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Early Exposures: 19th-Century Photography from the Collection, March 13, 2015-July 19, 2015

Photographic images are ubiquitous in today's world, but in the 19th century, photography was not only new but awe-inspiring, even magical.

In the early 1800s, several entrepreneurs simultaneously began to test formulas for the best way to create and fix an enduring image on a sensitized surface through the action of light. The daguerreotype, developed by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in association with Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, was announced to the public in 1839. The daguerreotype process created unique images, capturing human likenesses—its primary use—with astonishing clarity and precision. The calotype followed, introduced to the public in 1841 by its inventor, William Henry Fox Talbot. The calotype process created characteristically soft images with an uneven tonal quality on paper. Talbot discovered he could develop the latent image after exposure, printing it to make a positive. The potential to create multiples generated even more interest around the medium. For the rest of the century, competition—technological, commercial, and artistic—as well as the demands of public taste transformed photography from a costly and cumbersome novelty into a seductive, ubiquitous medium for documentation and artistic expression.

Recalling debates dating to the Renaissance about the purpose of representation, a divide quickly sprang up between those who valued photography for its hard, linear perfection and those who appreciated its possibility for soft—even manipulated—visual effects. For many, photography's virtue was its faithful witness, recording the faces of loves ones, faraway places, and events as they unfolded. Others valued photography's potential for investigations that were as poetic and expressive as painting. The highlights of 19th-century photography on view in this gallery represent the broad array of technical processes and approaches to the medium before 1900.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

American
Portrait of Charles Leonard Pendleton, ca. 1861
Ambrotype with hand tinting
Gift of Fred Stewart Greene 04.1466

Charles Pendleton's service in the Civil War is suggested by the martial jacket and the stamped case, which reads The Union Now and Forever. Probably a mere 15 when this was taken, he gave his collection of American decorative arts, on view in the Pendleton House, to the RISD Museum in 1904.

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Leander Baker
American, 1841 - 1925
Monument Square (Exchange Place), from the series *Providence Views,* after 1873
Albumen print, stereograph
Gift of Alice K. Miles 1986.035.10

From *Providence Views*, a series published by the Providence-based photographer Leander Baker, these two stereographs show scenes in downtown Providence. The first image shows Exchange Place (now Kennedy Plaza), the Butler Exchange building, built in 1873, occupying the spot currently held by the Bank of America building. The other scene depicts the Providence Arcade, which still stands today between Westminster and Weybosset streets. Signs for Alden's Ferrotypes say the public may purchase photographs, ferrotypes/ambrotypes, porcelains, copied work, and crayons (drawings) within.

Anna Atkins
English, 1799-1871
Lastroea Foenisecii, ca. 1854
Cyanotype
Museum purchase 1986.155

Anna Atkins created this cyanotype of the hay-scented buckler fern, or *Lastroea Foenisecii*, by treating sensitized paper with a combination of iron salts that together produce a brilliant blue. To capture the image without a camera, Atkins placed the fern and label on the paper and exposed it to sunlight, then rinsed it to fix the image. As the image dried, the chemical mixture turned bright blue.

Atkins learned the cyanotype method from the astronomer and scientist Sir John Herschel, who invented the process in 1842. Recognizing photography's value for botanical documentation, Atkins was one of the first scientists to use light-sensitive materials for illustration. She printed many of her specimens in a series of encyclopedias on British ferns and algae.

Adolphe Braun
French, 1812-1877
Zermatt-Schwarzsee Region: Gorner and Breithorn Glacier, ca. 1875
Carbon print from glass negative
Gift of Christian Kempf 1997.15

After 1850, Adolphe Braun led a successful photographic firm that specialized in topographical views and reproductions of works of art. European scenic photography developed in relation to the commerce

of mass tourism, encouraged by railroads, which exposed once-isolated regions and created a new class of travel consumer. Braun's views of Alpine glaciers and Alsatian architecture both satisfied the demand for tourist souvenirs and provided a substitute for real travel. Prized for their precision and thus their seeming truthfulness, Braun's conventional views functioned to some extent like today's picture postcards.

Adolphe Braun
French, 1812-1877
Fruit Tree Blossoms, from *Photographs of Flowers (Fleurs Photographiées),* ca. 1854
Albumen silver print
Mary B. Jackson Fund 1997.20

Adolphe Braun, originally a textile designer from the Alsace region of France, left that field after the success of his photographic still-lifes. Braun's still-lifes, some 300 of them, were created to aid designers and artists who were interested in accurately rendering foliage and flowers on fabrics and furnishings.

In one of these studies, *Fruit Tree Blossoms*, Braun carefully arranged a bouquet so that the flowers face forward while the overall design remains spontaneous and natural. Braun's technical achievement—particularly the sharp contrast of the foliage against the neutral background—stood out among that of his contemporaries.

Gustave de Beaucorps
French, 1825-1906
Algerian Street Scene, ca. 1858-1860
Waxed-paper negative
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 1997.66

This capture of a ghostly ascending cobblestone alleyway was probably not intended to be seen in the negative, but rather printed in the positive. De Beaucorps was an amateur photographer who made many waxed-paper negatives on his travels through Algeria, likely the location of this image.

Waxed-paper negatives were the first practical way to make negatives outside the studio, because the paper could be prepared at home. Durable and lightweight, they were appreciated for the soft delicacy and transparency of the images they produced.

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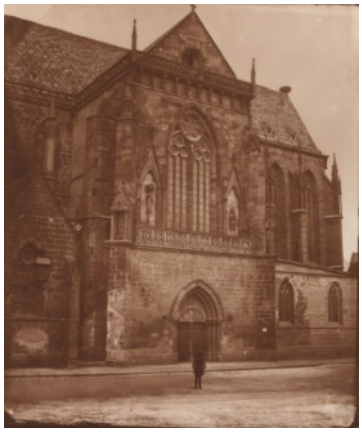

Adolphe Braun
French, 1812-1877
Saint Nicholas Portal of the St. Martin's Church, Colmar, from the *Album de l'Alsace,* 1859
Carbon print from glass negative
Gift of Christian Kempf 2000.28

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Robert Adamson
Scottish, 1821-1848
David Octavius Hill
Scottish, 1802-1870
Edinburgh Castle from Greyfriars, between 1843-47
Salt print from paper negative
Mary B. Jackson Fund 75.030

Just a few years after the calotype (paper negative) was introduced, Robert Adamson and David Octavius Hill made these sophisticated examples. They used the characteristically soft texture created by the calotype process to capture the fleeting nature of human life, a recurring theme in their work.

Thomas Annan
Scottish, 1829-1887
Close, no. 37, High Street, Old Glasgow, 1877
Carbon print from glass negative
Walter H. Kimball Fund 75.064

The dark conditions of this close, or narrow alleyway closed at one end, required the most light-sensitive method possible—the wet collodion process. Carrying chemicals with him, Thomas Annan coated the glass negative with photo-sensitive materials on site, capturing the exposure while the plate was still wet and developing it immediately after.

Photography played an important role in the late-19th-century urban renewal plans of many European cities, where the wide-scale

demolition of existing structures took place to accommodate new boulevards and buildings. Annan took the photograph as part of a project documenting the slums of Glasgow before their demolition by the Glasgow City Improvement Trust.

Linnaeus Tripe
English, 1822-1902
Tanjore, Great Pagoda, Great Bull as Viewed on Passing through the Last Gopurum, plate 10, 1858, from the album *Photographic Views in Tanjore and Trivady,* 1860
Albumen print from waxed paper negative
Mary B. Jackson Fund 77.024

The official photographer to the Madras government, Linnaeus Tripe documented much of south India. This photograph shows Nandi, sacred animal of the Hindu god Shiva, at the entrance to the Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur. Because of the bull's affiliation with fertility, it has been visited and anointed by pilgrims for hundreds of years, and Tripe's record emphasizes the smooth surface of the stone.

Tripe's interest in photography's descriptive and expressive possibilities is evident in this composition, which carefully considers the sightline while capturing the pattern of rich darks and lights made by the structure, the trees, and the shadows.

The photographic boom at the end of the 19th century reached the masses chiefly by way of portraiture. Case photography—unique photographs whose fragile surfaces were enclosed in velvet, metal, and glass within leather, rubber, or plastic cases—was the first type of portraiture most families owned.

Technological competition, including the drive to make photography more affordable to both makers and buyers, led to the invention of the succession of processes represented here.

Please note that dates refer to major use of the processes in the 19th century. Many of these processes were used by photographers well into the 20th century and are still employed today.

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David Octavius Hill
Scottish, 1802-1870
Robert Adamson
Scottish, 1821-1848
Elizabeth Rigby (Lady Eastlake), ca. 1845
Salt print from paper negative
Jesse Metcalf Fund 77.049

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The portrait of Elizabeth Rigby emphasizes the tension between a dark interior doorway and the natural outdoor light, with the sitter at the threshold. Rigby's downcast eyes and crucifix stand in contrast to the carousing *putti* at her right. Her averted eyes may have resulted from technical rather than artistic concerns, given the exposure time of up to 30 seconds.

Roger Fenton
English, 1819-1869
Still Life, 1860-1862
Albumen print from glass negative
Jesse Metcalf Fund 80.097

In this still-life, Roger Fenton emphasized tactile diversity, such as the shiny beads of the necklace, the smoothness of the embroidered Asian silk, the soft variety of the bouquet, and the hard carved marble of the funereal jewelry box. Sensorial and mysterious, he imbued it with a vanitas theme, aligned with his desire to claim photography as equal to or even surpassing painting.

The appointed photographer at the British Museum from 1854 to 1859, Fenton developed great skill photographing stationary objects of various sizes and materials. This image is part of a series of personal works he began in 1860 of objects arranged on marble or fabric.

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Antoine-Samuel Adam-Salomon
French, 1811 or 1818-1881
Self-Portrait, ca. 1865
Pigment print from glass negative
Jesse Metcalf Fund 81.075

Adam-Salomon used contrast in a way that came to be called "Rembrandt lighting" for its resemblance to the Dutch painter's dark manner. In this self-portrait, Adam-Salomon portrays himself as a deeply contemplative monk in a pose reminiscent of classical sculpture. Critic Alphonse de Lamartine wrote, "After admiring the portraits caught in a burst of sunlight by Adam-Salomon, the sensitive sculptor who has given up painting, we no longer claim that photography is a trade—it is an art, it is more than an art, it is a solar phenomenon, where the artist collaborates with the sun."

Gustave Le Gray
French, 1820-1882
Ships Leaving the Port of Le Havre, ca. 1856-1857
Albumen print from two glass negatives
Museum purchase: bequest of Lyra Brown Nickerson, by exchange
82.035

This seascape's dramatic effects are the product of Gustave Le Gray's stunning innovation in photographic technique. Previously, the proper exposure of both landscape and sky in a single picture was impossible to achieve, since photographic emulsions were not equally sensitive to all colors of the spectrum. Le Gray solved this problem by printing two negatives on a single sheet of paper, exposing the sea and the sky on separate occasions.

Le Gray was trained as a painter, and the silhouetted fleet of ships—the brigantines of the French fleet of Napoléon III— recalls the grace and majesty of painted Romantic seascapes.

Julia Margaret Cameron
English, 1815-1879
Louise Beatrice de Fonblanque, 1868
Albumen print from glass negative
Gift of Norman Bolotow and Tamara Belovitch and their Friends in honor of their marriage 82.063

Julia Margaret Cameron's innovative use of focus, the vaguely Renaissance costume, and the sitter's unfocused gaze suggest the subject's inner life. Such allegorical intonations were common in Cameron's work, particularly for her female sitters. She wrote: "My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to secure for it the

character and uses of High Art by combining the real and Ideal and sacrificing nothing of the Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and beauty."

Cameron took portraits of many of the English artists and intellectuals who made up her circle of close family friends. This example was made in a studio she briefly occupied at the South Kensington Museum, now the V&A.

Felix Bonfils
French, 1831-1885
Rue du Caire—Quartier Toulon 71, ca. 1870s
Albumen print from glass negative
Transfer from the RISD Library 84.054.40

Photographs bearing the name Félix Bonfils may have been taken by Bonfils or any number of staff photographers from the studio he founded in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1867. The Bonfils studio created albums of views, architecture, people, and works of art for an audience of travelers who journeyed to the Holy Land and other locales around the eastern Mediterranean. Such compendiums were perfect souvenirs.

Today, Bonfils's vast number of photographs of archaeological ruins and cities—such as this image of a street in the Toulon (or French) quarter of Cairo—are important sources of cultural and social history.

American
Portrait of a Man, mid 1800s
Daguerreotype
Gift of Mrs. Truman B. Pierce 17.125

Daguerreotypes (1839–1865) are unique images made with sensitized silver on a silver-coated copper plate. While the images can be difficult to see at some angles, the process was prized for its sharp detail.

Leander Baker
American, 1841 - 1925
Arcade, Providence, ca. 1870s
Albumen print, stereograph
Gift of Alice K. Miles 1986.035.12

From *Providence Views*, a series published by the Providence-based photographer Leander Baker, these two stereographs show scenes in downtown Providence. The first image shows Exchange Place (now Kennedy Plaza), the Butler Exchange building, built in 1873, occupying

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the spot currently held by the Bank of America building. The other scene depicts the Providence Arcade, which still stands today between Westminster and Weybosset streets. Signs for Alden's Ferrotypes say the public may purchase photographs, ferrotypes/ambrotypes, porcelains, copied work, and crayons (drawings) within.

Conly Studio
American, Boston, active late 19th century
Portrait of Cora Nash, late 1800s
Albumen print, cabinet card, from glass negative
Gift of John Carpenter 1986.148

In this cabinet-card portrait, the sitter, identified as Cora Nash, is bedecked from head to toe with photographic portraits of men, women, and children in small to large sizes. The photographs are strung across her body, shaped into a necklace and medallion, and fit onto a small bag in her hand. Ms. Nash is a walking advertisement for the potential of the photographic medium to capture—and advertise—identity.

W.H. Barstow Studio
American
Portrait of a Woman, mid 1800s
Ambrotype with hand tinting
Museum Collection 1988.056

Ambrotypes (1855–1865) are unique images made on glass plates and set against a dark ground. Though ambrotypes lack the brilliancy of daguerreotypes, they could be finished and delivered at the time of the sitting, which was an advantage over the daguerreotype.

American
Portrait of a deceased child, mid 1800s
Tintype with hand tinting
Anonymous gift 1988.075.3

Postmortem photography occurred with frequency until the early 20th century. This tintype of a deceased infant with cheeks colored rose would have been a cherished memento, made to comfort the grieving family.

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American
Portrait of Isabel Homer Pegram as a young girl, ca. 1850
Daguerreotype
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Waldo Newcomer 1999.44.15

Daguerreotypes (1839–1865) are unique images made with sensitized silver on a silver-coated copper plate. While the images can be difficult to see at some angles, the process was prized for its sharp detail.

André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri
French, 1819-1890
Portraits of two women, one with top hat, ca. 1860-1865
Albumen print, carte de visite, from glass negative
Gift of Judith Tannenbaum 2000.79

André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri patented the carte-de-visite method in 1854. This uncut example shows two women experimenting with pose and costume. Both women appear separately beside a column, but in three of the images the woman dressed as a man seems to engage in subtle flirtation with the other.

Various artists
Album of portraits, late 1800s
Molded and printed polymer and velvet bound album containing albumen and gelatin silver print cabinet cards
Gift of Mary Bergstein 2013.117

This album was made to accommodate cabinet cards. The majority of photographs taken in the album were made in Providence studios, as indicated by signatures on the back of each card. The owner of the album is likely the young woman shown here, at left, who appears in several poses, and at different stages of life, throughout the album. The exterior of the album features an early pliable thermoplastic with a printed design.

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Group portrait of athletes, ca. 1880s
Tintype
Gift of Frank G. Lesure 2014.75

Tintypes could be purchased in a simple paper cover. This grouping of athletes is typical of the casual nature and directness of many tintypes.

American
Portrait of a sleeping dog, mid 1800s
Daguerreotype
Museum Collection 46.069

Daguerreotypes (1839–1865) are unique images made with sensitized silver on a silver-coated copper plate. While the images can be difficult to see at some angles, the process was prized for its sharp detail.

American
Portrait of a woman, ca. 1860
Daguerreotype
Gift of Mrs. Frank A. Wightman 56.144.4

Daguerreotypes (1839–1865) are unique images made with sensitized silver on a silver-coated copper plate. While the images can be difficult to see at some angles, the process was prized for its sharp detail.

British
Alpine landscape with figures, ca. 1860
Pen and ink, graphite, and albumen prints on paper
Walter H. Kimball Fund 82.013

Creating photo collages was a popular 19th-century pastime, particularly for women from the British Isles, where photography was widespread and accessible. This alpine scene boasts a hand-drawn landscape—of some considerable skill—and the witty addition of collaged photographs of people and animals. A musical group brings and element of culture to the scene, while the prevalence of several

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dogs suggests the artist's affection for the animal. The combination of the apparent factuality of photography with a fictional, staged setting is uncanny as well as amusing.

American
Button with portrait of a young man, mid 1800s
Tintype with hand tinting
Gift of Christopher Monkhouse 83.190.2

Tintypes could be cut into any number of shapes, such as this button: a handy way to carry your loved one close to your heart.