate 1), is a composition inspired by the conventions of art rather than science, specifically the “Dutch school of art” that had recently come back into fashion. Assembling various symbolic objects around the door to his weathered stone stables, Talbot proposes photography to be an art form that is both iconographic and associative, able to “awaken a train of thoughts and feelings, and picturesque imaginings.”<sup>5</sup>

*The Fruit Sellers* (plate 2) was probably shot in September 1845 during a visit to Talbot’s home, Lacock Abbey, by his Welsh friend Calvert Richard Jones. Indeed, the negative may even have been made by Jones; it is certainly in his style and includes at least one member of his regular retinue who appears in several of his photographs.<sup>6</sup> Like other negatives by Jones, it was very likely printed by Henneman and his team of workers at the Reading Establishment. Here we see wealthy ladies and gentlemen pretending to be poor, an affectation that only the upper class could find amusing. Adopting the popular Victorian pastime of posing in *tableaux vivants*, this frieze of figures arranged in a courtyard speaks, therefore, of a quite particular class perspective on work and play, and on photography, too. Different again is the photograph Talbot took while ascending one of the towers of Orleans Cathedral (plate 3) during a

promotional trip he made to France in June 1843. Allowing his camera to crop the building abruptly on three sides, he shows how photography can divide the world it pictures into discontinuous fragments, a kind of ruthlessly unharmonious vision later to be associated with the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and Impressionist painting. It is, in other words, an entirely modern kind of picture.<sup>7</sup> It is also one of the last photographs that Talbot had Henneman print in large numbers: it was among the seven thousand calotype-derived images issued in the June 1846 issue of the periodical *Art Union* that subsequently faded, creating a public-relations disaster for Talbot and leading him to spend the next twenty years working on forms of ink-on-paper photomechanical reproduction.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the same themes broached by Talbot—art, architecture, science, industrialization, class, and commerce—are apparent in the work of other British photographers in this early period. Talbot had taken out a patent on his calotype process, in effect restricting its use to wealthy amateurs or professional photographers. In 1849, while working in his family’s candle- and soap-manufacturing business, Benjamin Brecknell Turner obtained a license from Talbot and began taking modest pictures of his own domestic life. After Talbot relinquished his patent, in 1852, Turner made larger and more ambitious pictures, concentrating on landscape and village views, using a camera that required half-hour exposures and whose back was the same size as his negatives.<sup>9</sup> A truncated shot of the base of a tree trunk (plate 6) no doubt appealed to picturesque taste and was in accord with the new practice of sketching details of the natural world in plein air. Exhibited regularly, Turner’s pictures show an idyllic England, with little hint that the countryside was about to be wholly transformed by industrialization. David Octavius Hill also took up the calotype, but in Edinburgh (and thus outside the patent restrictions) and as a professional photographer. Trained as a painter, Hill joined with engineer Robert Adamson in a collaborative studio, producing hundreds of portraits between 1843 and 1847. They soon became notable for their textured use of shadow and light, but also for the relatively casual and intimate poses adopted by their subjects, even when these were gathered in complex groups (plates 7–9). Compared to the stiff and formal portraits provided by daguerreotype studios

at the time, Hill and Adamson’s work presented photography as a medium capable of expressing creativity and individuality, even of taking on an anecdotal or entirely personal character.

Technical innovation was a hallmark of early photography in Great Britain, with new processes being regularly introduced and promoted, only to be superseded in turn. From 1851, many photographers adopted the collodion glass-negative process, and from it made salted paper or albumen positive prints. A complicated procedure, but capable of providing sharp details on a durable surface, the collodion process soon came to dominate professional photography. Julia Margaret Cameron, for example, used it to make an exceptional body of work, consisting primarily of portraits and “fancy subjects,” as she called them. Beginning her photographic career in 1863, she was notorious for her unusual printmaking, leaving fingerprints and other imperfections in the albumen surface of the finished photograph or in the collodion on her negatives.<sup>10</sup> Equally distinctive was her use of differential focus to produce ethereal portraits in which the subject looms out of darkness into the light, as if hovering between dream and reality. John Herschel, famous scientist and inventor of both the cyanotype process and the use of sodium thiosulfate as a fixer, stoically endured Cameron’s notoriously long sittings for at least four exposures on April 9, 1867, his hair in this example a ruffled blaze of filaments around his aging head (plate 28). All this was to capture, as Cameron hoped, “the greatness of the inner as well as the features of the outer man.”<sup>11</sup> Cameron’s female subjects, on the other hand, are frequently depicted as mythological or literary figures, dressed in costumes and with their faces turned away from the camera, as if caught in an interior world of deep feelings and otherworldly thoughts. In a picture from 1864, a woman is posed as a Madonna with two children, one of them asleep while the other leans in close with a hand on the woman’s chest, a surrogate sign of the tactility embodied in the damaged emulsion just below (plate 29). It has been suggested that Cameron’s work, whatever its subject, was inspired by her religious convictions, by her belief in a spiritual realm that inhabited every aspect of life.<sup>12</sup> Contemporaries of Cameron’s, such as Charles

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of this period of British photography, see Roger Taylor, *Impressed by Light: British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840–1860* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough survey of Talbot’s career, see Larry Schaaf, *Out of the Shadows: Herschel, Talbot, and the Invention of Photography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> William Henry Fox Talbot, from the text accompanying Plate III, “Articles of China,” in *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), n.p.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Talbot’s photographs of lace, see my “Dibujos de encaje” [Patterns of Lace], in Catherine Coleman, ed., *Huellas de Luz: El Arte y los Experimentos de William Henry Fox Talbot* [*Traces of Light: The Art and Experiments of William Henry Fox Talbot*] (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía/Aldeasa, 2001), pp. 53–59, 354–57.

<sup>5</sup> Talbot, from the text accompanying Plate VI, “The Open Door,” in *The Pencil of Nature*. See also Larry Schaaf, *The Photographic Art of William Henry Fox Talbot* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 30–31.

<sup>6</sup> Larry Schaaf has dated the exposure of this negative as “most likely September 9, 1845.” See his entry for Plate 44 and

the discussion of the photograph in Schaaf, *William Henry Fox Talbot: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), pp. 92–93, 132–36.

<sup>7</sup> See my “Summer Pleasures: One of the Towers of Orleans Cathedral” (August 2016), Talbot Catalogue Raisonné blog post: <http://foxtalbot.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/summer-pleasures-one-of-the-towers-of-orleans-cathedral/>.

<sup>8</sup> See Larry Schaaf, “‘The Caxton of Light’: Talbot’s Etchings of Light,” in Mirjam Brusius, Katrina Dean, and Chitra Ramalingam, eds., *William Henry Fox Talbot: Beyond Photography* (New Haven: The Yale Center for British Art, 2013), pp. 161–89.

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Barnes, *Benjamin Brecknell Turner: Rural England through a Victorian Lens* (London: V&A Publications, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> See Julian Cox and Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Complete Photographs* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Julia Margaret Cameron, *Annals of My Glass House* (1874), reprinted in Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays and Images* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> See Mike Weaver, *Julia Margaret Cameron, 1815–1879* (London: Herbert Press, 1984).

Dodgson and Clementina, Lady Hawarden, similarly charged their photographs with emotional and sensual resonance. To that end, both of these photographers took children as their subject. Dodgson, better known today as the author Lewis Carroll, was able to coax remarkably candid poses from young children he saw as exemplars of innocence (plate 31). Hawarden had her own daughters act out unscripted costume dramas within the family home in London. Featuring a closeness of bodies, a touching of hands, and exchanges of poignant looks, her photographs convey without words a specifically feminine social milieu (plate 30).

Portraiture has always been one of photography’s most popular and lucrative genres. The vast majority of early portraitists and their clients were content with capturing an accurate photographic likeness, confirming the newly central role of the individual within modern life and conveying that particular client’s presence in time and space. In contrast, Fallon Horne cast youth opposite age to create an allegorical double portrait (plate 34), with the older man resting his hand on a young admirer’s head while looking out wisely at the camera and the viewer. Eschewing all such affectations, Robert Howlett’s portrait of the engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel (plate 39) shows him standing in diffident triumph before the massive launching chains of the *Great Eastern*, an iron steam-driven ship that, at the time of its launch in 1858, was the largest vessel ever built. Alfred Capel Cure’s 1854 picture of some recruits (plate 11) also shows men pretending to be diffident, as if signing up for war and being photographed were both everyday events of no great consequence. Similarly casual is the pose adopted, no doubt under instruction, by Calvert Jones’s manservant, seated in the entrance to a building (plate 10). In each of these examples, the subjects of the photograph are centered in its rectangular frame, signifying the competence of the photographer and a faithful adherence to convention. Two pictures of people, likely taken by the same unknown photographer, both shot outdoors, cheerfully break with those conventions (plates 32, 33). The unexpected angles of these shots give their subject a strikingly dynamic persona, presaging the informality of the snapshot age to come, as well as the social mobility that capitalism had begun to make possible.

An adherence to convention connotes order and rationality, two qualities important to the establishment of photographic pictures as truthful, even scientific, documents. To that end, the English botanist Anna Atkins carefully placed her fern specimens in the center of her cyanotype paper before exposing it to light. The result was the generation of stark white-on-blue silhouettes of plants, accompanied by appropriate Latin captions, photographs that copied the look of the engravings and nature prints already familiar in her field. Atkins began making cyanotype impressions of British seaweed and algae in 1843; by the 1850s she was collaborating with her friend Anne Dixon to produce albums of British and foreign ferns. A specimen of *Polypodium Phegopteris*, or narrow beech fern (plate 16), represented the kind of abnormal variant of the species that fascinated Victorian collectors, while the *Pteris Rotundifolia* from Jamaica (plate 15) offered a glimpse of the greater British Empire.

Talbot had adopted a repeated frontality to remove the taint of subjectivity from his own photographic documents; this approach was employed by many subsequent photographers. Roger Fenton, for example, created thousands of salt prints from collodion glass negatives for the British Museum in about 1858, including several pictures of moa bones (plate 23).<sup>13</sup> Fenton and his assistants hung a temporary backdrop behind these remnants of an extinct flightless bird from New Zealand in order to isolate their details, a decision that today makes them look almost surreal (especially the two detached and partially reconstructed legs that stand upright on their own). The same tropes—deadpan frontality, isolation, repetition—are seen again in Charles Clifford’s photograph of a suit of Spanish armor (plate 36), James Mudd’s side view of the engine for the West Midland Railway (a shiny symbol of the Industrial Revolution [plate 38]), and Francis Edmond Currey’s artful still life of a dead heron (plate 37). In Hugh Welch Diamond’s photographic record of a woman patient in the Surrey County Asylum (plate 35), the subject has been similarly transformed by this kind of photography into a specimen to be studied, compared, and classified. The odd one out in this cavalcade of record photographs is a waxed-paper negative by Cure titled *My Beasts* (plate 12), a composition exposed on February 1, 1852.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of this commission, see Gordon Baldwin, Malcolm Daniel, and Sarah Greenough, *All the Mighty World: The Photographs of Roger Fenton, 1852–1860* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 16, 27.

Made ghostly by its reversal of tones, uneven chemistry, and fibrous texture, the picture features a hanging taxonomy of insects and other creatures (including a sea horse), each of them turned into a flat shape by their placement onto a tabula rasa. Hovering over this already puzzling array of creatures is a bat with wings outstretched, as if this creature of the night is lifting the whole ensemble into the air. Whatever Cure’s original intention for the photograph, it remains one of the stranger images from the nineteenth century to have survived.

As with Talbot and Fenton, Cure’s career as a photographer is marked by the diversity of the work he produced. Along with the photograph of recruits and *My Beasts*, MoMA’s collection includes a view of a tree struck by lightning (plate 14), one of several such images he shot in the 1850s, and another of the interior of a church (plate 13). In this one, Cure’s camera faces a window, into the light: contemplating this photograph, we are transported to the back of this sacred room (or “camera”), staring at the inside of the lens that is in the process of taking our own picture. It is, in other words, a photograph that seeks to meld worship and photography into a single life-affirming experience. Fenton’s commissions from the British Museum included the photographing of sculptures, the one featured here having been shot from the side, as if to animate the Greek hero into a living portrait (plate 24). But he also photographed historic English churches, such as Roslin Chapel (plate 22), which he beautifully frames as a series of beckoning arches and passageways, and some assiduously composed landscapes, including his technically superb study *September Clouds* (1856–7, plate 25), evoking the earlier sketches of John Constable. How better to demonstrate the malleability of the camera, its ability to photograph almost anything, limited only by the photographer’s skill and imagination? Seeing has here become entirely modern, aided by a machine that displaces that act from the human body,

potentially allowing the same indexically certified scene to be viewed, simultaneously, in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff—and even, over a century and a half later, in an art museum in New York.

Of course, seeing nineteenth-century British photographs in an American art museum can’t help but change their meaning, can’t help but orient our eye to look at them today as art, rather than, say, documents. The series of albumen photographs by Charles Thurston Thompson illustrates this kind of malleability too, even as it offers an apt metaphor for photography itself (plates 17–21). Thompson was an engraver who in 1853 was hired by Henry Cole, the director of the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) in London, to document in photographs the institution’s collection of decorative furniture. This included a group of elaborate mirrors, some Venetian and some English.<sup>14</sup> How can you photograph a mirror without appearing in it yourself? Thompson solved the problem by simply ignoring it, setting up his camera in front of each piece of furniture, taking off the lens cap, and making an exposure long enough to capture both the details of the ornamentation and himself standing in a landscape, checking his watch beside his cloth-covered instrument. One mirror faces another, into infinity. A single picture of this kind looks like a clumsy piece of documentation; seeing the five in MoMA’s collection all at once turns Thompson’s efforts to complete his impossible task into an ongoing conceptual art project. In 1853 the viewer would have been expected to ignore the presence of the photographer and concentrate only on the frame he is depicting. Today we do the opposite, looking beyond that frame to catch a glimpse of the magical act of photographing, an act taking place behind us and before us, more than 160 years ago. Here, in the temporal and spatial convolutions of this particular ocular experience, we are made to confront the modernity of photography in all of its fascinating complexity.

<sup>14</sup> See the description of this task given in Mark Haworth-Booth, *Photography: An Independent Art, Photographs from the Victoria and Albert Museum 1839–1996* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 32.



**William Henry Fox Talbot**  
British, 1800–1877

- 1
- The Open Door*. Before May 1844

Salted paper print

5 3⁄4 × 7 1⁄4 in. (14.3 × 19.5 cm)

Acquired through the generosity  
of Jon L. Stryker and purchase, 2008



**Calvert Richard Jones**  
British, 1802–1877

Likely collaboration with

**William Henry Fox Talbot**  
British, 1800–1877

- 2
- The Fruit Sellers*. 1845

Salted paper print

6 3⁄4 × 8 3⁄4 in. (17.2 × 21.2 cm)

Gift of Anne Ehrenkranz in honor  
of John Szarkowski, 1992





3 *One of the Towers of Orleans Cathedral, as Seen from the Opposite Tower. June 21, 1843*  
Salted paper print  
Image: 6 3/4 x 7 1/4 in. (16 x 20 cm) (angled corners)  
Acquired through the generosity of Jon L. Stryker, 2007

>

4 *Lace. 1845*  
Salted paper print (photogram)  
Image: 6 1/4 x 8 1/4 in. (16.5 x 22.3 cm)  
Acquired through the generosity of Dr. Stefan Stein, 1992

5 *Articles of Glass. Before June 1844*  
Salted paper print  
5 3/8 x 5 3/8 in. (13.2 x 15.1 cm)  
Purchase, 2008





# Early Photography in France

1850

1870

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- |                               |                             |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Olympe Aguado de las Marismas | Alphonse Le Blondel         |
| François Aubert               | Gustave Le Gray             |
| Charles Aubry                 | Henri Le Secq               |
| Édouard-Denis Baldus          | Charles Marville            |
| Auguste Belloc                | Nadar                       |
| Bisson Frères                 | Charles Nègre               |
| Bruno Braquehais              | Henri-Victor Regnault       |
| Adolphe Braun                 | Louis-Rémy Robert           |
| Étienne Carjat                | Louis Rousseau              |
| Eugène Cuvelier               | Adolphe Terris              |
| André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri  | Adrien Tournachon           |
| Guillaume-Benjamin-Armand     | Unknown photographers       |
| Duchenne de Boulogne          | Auguste Vacquerie           |
| Herman Heid                   | Julien Vallou de Villeneuve |



“The Black Clothing of Things”: French Photography under the Second Empire

Quentin Bajac

“Saw today, at the Hôtel Drouot, the first sale of photographs. Everything is becoming black in this century, and photography seems like the black clothing of things,”<sup>1</sup> the Goncourt brothers wrote in their journal on June 4, 1857. At the time, Édouard-Denis Baldus had just completed documenting the construction of the new Louvre with photographs, a commission of the Ministère d’État that had occupied him since 1855 (plate 51). In fall, Gustave Le Gray would photograph, also as an official commission, army maneuvers at the Camp de Châlons (plates 82–84); he would shortly thereafter add to his signature the mention “photographer of the Emperor.” Photography in France in the mid-nineteenth century was in full swing, and the Goncourts, a bit disillusioned, were witnessing the inexorable advent of this new mechanical and modern image—a resolutely black modernity, like coal smoke, the bourgeois frock coat, or the silver salts of photographic prints.

The rise of photography on paper in France took place during the Second Empire, the period initiated by a coup d’état in December 1851 by Napoleon III and ending in 1871 with the regime’s collapse after the war with Prussia, an episode brought to a close by the tragic events of the Paris Commune (plates 77–79). Almost all of the images in this chapter were made in France during these two decades. Over the course of these twenty years, photography on paper experienced considerable growth, bolstered by the support of public authorities around the emperor and his government, in a manner French centralism uniquely allows. This flourishing happened within the centralizing and authoritarian political context of the 1850s, marked in particular by many restrictions on public freedoms and the press. It was also buoyed by a thriving capitalism that saw photography as a modern tool, befitting the economic and industrial transformation of the country.

After the 1840s, characterized in France by the prevalence of the daguerreotype, the year 1851 saw the creation of the Société Héliographique, an

organization charged with promoting photography, especially on paper. From the very beginning, it was equipped to this end with a journal, *La Lumière*, a place for the exchange of information but also for the emergence of an aesthetic discourse around photography. A sign of the enthusiasm this new technology was generating, the Société brought together not only professional photographers but also a number of enlightened amateurs, aristocrats, and political figures, as well as artists (such as Eugène Delacroix) and scientists. A number of the photographers represented in this chapter—Auguste-Rosalie Bisson and Louis-Auguste Bisson, Le Gray, Baldus, Charles Nègre, Henri Le Secq, Olympe Aguado de las Marismas, Julien Vallou de Villeneuve, and Henri-Victor Regnault—were among them. Also in 1851, five photographers from the Société were recruited to create a photographic inventory of the rich heritage of France under the auspices of the Commission des Monuments Historiques, the first in a long series of commissions made by public authorities throughout the decade.<sup>2</sup> And finally, it was in 1851 that one of the French pioneers of photography on paper, Louis-Désiré Blanquart-Evrard, opened a photographic printing establishment near Lille. His Imprimerie Photographique would be the main producer of photographic views on paper in France until 1855, the date of its closing: twenty-four albums or portfolios, or more than 550 images, made by some of the most prominent emerging photographers on paper of the period, from Regnault to Le Secq.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, as a symbol, 1851 is the year of Louis Daguerre’s passing, at the very moment the hegemony of his process was beginning to be contested in France; at the same time, Le Gray, in his first treatise on photography on paper, exclaimed, “The future of photography is in paper.”<sup>4</sup>

Like Queen Victoria and her husband Prince Albert in Great Britain or Pedro II in Brazil during the same period, Napoleon III played a leading role in this development.<sup>5</sup> Many of the images in this chapter are the results of commissions made by the emperor, the government, or local public authorities: in addition to the construction site for the new Louvre mentioned above, Baldus photographed the floods of the Rhône in 1856 (plate 48), again at the request of the government. In their descriptive dryness, the images are a long way from the picturesque and narrative paintings that featured the emperor visiting

victims of the flood, presented at the annual Salon of Painting the following year.<sup>6</sup> The images made by Nègre at the newly built imperial asylum in Vincennes (plate 63) are the product of a commission from the Ministère de l’Intérieur, with the aim of increasing the visibility of the regime’s social policies favoring the most impoverished. Finally, in the 1860s, the giant urbanization projects in Paris and Marseilles, mandated by the emperor and carried out under the aegis of prefects Georges Eugène, Baron Haussmann (in Paris) and Charlemagne de Maupas (in Marseilles), would also appeal to various photographers, including Charles Marville, official photographer of the city of Paris starting in 1862, and Adolphe Terris, who performed similar duties in Marseilles. While rue du Cygne, photographed by Marville before its planned expansion (plate 76), ultimately escaped destruction, the construction of rue Impériale (plate 75), the new main thoroughfare in Marseilles, required the displacement of sixteen thousand people.

Photographic documentary campaigns abroad also received considerable support: for instance, Louis Rousseau of the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris was able to produce a few ethnographic studies (plate 72), among other subjects, during an 1856 research trip to the North Sea under the patronage of the imperial prince, son of the emperor. Photography was then added to the practices of sketching and casting from nature and became a crucial part of every expedition. Discussed in the following chapter, certain essential works from the early days of photography on paper in France were made for archaeological purposes in the context of missions carried out by the Ministère de l’Instruction Publique (Auguste Salzmann in Jerusalem [plate 95]) or the Beaux-Arts administration (Louis De Clercq in Syria [plate 94]).<sup>7</sup> Finally, the enthusiasm for photography among the higher echelons of the state in the 1850s is illustrated by the close ties that several members of the entourage of the imperial family maintained with members of the Société Française de Photographie, created in 1854.<sup>8</sup> More than anyone else, the Aguado brothers, amateur photographers trained by Le Gray, embody this proximity: related to the empress’s family and a regular at gatherings of the court at the Château de Compiègne, Olympe Aguado in particular left behind a number of group portraits, which, reminiscent of genre scenes (plate 60), sometimes feature members of the imperial court.

A number of new private patrons used photography for documentary and promotional ends, extending the activity of Napoleon III and his government. Enthusiasm for the photographic object seems to have been greatest in the railroad sector, then in full expansion and attracting considerable private capital. Baldus, for instance, worked for the railroads twice, first in 1855 for the Chemin de Fer du Nord, financed by the banker James de Rothschild, then in 1860–61 for the Compagnie Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée. His “PLM album” promoting the line, combining old and recent images, picturesque landscapes (plate 47), and views of historic monuments and industrial works, conveniently illustrates the transformations of France in the 1850s and the contradictions inherent therein: a division between interest in its historic heritage and exaltation of the nascent modernity. A romantic sensibility in decline—still apparent in the photographic production of the first half of the 1850s, notably in the strong presence of Gothic religious architecture (plates 49, 50)—gradually faded away in favor of a new focus on symbols of industrial progress. Baldus is a good example of this, having on the one hand documented the necessary safeguarding of a heritage in peril via the *missions héliographiques* in 1851, and ten years later celebrated the grandeur of the railroad, a tool of progress and civilization—often with very similar landscape views.

It is studio photography, however, that saw the most remarkable development in France under the Second Empire.<sup>9</sup> Supported by new investors interested in the medium and its potential for development, a number of photographers opened vast studios on Parisian boulevards. To advertise his newly opened studio on the rue Saint-Lazare, Nadar, in partnership with his younger brother, Adrien Tournachon, created the series of photographs in which the mime Charles Debureau, a leading actor of the period, in character as Pierrot, simulates various emotions, such as surprise (plate 66), thereby demonstrating not only the expressive possibilities of the new medium but also the talent of the new cameramen.<sup>10</sup> The following year, in 1855, the series was awarded a gold medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. Although supported financially by the Péreire brothers, bankers close to Napoleon III, the Nadar studio became a gathering place for the Parisian artistic and intellectual bohemia, often hostile to the empire, in

<sup>1</sup> Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal des Goncourt: Mémoires de la vie littéraire, 1851–1861* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1887), p. 190. Quoted in Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> See Anne de Mondenard, *La Mission héliographique. Cinq photographes parcourent la France* (Paris: Éditions du Patrimoine, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Regnault’s image was published by Blanquart-Evrard in 1853 in his collection *Études photographiques*; Le Secq’s was published the same year in Blanquart-Evrard’s *Paris Photographique*.

<sup>4</sup> Gustave Le Gray, *Nouveau traité théorique et pratique de photographie sur papier et sur verre* (Paris: Lerebours et Secretan, 1851), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> See Sylvie Aubenas, ed., *Des Photographes pour l’Empereur: Les albums de Napoléon III* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> See Malcolm Daniel, *The Photographs of Édouard Baldus* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See Roxana Marcoci’s essay in this volume.

<sup>8</sup> See Paul-Louis Roubert, *L’image sans qualités: Les beaux-arts et la critique à l’épreuve de la photographie, 1839–1859* (Paris: Monum, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> See Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1840–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> See Maria Morris Hambourg, Françoise Heilbrun, and Philippe Néagu, *Nadar* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995).

the mid-to-late 1850s. Whether a portrait of the journalist Eugène Pelletan (plate 64), an opponent of the regime from the start, or of the Romantic writer and art critic Théophile Gautier (plate 65), Nadar, a caricaturist by training, reinforced the expression of his models with a few simple devices: plain backgrounds, an absence of accessories, an emphasis on psychology and not on social status—as seen in particular in the recurrent pose of placing one’s hand in one’s waistcoat, emphasizing the determined and romantic character of the figure. This pared-down approach would be found a few years later in the portraits of Étienne Carjat, who also trained as a caricaturist and was affiliated with artistic circles: his portrait of Charles Baudelaire (plate 67) focuses on the poet’s piercing gaze. Baudelaire stares at the camera with a surly and suspicious air—an indication of the mistrust with which he regarded photography, which he accused of perverting taste in the arts by habituating the viewer to the most trivial realism.

We find an entirely different clientele, closer to the spheres of power, and a very different aesthetic in the work produced by the studio of André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, the largest in Paris in the early 1860s. Patented in 1854, his *carte de visite* format allows multiple views to be made on the same negative, leading to a considerable reduction in costs and further growing the diffusion of the photographic image. His portraits are often situated in a more narrative context, in the tradition of the genre scene. His subjects are typically shown surrounded by furniture (curtains, an armchair, plants) and accessories (books, newspapers) simulating a bourgeois or aristocratic interior. In two images from a sitting in 1860, José Manuel Hidalgo, an exiled Mexican monarchist and protégé of Empress Eugénie who would play a decisive role in Napoleon III’s engagement in Mexico, ostensibly reads *Le Pays*, a Bonapartist and anti-republican daily paper (plate 69).

Interest in the developments of the portrait even reached Victor Hugo: exiled with his family on the island of Jersey after the coup d’état of 1851, the empire’s principal opponent saw the new technology as a means to battle boredom, break through the isolation, and secure an income. Along with landscapes of the island that they sought to publish (without much success), his sons and his son-in-law, Auguste Vacquerie, made a number of portraits of Hugo (plate 61) and his friends, often equally liberal European figures whom the upheavals

of the People’s Spring of 1848 had pushed into exile in England.<sup>11</sup> The image of the exiled writer, defeated and yet still standing—“Victus sed Victor,” per an inscription written under one of his portraits—circulated across the seas, consigned to albums or inserted in books.

Photography was at the same time the subject of many experiments, giving rise to often unusual, at times disturbing, images, such as those made by the neurologist Guillaume-Benjamin-Armand Duchenne de Boulogne in collaboration with Adrien Tournachon in 1855–56 (plate 74). By exposing various parts of their model’s face to electric shocks, the two men compiled and published a nomenclature of the muscles of the face and the emotions they convey—a sort of new treatise on the passions intended for scientists as well as artists. It is interesting to compare this series with the portraits of the mime Deburau mentioned previously, which were co-created a year earlier by the same Tournachon and guided by the same interest in questions of physiognomy and the expression of human emotions. Meanwhile, Nadar, starting in the early 1860s, became less interested in his studio work and turned to other experiments, notably photography using artificial light. Ever attentive to ensuring good publicity for his projects, he chose as fields of experimentation two strongly evocative and mysterious places: first, the subterranean Paris of the catacombs (plate 73); then, in a second series, of the sewers, creating photographs that reveal, in his own words, “the mysteries of the deepest, the most secret caverns.”<sup>12</sup>

Nègre confronted another technical limitation, that of instantaneity, in his shot of an overturned horse-drawn carriage (plate 62). Trained as a painter—his work, in particular his genre paintings, was shown at the Salon several times—Nègre became interested in the study of motion in his paintings as well as in his photographs, notably in a number of Parisian street scenes taken near his studio on the Île Saint-Louis. Here Nègre used a stereoscopic format resulting in images of smaller dimensions, reducing the exposure time and granting greater spontaneity in shooting. Yet the blurred figures of certain bystanders, who are at a standstill or in slow movement, reveal that we are still a long way from the instantaneity of what, at the turn of the century, would be called “snapshots.”<sup>13</sup>

Nègre’s training as a painter was hardly exceptional. Le Secq, Le Gray, Roger Fenton, and Nègre were

students in the workshops of either the painters Paul Delaroche or Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (or both) before turning to photography. These pioneers of photography on paper, born for the most part in the 1820s, were called “*peintres manqués*” by Baudelaire and “*peintres ratés*” by Nadar (both meaning failed painters).<sup>14</sup> Marville was a “painter-engraver” before becoming a photographer; Vallou de Villeneuve and Auguste Belloc also received artistic training; Nadar and Carjat, as mentioned, were caricaturists. Even a photographer like François Aubert, who moved to Mexico in the 1850s and was known for the most part for his series of documentary photographs made around the execution of Emperor Maximilian (plate 71), trained with the neoclassical painter Hippolyte Flandrin at the École des Beaux-Arts in Lyon and exhibited at the Salon in 1851 before emigrating.

Sharing similar backgrounds, painters, photographers, and engravers in the 1850s enjoyed a real closeness, often depicting the same subjects, such as the forest of Fontainebleau, a favorite motif of Romantic painters since the 1810s, which was taken up by Le Gray (plate 45) at the end of the 1840s and especially Eugène Cuvelier, the bulk of whose production was made around the village of Barbizon (plate 46). Painters and photographers also occasionally shared models: several photographs of female nudes by Vallou de Villeneuve, made around 1853 and distributed as “studies from nature” (plate 56), evoke the paintings of Gustave Courbet from the period—the two men were then working with the same model.<sup>15</sup>

It is under this vague term “studies from nature” that photography on paper entered artists’ studios, where it served as a model or memory aid in addition to other types of representation (engravings, casts from nature) still being used. Included in this category is the stunning image of a severed foot (plate 59), found among the papers of Romantic painter Paul Huet, or a female nude by Belloc (plate 55). A growing number of photographers proposed that their nude studies be used as the basis of drawing instruction (plate 57). By the end of the 1860s and throughout the following decade, this kind of academic nude circulated widely in artists’ studios and schools of fine art, including through dedicated publishing houses such as Giraudon and Calavas, which sold academic photographs by the Austrian Herman Heid (plate 58) in Paris at the end of the 1870s.

Photography was also present in schools of applied and decorative arts. At the Manufacture de Sèvres, which specialized in the production of ceramics under the aegis of Regnault, a photography studio was created in the early 1850s (plate 42). Its first director was Louis-Rémy Robert, head of painting and gilding workshops and an amateur photographer in his leisure hours (plates 40, 41). During the same period Adolphe Braun, a designer for the textile industry in Alsace, turned to photography to make floral still lifes intended for manufacturers (plate 52). The same idea motivated Charles Aubry, a designer of wallpapers, carpets, and textiles, to open his photography studio in the early 1860s. Aubry suggested that his floral compositions (plates 53, 54) be used instead of engravings and lithographs in art schools to teach drawing (although the undertaking was not very successful, and Aubry declared bankruptcy in 1865).

This role of “very humble servant of the arts” is one to which Baudelaire, photography’s outspoken adversary, wished to see the medium be confined, and indeed the 1850s in France were years of struggle for the artistic recognition of photography. The Société Française de Photographie and a few photographers played a major role in this battle, first and foremost Le Gray, who, in 1851, wrote: “It is my deepest wish that photography, instead of falling within the domain of industry, of commerce, will be included among the arts. That is its sole, true place, and it is in that direction that I shall always endeavor to guide it.”<sup>16</sup> Whether made in one shot (plate 43) or by combining two negatives, one for the sky, another for the sea (plate 44), Le Gray’s seascapes of 1856–57 (personal works and not commissions), are, along with his views of Fontainebleau, among his works most marked by a Pictorialist influence. While photography officially entered the Salon in 1859, its artistic status was far from recognized as such: in 1862, about thirty painters and engravers, including Ingres and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, signed a petition protesting against “any acknowledgment of photography as an art,” adding that the technology “amounts to a series of manual operations” and that “the proofs that result cannot under any circumstances be likened to works that are the fruit of intelligence and the study of art.”<sup>17</sup> Despite an outstanding infancy, it would take more than a century for photography in France to begin, slowly, to be considered as an art form, fulfilling Le Gray’s aspirations for the medium.

<sup>11</sup> See Françoise Heilbrun and Danielle Molinari, eds., *En collaboration avec le soleil: Victor Hugo, photographies de l'exil* (Paris: RMN-Paris Musées, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Félix Nadar, *Quand j'étais photographe* (Paris: Flammarion, 1900); translated by Eduardo Cadava and Liana Theodoratou, *When I Was a Photographer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> See Michel Frizot’s essay in this volume.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “Salon de 1859. Le Public moderne et la photographie,” *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 616; Nadar, *When I Was a Photographer*, p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> Dominique de Font-Reaulx, “Courbet et la photographie,” in Sylvie Aubenas, ed., *L’Art du nu au XIXe siècle. Le Photographe et son Modèle* (Paris: Hazan, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Le Gray, *Nouveau traité théorique et pratique*, pp. 70–71.

<sup>17</sup> *Le Moniteur de la photographie*, December 15, 1862, reproduced in André Rouillé, *La Photographie en France. Textes et Controverses: une anthologie, 1816–1871* (Paris: Macula, 1989), pp. 399–400.



Louis-Rémy Robert  
French, 1811–1882

40    Untitled (Sèvres porcelain manufactory).  
c. 1852  
Salted paper print  
8 7⁄8 × 6 1⁄4 in. (22.5 × 17.1 cm)  
Suzanne Winsberg Collection.  
Gift of Suzanne Winsberg, 2009

41    Untitled (Sèvres porcelain manufactory).  
c. 1852  
Waxed-paper negative  
9 1⁄4 × 6 3⁄4 in. (23.2 × 17.7 cm)  
Suzanne Winsberg Collection.  
Gift of Suzanne Winsberg, 2009



Henri-Victor Regnault  
French, 1810–1878

42    Untitled (*The Ladder* [*L'Échelle*], Sèvres porcelain manufactory)  
from the album *Études photographiques*. 1853  
Salted paper print  
11 3⁄4 × 8 1⁄4 in. (28.4 × 20.9 cm) (angled corners)  
Acquired through the generosity of the  
Nina W. Werblow Charitable Trust, 1995



Gustave Le Gray  
French, 1820–1884



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43 *The Great Wave, Sète (La Grande Vague, Sète)*. 1856  
Albumen silver print  
13 ¼ × 16 ½ in. (33.6 × 41.3 cm)  
Gift of Paul F. Walter, 1989

44 *The Tugboat (Le Vapeur)*. 1857  
Albumen silver print  
12 ½ × 16 ¾ in. (30.8 × 43 cm)  
Acquired through the generosity of Robert B. Menschel, Jo Carole  
Lauder, and Roxann Taylor in honor of Richard E. Salomon, 2014



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