

QAG



EVER PRESENT

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE
QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY
COLLECTION 1850-1975

GOMA



Garry Winogrand *Circle Line Statue of Liberty Ferry, New York 1971*, printed 1974

EVER PRESENT PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY COLLECTION 1850–1975

In the introduction to *The Pencil of Nature*, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–77) described the moment when the idea of 'photogenic drawing' occurred to him, as he was sitting sketching on the banks of Lake Como in Italy:

One of the first days of the month of October 1833, I was amusing myself on the lovely shores of the Lake of Como, in Italy, taking sketches with Wallaston's camera lucida, or rather I should say, attempting to take them, but with the smallest possible amount of success. For when the eye was removed from the prism — in which all looked beautiful — I found that the faithless pencil had only left traces on the paper melancholy to behold.¹

Although Talbot was using a camera lucida (light chamber) in this instance, it was his recollection of images seen in a camera obscura (dark chamber) that provided the impetus for his subsequent photographic experiments. An optical device invented in the seventeenth century as an aid for drafting, a camera obscura consisted of a wooden box fitted with a lens which projected an image that could be traced on paper. Frustrated by his inability to sketch accurately the scene before him, Talbot mused 'how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper!'²

In January 1839, less than six years after his revelatory moment at Lake Como, Talbot revolutionised the modern era's view of the world by revealing at London's Royal Institute that he had fixed — by light alone — a hazy image on paper of a rural English landscape. While Talbot was inventing paper photographs in England, in August that same year, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) revealed to the French Académie des Sciences in Paris that he had captured, with astonishing clarity, portraits on the mirror-like surface of a highly polished copper plate. And, in September 1839, just four weeks after the publication of Daguerre's process in France, the first daguerreotype was made in the United States. As Talbot recalled in the opening remarks to *The Pencil of Nature*, 'the term "Photography" is now so well known, that an explanation of it is perhaps superfluous'.³ The speed and veracity with which both amateur photographers and professional photographic studios appeared across the globe changed irreversibly how the world was perceived and recorded, and consequently ushered in a new artistic era.

By drawing on art works from the Queensland Art Gallery Collection, 'Ever Present' explores the development of the photographic image from its experimental foundations in the mid nineteenth century to the establishment of photography as a modern art form in the early to mid twentieth century. Reflecting the arbitrary nature of photography's beginnings, as well as the importance of early techniques for subsequent developments in the visual arts, the exhibition features works by unknown nineteenth-century practitioners alongside iconic images by some of the most eminent photographers of the twentieth century. Over the course of photography's first 125 years, photographers have recorded, documented, captured and creatively manipulated images of the world and, in doing so, a new visual repertoire — a 'common language' of photography — has come to pervade modern life.

The decades immediately following the invention of photography were marked by technical innovation and the rise of portraiture, the most popular and prolific genre of early photography. By the late 1840s, daguerreotype photography studios had opened in many sizeable cities around the world, while smaller towns were serviced by travelling photographers with covered wagons fitted out as mobile studios. Through portraiture, photography profoundly influenced the recorded histories of ordinary people. Of the millions of photographic portraits taken from the mid nineteenth century, the vast majority show subjects who, historically, would have left no visual record of their lives and whose identity is unknown beyond surviving photographs. But, as it had become possible to capture an 'exact likeness' of people in life, these ethereal images remain in existence — visible and present — long after death.

Within a decade of Talbot and Daguerre's inventions being made public they were superseded by a superior photographic process. Based on Talbot's paper photographs (calotype), but with the clarity of the daguerreotype, the collodion glass plate negative invented in 1848 by F Scott Archer (1813–57), and later published by him in 1851, produced a crystal-clear window on the world. Significantly, Archer's process also allowed for the printing of multiple images from one negative on specially prepared papers.



Julia Margaret Cameron *Portrait of Frances St John* c.1870

Though the equipment was still relatively cumbersome and complicated, photographers in Europe, America, Asia and Australia who were in possession of large, portable cameras took to travelling in order to photograph landscapes, architecture and people. Photography quickly became the most immediate means by which knowledge of the 'character' of other cultures and geographies was both gathered and disseminated — succeeding earlier painted and printed views. However, as the scientific and documentary application of photography widened, and photographers of European descent turned their attention to foreign subjects and indigenous groups, it became increasingly clear that the empirical nature of the photograph was not inherently objective. Depending on the point of view of the photographer, subjects could easily be depicted in romanticised or distorted ways. Photography therefore became a culturally inflected medium used for a variety of public and private purposes, not all of which were sympathetic to the subject. Playing an extraordinary role in the transformation of visual culture, photography significantly influenced society — documenting and effecting social change, as well as recording the progressive triumph of urbanisation, mechanisation and technology over nature.

By the end of the nineteenth century, photography's far-reaching implications for centuries of artistic tradition were just beginning to be realised. Pioneers like British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–79) began to grapple with the artistic potential of the medium, attempting to bring it within the service of art by drawing on the history of European painting and literature. Emerging in the late nineteenth century, pictorial photography favoured processes that allowed for soft grainy 'pictures', and often the extensive manipulation of the image post exposure for the purposes of artistic and aesthetic effect.

At the same time as the pictorialists were attempting to create unique artistic images, some also recognised the benefits of making multiple reproductions of an image from a single negative. This perhaps reflects the uncertainty of how to approach photography as an art form. Photographer, gallerist and founder of the New York pictorialist breakaway group Photo-Secession, Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) created beautiful photogravures from original negatives which were then published in his journal *Camera Work* (1903–17). *Camera Work* was disseminated widely and exerted considerable influence on international trends in modern art photography in the early twentieth century. In an important article for the American journal *Scribner's*, published in 1899, Stieglitz wrote:

About ten years ago the movement towards pictorial photography evolved itself out of the confusion in which photography had been born, and took a definite shape in which it could be pursued as such by those who loved art and sought some medium other than the brush or pencil through which to give expression to their ideas. Before that time pictorial photography, as the term was then understood, was looked upon as the bastard of science and art, hampered and held back by the one, denied and ridiculed by the other.⁴

While *Camera Work* was a vehicle for European and American Pictorialism, Stieglitz himself advocated 'straight' photography, where the artist's eye for composition and atmospheric effect took precedence over any post-exposure manipulation that might produce an aesthetic result. The pioneering development of the moving image steered photography away from the static pictorial domain and the creation of unique objects — the traditional focus of artistic practice — towards an ever-expanding future catering to the public appetite for increasingly realistic representations of the fast-moving world.

As the early decades of the twentieth century unfolded, photography was dominated by the gelatin silver print. Commercially available since the 1880s, gelatin silver paper remained in wide use until the invention of smaller, faster cameras, such as the pocket-sized 35mm Leica, released in 1925. What came to define photography creatively was not the capacity of the photographic image to emulate a painting, but its capacity to capture a moment in time, as French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004) explored in his 1952 monograph *The Decisive Moment*. According to Cartier-Bresson:

To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event as well as the precise organisation of forms which gave the event its proper expression.⁵

With small, portable cameras, photographers took to the streets to capture on film fleeting, temporal moments. The objective of these photographers was to make perfectly composed, undoctored images that recorded, in extraordinary detail, everyday and often arbitrary aspects of the modern world which appeared strangely beautiful, or surreal and disconcerting, when frozen in time. Seeking a 'real' image of the world, photographers aimed their lenses at people and places in a seemingly 'straight' manner, free from pictorial artifice and stylistic mannerisms. However, many were nonetheless painstakingly conscious of the way their photographs 'framed' and transformed their subjects.



Henri Cartier-Bresson *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris 1932*, printed 1991

This new approach profoundly influenced the development of documentary photography in the 1930s. In Germany, August Sander (1876–64) undertook a monumental project entitled *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, a series comprising some 540 portraits of the people of Germany, now regarded as a pioneer work of conceptual photographic art. In the United States, the Farm Security Administration, known as the FSA, commissioned photographers, including Walker Evans (1903–75), to document America's rural poor during the Depression, a project resulting in the influential 1938 exhibition and publication 'Walker Evans: American Photographs', at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Through Magnum Photos, the agency established in 1947 by Cartier-Bresson and his colleague Robert Capa (1913–54), the stature of photojournalism grew considerably. The work of such artist-photographers now bridged the previously separate worlds of documentary photography and fine art.

As a consequence of the accelerated tempo of life at the turn of the twentieth century, the representation of time and motion through space became a preoccupation for many artists. Realising that the camera gave them a unique vantage point, photographers attempted to capture the new dynamic of modernity, expressed through images of people and objects travelling at speed through space. Originating in Germany and Russia in the 1920s, a style known as *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) saw photographers employ a multitude of viewpoints to create images capturing new forms which were symbolic of modern patterns of movement, energy and altered perspectival space.

Conversely, photographers responded to the increased pace of life by attempting to slow it down or, indeed, metaphorically, to stop it all together. Photographers such as Edward Weston (1886–1958) invested an enormous amount of time painstakingly arranging compositions, which then required extended exposure times to create sharply focused, finely detailed and overtly formalist images. Drawn to the objectification of life in the modern era, photographers celebrated stillness, focusing their cameras on the formal properties of both animate and inanimate objects in an effort to evoke a sense of timelessness.

Since the invention of photography, the vibrant life of city streets has been a subject of intense interest, and in the 1940s and 1950s a particular type of photography emerged in New York. Drawing on the tradition of documentary realism — in which photography was used to foreground social and political issues — a new style of street photography developed that both encapsulated and critiqued contemporary urban American culture. Robert Frank (b.1924), influenced by his mentor Walker Evans, compiled a photographic essay in the form of *The Americans* (1958–59), which revealed the pervasiveness of consumer culture, individual freedom, racism, religion, politics and paranoia in 1950s America. Unlike Evans's carefully composed images, Frank's photographs were grainy and fragmented, intuitive and cinematic in effect.

In the 1960s, artists such as Diane Arbus (1923–71) increasingly liberated photography from the idea that its function was primarily instructive and analytical. Instead, the focus shifted to one of increasing subjectivity, reflecting an awareness of the prejudiced nature of the relationship between photographer and subject, as well as a complex understanding of personal and social identity. For many photographers in the 1970s, including Lee Friedlander (b.1934) and Garry Winogrand (1928–84), the complexity of contemporary urban culture became the backdrop for an art that abandoned any appeal to universal principles and sentimentality. Rather, their photography reflected an aesthetic that embraced irony and was characterised by cool emotional detachment. In an interview in 1982, Winogrand claimed:

I think that there isn't a photograph in the world that has a narrative ability. Any of them. They do not tell stories — they show you what something looks like. To a camera. The minute you relate this thing to what was photographed — it's a lie. It's two-dimensional. It's an illusion of literal description. The thing has to be complete within the frame, whether you have the narrative information or not. It has to be complete in the frame. It's a picture problem. It's part of what makes things interesting.⁶

While the validity of Winogrand's claim is undeniable, the fact remains, albeit ironically, that it is the ability of photography to evoke a narrative beyond the frame that makes the individual photograph compelling, and which continues to inspire creativity and debate. But, for Winogrand and for many artists working in the 1970s, photography — with its 100-year history — had now become fully integrated into the art world, and was therefore considered simply another tool for image creation.

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Walker Evans *Sidewalk and shopfront, New Orleans* 1935, printed 1971



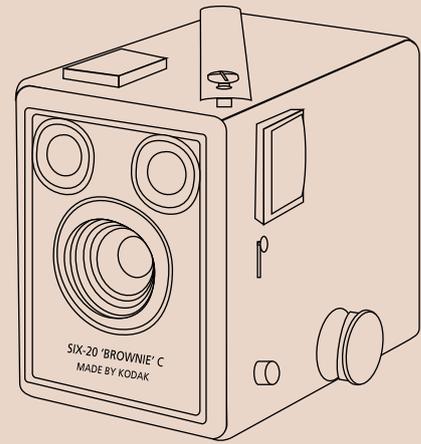
Robert Frank *St. Petersburg, Florida* 1955, printed 1979

ENDNOTES

- 1 *The Pencil of Nature*, written and illustrated with photographs by William Henry Fox Talbot was published in 1844–46 in London. William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, reproduced in Mike Weaver (ed.), *Henry Fox Talbot: Selected Texts and Bibliography*, Clío Press, Oxford, 1992, p.76.
- 2 Talbot, in Weaver, p.77.
- 3 Talbot, in Weaver, p.75.
- 4 Alfred Stieglitz, 'Pictorial photography', reproduced in Richard Whelan (ed.), *Stieglitz on Photography: His Selected Essays and Notes*, Aperture, New York, 2000, p.102.
- 5 Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1952, unpaginated.
- 6 ASX, *Interview: Garry Winogrand with Bill Moyers* [edited transcript], 1982, <<http://www.americansuburbx.com/2009/06/interview-garry-winogrand-excerpts-with.html>>, viewed 28 August 2013.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANALOG PHOTOGRAPHY

The word 'photography' is derived from the Greek words *photos* meaning 'light' and *graphein* meaning 'to draw'. It was first used by the scientist Sir John FW Herschel in 1840, and is a method of recording images by the action of light, or related radiation, on a sensitive material.



1816

Joseph Niépce captured the first photographic image using a camera obscura and the technique of heliography (sun drawing). The resulting image required eight hours of sun exposure and was not permanent. Niépce continued experimenting with this process until his death in 1833.

1839



John Moffat / Scotland 1819–94 / Portrait of William Henry Fox Talbot 1864 / Private collection / © Bianchetti/Leamage / The Bridgeman Art Library

William Henry Fox Talbot experimented with a photographic process called photogenic drawing, where a negative image was produced without the use of a camera.

In January, William Henry Fox Talbot invented the calotype, a process which, for the first time, allowed multiple copies of an image to be made from a paper negative. Images created by this process appeared mottled and sketchy as the

image was contained in the texture of the paper, rather than on top as a surface coating.

Named after its inventor Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, the daguerreotype — revealed to the French Académie des Sciences in August — was the result of a process whereby a highly polished silver-plated copper plate was made light sensitive with iodine and bromide vapour. After a long exposure time, the direct positive image was brought out by mercury vapour.

The first daguerreotypes were produced in the United States in September, indicating the rapid spread of photography throughout the world.

1842

Sir John FW Herschel invented the cyanotype when he discovered the light sensitivity of iron salts. The process was named after the brilliant cyan (blue) colour that was produced via oxidation as the image developed.

1848

The wet collodion process was invented by F Scott Archer. The process involved coating a glass plate with a collodion solution made from gun cotton (cotton soaked in nitric and sulphuric acid), which was dissolved in a mixture of alcohol, ether and potassium iodine. The glass plate was then exposed in a camera to create a negative

DID YOU KNOW?

Camera technology is based on the physical science of optics. Around 330BC, Greek philosopher Aristotle questioned how the sun could make a circular image when it shone through a square hole.

from which multiple prints could be made. The wet collodion process became widespread, quickly replacing the daguerreotype and the calotype, as the transparency of the glass plate negative produced greater detail in the resultant prints. Exposure times were also shorter.

1850

Invented by Louis-Désiré Blanquart-Evrard, the albumen print was the most common type of print in the nineteenth century. The process, which derived its name from the use of egg white (albumen) as a surface coating, produced prints with a greater clarity than had previously been achieved.

During the same year, Alphonse Louis Poitevin invented the collotype, which was the first process to use photolithographic printing, a process allowing large editions of accurate and detailed reproductions to be produced using glass plates as the printing surface.

1856

Patented by Hamilton Smith, tintypes were made from a negative and were a cheaper alternative to paper prints. Tintypes resulted from a process whereby a positive image was formed directly onto a sheet of metal using a variant of the collodion negative process.

1864

A photomechanical process called a woodburytype, whereby an image was formed using coloured gelatin rather than ink, was invented by Walter Bentley Woodbury and Joseph Wilson Swan. Tone was achieved through the application of thicker and thinner areas of gelatin, resulting in an image that was highly luminous, permanent and very true to life.

1870

Alphonse Louis Poitevin invented the carbon print process. As the photographs did not fade easily, the process was popular in the 1870s and 1880s for book illustration and for commercial editions of photographs.

1873

William Willis invented the platinum print. The process involved contact printing a negative on a sheet of paper coated with a light-sensitive solution of iron salts, including chloroplatinate which, when developed in a chemical solution, created an image in platinum metal. Producing prints with great tonal range, the technique was popular until the 1920s, when the price of platinum made the prints prohibitively expensive.

1879

With his invention of the grain gravure, Karel Klič improved the photogravure (also known as photo-etching or heliogravure), which was originally invented in the 1830s by William Henry Fox Talbot in England and Joseph Niépce in France. This process, which proved precise and economical, is still in use today.

1882

The introduction of commercially available papers coated with gelatin and containing light-sensitive silver salts (principally, silver bromide and silver chloride) revolutionised photography. Gelatin silver bromide papers were 'developing-out' papers, rather than 'printing-out' papers — after brief exposure under a negative, usually using an enlarger, the image was further developed in a chemical bath. The commercial availability of silver gelatin papers meant that photographers no longer needed to coat their own paper just prior to exposure. By the mid 1890s, gelatin silver prints replaced albumen prints as they were more stable, and simpler and quicker to produce. Until the advent of digital photography in the late twentieth century, gelatin silver prints remained in general use.

1880s

American entrepreneur and inventor George Eastman perfected the process for making dry plates (gelatin silver plates). He also developed the hand-held camera, which he called the Kodak camera, for which he invented a dry, transparent and flexible photographic film.

1892

Founded by George Eastman, the Eastman Kodak Company was one of the first companies to mass-produce photographic equipment and film, thereby encouraging amateur photography on a large scale.

1900

George Eastman released the 'Brownie' camera in February. Popular until the 1960s, the Brownie was an inexpensive, point-and-shoot, hand-held camera marketed for use by all ages.

1904

The autochrome was the first widely available process for creating colour photographs. The Lumière brothers (Auguste and Louis) invented the process, which used translucent microscopic granules of potato starch, dyed red, blue and green.

1925

Designed by German optical engineer Oskar Barnack, the Leica, a small, lightweight 35mm camera, was released. Because the Leica allowed you to get close to actual events, photographers began to tell stories in a more dynamic and truthful manner. Barnack had been developing the Leica since the early 1900s, but its public release was delayed due to World War One.

1936

Chromogenic printing, generally known as Type C printing was developed. Type C colour images are printed from a negative or transparency. This cheap process is still the most common and convenient of all colour processes.

1948

Edwin Herbert Land invented instant photography, the one-step process for developing and printing images. In November, the first Polaroid camera (and film) was sold to the general public.

1952

French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson coined the phrase 'the decisive moment' to describe the way a great photographer is able to capture in a fraction of a second a perfectly composed, spontaneous and undoctored image direct from life.

1963

Cibachrome prints were introduced and manufactured by the Ilford company. A dye destruction print method was used to create a high quality, vibrant and permanent colour image.

c.1970s

In the late 1960s, work began on the development of a process where a gridded mosaic of light-sensitive picture elements, called pixels, embedded on a computer chip could generate a digital image. By the mid 1980s, the first digital camera prototypes had been produced.

1975

An engineer at Eastman Kodak Company, Steven Sasson invented and built the world's first digital camera. The invention was rejected by the public who questioned why anyone would want to look at a photograph on a TV screen.

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Kodak camera advertisement, *Illustrated London News*, 16 September 1893 / Image courtesy: Oxford Science Archive/Heritage Images



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CAPTIONS

COVER: **Baron Raimund von Stillfried-Ratenicz** / Austria 1839–1911, active Japan 1871–1910 / *Young lady wearing hakama kimono* (from 'Japan' album) (detail) mid 1870s / Hand-coloured albumen photograph, laid down on board (originally bound in an album) / Purchased 2010 with funds from the Henry and Amanda Bartlett Trust through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

ABOVE: **Edward Weston** / United States 1886–1958 / *Dunes, Oceano* 1936, printed c.1990 / Gelatin silver photograph / 19.1 x 24.2cm / Purchased 1991 with funds from James Hardie Industries Limited through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Julia Margaret Cameron / England 1815–79 / *Portrait of Frances St John* c.1870 / Albumen photograph / 30.2 x 26.4cm / Gift of Miss Gwen Lord 1984

Henri Cartier-Bresson / France 1908–2004 / *Behind the Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris* 1932, printed 1991 / Gelatin silver photograph / 35.8 x 24cm / Purchased 1991 with funds from James Hardie Industries Limited through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Walker Evans / United States 1903–75 / *Sidewalk and shopfront, New Orleans* 1935, printed 1971 / Gelatin silver photograph / 24.2 x 19.1cm / Purchased 1996 with funds from ICI Australia Limited through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Robert Frank / Switzerland/United States b.1924 / *St. Petersburg, Florida* 1955, printed 1979 / Gelatin silver photograph / 20.2 x 30cm / Purchased 1996 with a special allocation from the Queensland Government. Celebrating the Queensland Art Gallery's Centenary 1895–1995 / © Robert Frank

Garry Winogrand / United States 1928–84 / *Circle Line Statue of Liberty Ferry, New York* 1971, printed 1974 / Gelatin silver photograph / 21.6 x 32.7cm / Purchased 1991 with funds from James Hardie Industries Limited through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / © The Estate of Garry Winogrand / Courtesy: Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco

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