

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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WORK OF TWO PIONEER MASTERS OF PHOTOGRAPHY TO BE SHOWN AT MUSEUM
Photographs by the early Scottish team of David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson and by the English photographer Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron will be on exhibition in the Auditorium Gallery of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from April 27 to July 24. Assembled by Edward Steichen, Director of the Department of Photography, this exhibition is another of the Museum's series of "flash backs," this time going back to the two most important figures in the beginnings of photography as an art. Each photographer will be represented by more than 50 pictures.

D. O. Hill (1802 - 1870) was well known in Edinburgh as a landscape painter and was a member of the Royal Scottish Academy. As a result of a commission he received in 1843 to paint a 5' x 11' canvas to contain more than 450 portraits of Church dignitaries, he turned to photography as a means of assembling the necessary material. He went to Robert Adamson, a young man who had had photographic experience particularly in the newly discovered Fox Talbot calotype process of negative and positive photography. For the next 5 years, until Adamson's death, these two collaborated in producing, for the most part, superb half-length portraits, some scenes and landscapes, some fisher folk. In view of Hill's early profession as painter and its influence on his photography, it is interesting to note one of the comments written to him at the time: "I sat up until nearly 3 o'clock in the morning looking over them. They are indeed most wonderful, and I would rather have a set of them than the finest Rembrandts I ever saw." Since there is some conjecture among historians about the part played in this team by Adamson, there will also be shown for comparison and contrast a small group of pictures done a decade later by Hill in collaboration with another photographer A. MacGlasson.

This is the first comprehensive showing in the United States of the work of Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron. Mrs. Cameron (1815 - 1879) started photographing because her children gave her a camera for Christmas in 1863. Early in the following year she produced her first successful photograph - a picture of a child. Her enthusiasm may be gaged by the fact that she coated this plate, made the photograph, developed, fixed, washed, varnished, printed, mounted and framed the

picture and presented it to the child's father - all on the same day. Her subsequent portraits included famous people of her day: Tennyson, Herschel, Darwin, Carlyle, Longfellow. Despite a complete absence of instruction, within a few months after her first picture she exhibited at the Photographic Society of London, and a photography magazine wrote of her work in a vein characteristic of the period: "... admirable, expressive and vigorous, but dreadfully opposed to the photographic conventions and proprieties." At about this same time Victor Hugo wrote to her: "No one has ever captured the rays of the sun and used them as you have. I throw myself at your feet." Her colorful character lived after her to such a degree that the late novelist Virginia Woolf wrote an essay about her in which she drew the following portrait: "Dressed in robes of flowing red velvet, she walked with her friends, stirring a cup of tea as she walked, half way to the railroad station in hot summer weather." And Roger Fry, the eminent art writer, stated in an article about her:

"Mrs. Cameron's photographs already bid fair to outlive most of the works of the artists who were her contemporaries. One day we may hope that the National Portrait Gallery will be deprived of so large a part of its grant that it will turn to fostering the art of photography and will rely on its results for its records, instead of buying acres of canvas covered at great expense by fashionable practitioners in paint."

These three photographers used equipment that most amateurs today would scoff at and worked under conditions that would now seem impossible. Their exposures ranged from 2 or 3 minutes up to 10. The Hill-Adamson sitters were all posed outdoors, usually in full sunlight. Mrs. Cameron's studio was in the hot confines of a glass-roofed chicken coop; her darkroom was set up in the coal shed.

Mr. Steichen comments on these photographs as follows:

"The Hill-Adamson photographs are carefully calculated, arranged and posed compositions showing the strong embodiment of the painter concept of that period. Although they reflect the thinking of the mid-Victorian period, Mrs. Cameron's pictures are more definitely photographic in concept. They express her boundless enthusiasm for the medium and her deep emotional interest in people.

"The Hill-Adamson photographs, although taken outdoors, reflect the spirit of the painter's studio; they are dominated by the dignity and the formal style of the painter. Mrs. Cameron, on the other hand, was the first photographer to be impressed by ^{one of} the most important elements ^{the} in photography - the camera's ability to record and fix emotions and mood of a moment."

The photographs included in the exhibition were loaned by the following institutions and individuals: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; Boston Museum of Fine Arts; George Eastman House; Dr. Heinrich Schwarz; Mrs. Charles Bruen Perkins; Mr. T. J. Maloney.