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The Museum of Modern Art draws upon the exceptional depth of its collection to tell a new history of photography in the three-volume series Photography at MoMA.

Since the invention of photography, legions of practitioners have mined its artistic and practical potential, paying particular attention to its novel depiction of space and time, its utility as a tool for documentation and exploration, and its distinctive take on modernism and modernity. This volume explores the ways in which this new medium, originating and expanding in the late 1830s and early 1840s, was adopted, adapted, and refined by early practitioners, one of photography’s inventors, the portraitists Julia Margaret Cameron, Nadar, and Gertrude Käsebier; the motion studies of Eadweard Muybridge; the surveys of landscape and architecture by American and European practitioners; the documentary images of Carleton Watkins, Eugène Atget, and Lewis Hine; the modernist works of Karl Blossfeldt, Edward Steichen, and Paul Strand. This volume provides a wide-ranging look at a medium so thoroughly and instantly modern that it is represented in MoMA’s collection by works that predate any of the Museum’s paintings or sculptures by a full forty years. And now, more than 175 years later, the modern spirit of early photography remains intact, and Photography at MoMA: 1840 to 1920 provides a record of its contradictions, aspirations, and achievements.
Photography at MoMA

Edited by

Quentin Bajac
Lucy Gallun
Rosana Marcoci
Sarah Hermanson Meister
Foreword
Glenn D. Lowry 9

“Background Material”: Nineteenth-Century Photography at MoMA
Quentin Bajac 10

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Great Britain

The Pencil of Nature

Unknown photographer

Benjamin Brecknell Turner

Charles Thurston Thompson

William Henry Fox Talbot

James Mudd

Calvert Richard Jones

Robert Howlett

Colbert Richard Jones

Unknown photographer

Olympia Aguedo de las Mariñas

François Aubert

Charles Aubry

Édouard-Denis Baldus

Auguste Balloc

Bisson Frères

Bruno Braquemps

Adolphe Braun

Étienne Carjat

Eugène Cuvelier

André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri

Guillaum Benjami Armand

Auguste Vacquerie

Julien Vallou de Villeneuve

James Anderson

Charles N. Barnard

George N. Barnard

Charles M. Bell

Felipe Beato

William H. Bell

Paul-Charles Berthier

Bisson Frères

Samuel Bourne

George P. Cottman

Louis De Chirac

Maxime Du Camp

John L. Dunmore

Roger Fenton

Francis Freh

Joseph Philibert Girault de Prangey

John B. Greens

Gustave Le Gray

Robert Mazzeron

Auguste Mestral

John Murray

Charles Nègre

William Henry Pageau

Carlo Ponti

James Robertson

Auguste Salzmann

John Shaw Smith

Giorgio Sommer

William James Stillman

Felice Teym

Linnaeus Tripe

Underwood and Underwood

Unknown photographers

George R. Bell

James Wallace Black

Brady & Company

Solomon D. Butcher

William England

Alexander Gardner

Alphonse Le Blondel

Herman Heid

Guillaume-Benjamin-Armand

André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri

Eugène Cuvelier

Étienne Carjat

Adolphe Braun

Bruno Braquehais

Bisson Frères

Auguste Belloc

Charles Aubry

François Aubert

Olympe Aguado de las Marismas

1840

1850

1860

1870

1880

1900

1920

1920

1950

1970

1970

1920

1950

1920
American Vernacular

Charles Dudley Arnold  
Jessie Tarbox Beals  
Arthur P. Bedou  
Ernest J. Bellocq  
Henry Hamilton Bennett  
Wilson A. Bentley  
Brown Brothers  
Charles H. Currier  
Louis W. Hine  
Clifton Johnson  
Frances Benjamin Johnston  
Edwin Hila Lincoln  
William H. Martin  
Eadweard J. Muybridge

Pach Brothers  
Jacob August Rits  
John Runk  
Charles Schenck  
William J. Shaw  
Charles Norman Sieden  
H. William Tupper  
Underwood and Underwood  
Unknown photographers  
Carlton E. Watkins  
John Adams Whipple  
Joseph Janvier Woodward  
Willard Worden  
Yerkes Observatory
Photography’s vernacular and shortine-art

On the interrelationship between social, political, economic, and practical factors that primary motivation of their creators. There are many photographs that appear in the first two chapters of this Europe were quite different, as evidenced by the American landscape photography. The circumstances in whose evolving characteristics are suggested by the term points to a broader range of work than when the adjective wasn’t applied in this context until much relevance towards the end of the nineteenth century, even if the adjective wasn’t applied in this context until much later. It is curious that a single term—“vernacular”—can encompass so diverse a body of work, whose evolving characteristics are suggested by the selection presented here. With respect to photography, the term points to a broader range of work than when applied to language or architecture, encompassing virtually all work for hire and most work by amateurs: from in-camera originals to a more efficient, production-oriented approach. Until the 1880s (when the increased sensitivity of so-called dry plate negatives began to dominate), virtually all albums silver prints were made from wet-collodion-on-glass negatives. The negative was typically 18 cm in length and 21 cm in width. “Whole plate” daguerreotypes (plate 177) were the most expensive process, but could produce multiple identical (or nearly identical) positive prints from a single negative at a scale unimaginable only a decade earlier. The advent of this method, along with the concurrent development of photography on paper, signaled a shift away from in-camera, in-camera originals to a more efficient, production-oriented approach. Until the 1880s (when the increased sensitivity of so-called dry plate negatives began to dominate), virtually all albums silver prints were made from wet-collodion-on-glass negatives. The negative was typically 18 cm in length and 21 cm in width. “Whole plate” daguerreotypes (plate 177) were the most expensive process, but could produce multiple identical (or nearly identical) positive prints from a single negative at a scale unimaginable only a decade earlier. The advent of this method, along with the concurrent development of photography on paper, signaled a shift away from in-camera, in-camera originals to a more efficient, production-oriented approach. Until the 1880s (when the increased sensitivity of so-called dry plate negatives began to dominate), virtually all albums silver prints were made from wet-collodion-on-glass negatives. The negative was typically 18 cm in length and 21 cm in width. “Whole plate” daguerreotypes (plate 177) were the most expensive process, but could produce multiple identical (or nearly identical) positive prints from a single negative at a scale unimaginable only a decade earlier. The advent of this method, along with the concurrent development of photography on paper, signaled a shift away from in-camera.
picked,” points to the often indistinguishable threads of art, commercial, and artistic practices in the nineteenth century.

In 1872, Eadweard Muybridge was famously photographed, having captured a horse in mid-stride. This was the first photograph to show a horse with all four legs off the ground, demonstrating to the public that a horse does not always have one leg on the ground in a gallop—a fact not discernable by the human eye. By 1878, Muybridge had completed 781 plates in Animal Locomotion: An Electro-Mechanical Study of Animal Movements, which became the foundation for the work of other photographers such as John A. Johnson and Gertrude Käsebier.

In 1917, John Johnston and Gertrude Käsebier took photographs on their summer vacations in Maine in July 1913 and 1918, respectively. These photographs were part of a larger body of work that explored the relationship between photography and art. The photographs were reproduced in a book titled “Camera Aesthetics,” which was published in 1922. Through his interventions, we are reminded that art can not only capture but also transform the ordinary and commonplace into something extraordinary.

The question of whether photography ought to be considered a fine art has vexed practitioners and the public for centuries. Marcus Root, himself a photographer, opined in 1864, “Whether the pencil or the camera be employed, this distinction [between artists and “mere mechanics”] is as artificial as it is useless.” Root went on to argue that photography was a fine art because it required a combination of technical skill and artistic vision.

The Camera and the Pencil: A Study in Art and Science, written by Clarence H. White and published in 1921, addressed the question of whether photography was a fine art. White argued that photography was a fine art because it required a combination of technical skill and artistic vision.

Nonetheless, the prominent presence (in this chapter and in the Museum’s collection) of photographs made for a myriad of practical purposes suggests the significance of these vernacular works to any understanding of this history of the medium.

Now that the issue of “art or not” has been resolved, we can consider the question of what the Museum should—and should not—collect. In this chapter (and the following one), we examine the contributions of photographers whose work not only reflected the changing tastes of the time but also reflected the cultural and social contexts in which they worked. This chapter considers the ways in which photography has been used to document and interpret the world around us, and how it continues to do so today.
174 Untitled. c. 1840s
Daguerreotype
Image: 4 1/4 × 3 1/2 in. (12.1 × 8.9 cm)
Gift of Anne Ehrenkranz in honor of Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr., 1994

175 Untitled. c. 1850
Daguerreotype
Image: 2 1/4 × 3 1/4 in. (6.3 × 8.3 cm)
Gift of Virginia Cuthbert Elliott, 1974

176 Untitled. c. 1860
Ambrotype
Image: 2 1/4 × 3 1/4 in. (6.1 × 7.7 cm)
Gift of Celeste Bartos, 1974

177 Unknown photographers. Untitled. c. 1840s
Daguerreotype
Image: 4 1/4 × 3 1/2 in. (12.1 × 8.9 cm)
Gift of Anne Ehrenkranz in honor of Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr., 1994

178 William J. Shew
American, 1809–1863

179 Untitled. c. 1850
Ambrotype
Image: 2 1/4 × 3 1/4 in. (6.1 × 7.7 cm)
Gift of Celeste Bartos, 1974

180 Untitled. c. 1860
Ambrotype
Image: 2 1/4 × 3 1/4 in. (6.1 × 7.7 cm)
Gift of Celeste Bartos, 1974

181 Untitled. c. 1860
Ambrotype
Image: 2 1/4 × 3 1/4 in. (6.1 × 7.7 cm)
Gift of Celeste Bartos, 1974
John Adams Whipple
American, 1802–1881

The Moon. 1853–54
Salted paper print
7 1/8 x 8 5/8 in. (18.4 x 21.9 cm)
Gift of Warner Communications, Inc., 1979

Joseph Janvier Woodward
American, 1833–1884

Test Podura Scale Showing Exclamation Marks. 1871
Albumen silver print
Image: 7 1/2 x 5 7/8 in. (19.1 x 15.0 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1988
Unknown photographer

Untitled. c. 1875

Albumen silver print

9 × 7 ⅜ in. (23.1 × 18.9 cm)

Acquired through the generosity of Paul F. Walter, 1986

Carleton E. Watkins

American, 1829–1916

Late George Cling Peaches. 1889

Albumen silver print

12 × 18 ⅞ in. (30.5 × 48.0 cm)

Acquired through the generosity of Jon L. Stryker, 2010
Eadweard J. Muybridge
American, born England, 1830–1904

164. Study of Foresketchings, Horses; Running, 1878–79, from the album The Attitudes of Animals in Motion, 1881
Albumen silver print
Overall: 5 ½ × 9 ½ in. (14 × 23.1 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 1986

165. Movement of the Hand, Beating Time, 1884–86,
from Animal Locomotion: An Electro-Photographic Investigation of Connective Phases of Animal Movements, 1887
Collotype
9 ¾ × 11 ½ in. (24.1 × 30 cm)
Gift of the Philadelphia Department of Commerce, 1986

166. Emptying Bucket of Water, 1884–86,
from Animal Locomotion: An Electro-Photographic Investigation of Connective Phases of Animal Movements, 1887
Collotype
9 ¾ × 11 ½ in. (24.1 × 30 cm)
Gift of Mrs. Jane K. Murray, 1944
Unknown photographers

186 Arthur Cleveland, c. 1895
Tintype
4 × 3/4 in. (10.2 × 8.4 cm)
Gift of Richard Benson, 2008
(Departmental Collection)

187 Untitled, c. 1880
Tintype
4 × 3/8 in. (10.2 × 8.4 cm)
Gift of Ezra Mack, 1997

188 Untitled, 1870s
Tintype
3 ⅝ × 2 ⅛ in. (9.3 × 5.4 cm) (angled corners)
The Family of Man Fund, 2014

Pages from an album of mug shots, 1870s–80s
Albumen silver prints
Each: 3 ⅝ × 2 ⅛ in. (9.3 × 5.4 cm) (rounded corners)
Purchase, 1989

189 Pages from an album of mug shots, 1870s–80s
Albumen silver prints
Each: 3 ⅝ × 2 ⅛ in. (9.3 × 5.4 cm) (rounded corners)
Purchase, 1989
Edwin Hale Lincoln
American, 1848-1908
Figurehead of U.S.S. Frigate Niagara c. 1900
Platinum print
7 ¼ x 9 ¼ in. (18 x 23 cm)
John F. Gutfreund Fund, 1999

Charles Dudley Arnold
Canadian, 1844-1927
World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893
Platinum print
16 x 20 in. (40.6 x 50.8 cm)
Samuel I. Newhall Fund, 2005
Charles H. Currier
American, 1851–1938

Kitchen in the Vicinity of Boston, Massachusetts. 1901
Gelatin silver print
7 × 9 ¾ in. (17.8 × 24.8 cm)
Gift of Ernst Halberstadt, 1944

Clifton Johnson
American, 1865–1940

Barred Door, Rocky Hill Meeting House. c. 1910
Gelatin silver print
6 ¼ × 4 ¼ in. (15.9 × 10.7 cm)
Purchased, 1987

Henry Hamilton Bennett
American, born Canada, 1843–1908

Layton Art Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. c. 1890
Albumen silver print
17 3/4 × 21 3/4 in. (45.1 × 55.2 cm)
Gift of H.H. Bennett Studio, 1965
Frances Benjamin Johnston
American, 1864–1952

Agriculture, Mixing Fertilizer from The Hampton Album. 1899–1900
Platinum print
7 1/4 × 9 1/2 in. (18.4 × 24.2 cm)
Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1965

Stairway of the Treasurer’s Residence: Students at Work from The Hampton Album. 1899–1900
Platinum print
7 1/4 × 9 1/2 in. (18.4 × 24.2 cm)
Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1965
Frances Benjamin Johnston
American, 1864–1952

From The Hampton Album. 1899–1900
Platinum prints
Each: 7 1/4 × 9 in. (19 × 23 cm)
Gift of Lincoln Kirstein, 1966

Kindergarten Children Washing and Ironing
A Class in Dress-Making
Girls Basket Ball
Jacob August Riis
American, born Denmark, 1849–1914

Bandits’ Roost, 59½ Mulberry Street, 1888
Gelatin silver print, printed 1958
14 x 10 1/8 in. (35.5 x 25.7 cm)
Gift of the Museum of the City of New York, 1959

Willard Worden
American, 1873–1946

Early Morning Scene on Market Street, San Francisco. April 18, 1906
Gelatin silver print
7 5/8 x 9 5/8 in. (19.4 x 24.3 cm)
David H. McAlpin Fund, 1977

Brown Brothers
United States (active 1904–present)

Christmas Party Given by Jim Sullivan’s Political Club, New York. c. 1905
Gelatin silver print
6 1/8 x 9 7/8 in. (15.7 x 25.1 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001
Photographing from the Blackwell’s Island Bridge. 1907
Gelatin silver print
7 ⅞ × 9 ½ in. (20.1 × 15.2 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001

Above Fifth Avenue, Looking North. 1905
Gelatin silver print
9 ⅝ × 7 ⅞ in. (24.2 × 19.4 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001

Brooklyn Bridge, c. 1914
Gelatin silver print
7 × 9 ⅞ in. (18 × 25.4 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001

Maiden Lane, New York. 1905
Gelatin silver print
7 × 9 ⅞ in. (18 × 25.4 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001

Brown Brothers
United States (active 1904–present)

Unknown photographer
Lewis W. Hine
American, 1874–1940

Doffers, Willingham Cotton Mill
Macon, Georgia, January 1909
Gelatin silver print
4 × 3 3/8 in. (10.2 × 8.6 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001

Unknown photographer

L.S. Chandler, Suffragette c. 1910
Gelatin silver print
5 × 6 3/4 in. (12.7 × 17.1 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001
Lewis W. Hine
American, 1874–1940

210 Messenger Boy, Waco, Texas. September 1913
Gelatin silver print
4 ⅝ × 6 ⅝ in. (11.8 × 16.8 cm)
Stephen R. Currier Memorial Fund, 1970

211 Sadie Pfeifer, Cotton Mill Spinner. Lancaster, South Carolina. November 30, 1918
Gelatin silver print
7 ⅞ × 9 ⅞ in. (19.9 × 24.2 cm)
Purchase, 1974

212 Coalbreakers, Pittston, Pennsylvania. January 1911
Gelatin silver print
4 ⅞ × 6 ⅞ in. (12 × 17.1 cm)
Stephen R. Currier Memorial Fund, 1970

213 Coalbreakers, Pittston, Pennsylvania. January 1911
Gelatin silver print
4 ⅞ × 6 ⅞ in. (12 × 17.1 cm)
Gift of John C. Woodell, 1982
Jessie Tarbox Beals
American, born Canada, 1870–1942

Physically Defective Children, c. 1910
Gelatin silver print
7½ × 9⅛ in. (19.1 × 23.1 cm)
John Parkinson III Fund, 1998

John Runk
American, 1878–1964

Pine Boards and Frank Stenlund,
South Stillwater, Minnesota, 1912
Gelatin silver print, printed 1964
6¼ × 7⅛ in. (16.1 × 18.3 cm)
Courtesy the John Runk Photograph Collection,
Minnesota Historical Society, 1974 (Departmental Collection)
Unknown photographer

220  Untitled. 1900
Gelatin-silver print
3/4 x 7 1/2 in. (8.9 x 19.5 cm)
The Family of Man Fund, 2014

Arthur P. Bedou
American, 1882–1966

221  Booker T. Washington on Horseback. 1915
Gelatin-silver print
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (19 x 24.3 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Jill and Norman Korostoff in honor of Edythe Korostoff, 2011
Pach Brothers  
United States (active 1867–1947)

Yale Daily News Board. 1907  
Platinum print  
Image: 9 ⅞ x 7 ½ in. (25 x 19 cm)  
Gift of Richard Benson, 2008

H. William Tupper  
American, 1846–1911

The Graduating Class of Harvard College. 1905–06  
Platinum print  
11 ⅞ x 25 in. (30 x 64 cm)  
Gift of Richard Benson, 2008
Ernest J. Bellocq
American, 1873–1949

Untitled. c. 1912
Gelatin silver printing-out-paper print, printed by Lee Friedlander 1966–69
10 × 7 in. (25.4 × 17.8 cm)
Mr. and Mrs. John Spencer Fund, 1969

Untitled. c. 1912
Gelatin silver printing-out-paper print, printed by Lee Friedlander 1966–69
10 × 7 in. (25.4 × 17.8 cm)
Gift of Lee Friedlander, 1969
Unknown photographers

Love Field, Dallas, Texas. c. 1918
Gelatin silver print
2 1/8 x 3 3/8 in. (5.1 x 8 cm)
Gift of Jack Banning, 1997

Untitled. c. 1920
Gelatin silver print
2 1/8 x 3 3/8 in. (5.1 x 8 cm)
Gift of Thomas Walther, 2005

Untitled. c. 1900
Gelatin silver print
2 5/8 x 3 9/16 in. (7.2 x 9 cm)
Gift of Thomas Walther, 2005

Bathers at Lake George. c. 1918
Autochrome
6 3/4 x 4 3/4 in. (17.2 x 12 cm)
Gift of Richard and Barbara Benson, 2017

Untitled. c. 1920
Gelatin silver print
2 1/4 x 3 1/2 in. (5.7 x 8.9 cm)
Gift of Thomas Walther, 2005

Untitled. c. 1904–18
Gelatin silver print
6 x 2 1/2 in. (15.2 x 6.4 cm)
Gift of Thomas Walther, 2005
Charles Norman Sladen
American, 1858–1949

*Untitled from the album July 1913.*
1913
Gelatin silver prints, ink, and watercolor on paper
Overall: 11 ¹/₈ x 23 ¹/₂ in. (28.5 x 59 cm)

Purchased with funds from
The Richardson Foundation, 1989

*Untitled from the album July 1913.*
1913
Gelatin silver prints and ink on paper
Overall: 11 ¹/₈ x 23 ¹/₂ in. (28.5 x 59 cm)

Purchased with funds from
The Richardson Foundation, 1989
William H. Martin  
American, 1865–1940

A Load of Good Iowa Apples. 1909
Gelatin silver print
2 7/8 × 4 1/8 in. (7.3 × 10.6 cm)
Gift of Charles Isaacs in memory of John Szarkowski, 2007

Charles Schenk  
American, born Germany, 1845–1915

Untitled from Practical Poses for the Practical Artist. 1912
Gelatin silver print
Overall: 12 1/2 × 9 1/2 in. (32.6 × 24.5 cm)
Horace W. Goldsmith Fund through Robert B. Menschel, 1992
Unknown photographer

Untitled. c. 1910
Cyanotype (photogram)
20 ⅜ x ⅞ in. (51.9 x 21 cm)
John-Parkinson II Fund, 1997

Wilson A. Bentley
American, 1865–1931

Snowflake. c. 1905
Gelatin silver printing-out-paper print
Overall: 6 ⅝ x 5 ⅜ in. (16.8 x 13.6 cm)
Acquired in memory of John Parkinson III through the generosity of his friends, 2006

Yerkes Observatory

Halley’s Comet. 1910
Gelatin silver print
6 ⅝ x 8 ⅞ in. (16.8 x 22.4 cm)
The New York Times Collection, 2001
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Cover:
Charles Thurston Thompson
British, 1855–1939
English Mirror, c. 1730, from Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Forest, 1853
Albumen silver print, 9 1/8 x 6 7/8 in (231 x 170 cm)
Acquired through the generosity of Jon L. Stryker, 2014
See plate 17.
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