

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

From the Victorians to the present day

Information and Activities for Secondary Teachers of Art and Photography

John French

Lord Snowdon,
vintage bromide print, 1957
NPG P809
© SNOWDON / Camera Press

Contents

Introduction	3
Discussion questions	4
 Wide Angle	
1. Technical beginnings and early photography	
Technical beginnings	5
Early photography	8
Portraits on light sensitive paper	11
The Carte-de-visite and the Album	17
2. Art and photography; the wider context	
Art and portrait photography	20
Photographic connections	27
Technical developments and publishing	32
 Zoom	
1. The photographic studio	36
2. Contemporary photographic techniques	53
3. Self image: Six pairs of photographic self-portraits	63

Augustus Edwin John; Constantin Brancusi; Frank Owen Dobson
Unknown photographer,
bromide press print, 1940s
NPG x20684

Introduction

This resource is for teachers of art and photography A and AS level, and it focuses principally on a selection of the photographic portraits from the Collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London which contains over a quarter of a million images. This resource aims to investigate the wealth of photographic portraiture and to examine closely the effect of painted portraits on the technique of photography invented in the nineteenth century.

This resource was developed by the Art Resource Developer in the Learning Department in the Gallery, working closely with staff who work with the Photographs Collection to produce a detailed and practical guide for working with these portraits. The material in this resource can be used in the classroom or in conjunction with a visit to the National Portrait Gallery and as follow up material post-visit.

There are two main parts to this teachers' resource, part one: WIDE ANGLE and part two: ART and PHOTOGRAPHY and a further three in-depth studies of specific aspects of the genre called ZOOM. All four sections can be downloaded separately.

All look at photographic portraits in depth and comprise:

- Reproductions of the portraits
- Contextual information
- Guidance in the understanding of the history of photography and its role in society
- Discussion points for students to examine portraits in detail
- Related activities
- Further related photographic web links

The contextual information provides background material for teachers that can inform the students' work as required. The discussion points give questions and introduce concepts for the teacher to ask a group or class – it may be necessary to pose additional supplementary questions to achieve the full depth of meaning. Students should pose their own questions, too. It is recommended that these discussions are carried out first when tackling a new portrait or photographic exhibition.

The historical and aesthetic information in this resource relates to the range and content specified in the requirements for the study of Photography at A level. Students should be encouraged to generate their own enquiry topics and make their own photographic portrait studies using the portraits in this resource, as well as attempting the projects suggested here. The activities in this resource provide opportunities to make links between photography and art. In both subjects, the focus is on the key concepts of creativity, cultural understanding and making.

Other activities link critical thinking about identities, how images relate to social, historical and cultural contexts and how ideas, feelings and meanings are conveyed through portrait photography and ultimately how they shape our history. All images are © National Portrait Gallery, London unless otherwise stated.

Questions about a portrait photograph

Use the following questions to help your group appreciate and analyse aspects of portrait photography:

- How big is the image?
- Is it in 'hard copy' or on 'screen'? (analogue or digital?)
- Is it in colour or black and white?
- Work out how the subject was lit; is there any strong directional lighting?
- Where from?
- Is there more than one person in the portrait?
- Is it a portrait showing the sitter's head, head and shoulders, are they seated or standing?
- Are their hands in view? How do they hold them?
- Does the subject look directly at the viewer or are they turned away or in profile?
- What sort of background is there?
- Is it an interior or exterior view?
- Is it an urban or a country setting?
- When do you think that the photograph was taken?
- Why do you think that the photograph was taken?
- What future purpose might it have?
- Is it worth anything? Financially or sentimentally?
- Could there be any other sorts of values attached to this photograph?
- Do you think that it took much time, money and energy to make?
- Do you think that the photographer needed to be creative to take the portrait?
- Do you like or dislike this portrait photograph? Where was the photographer positioned in relationship to the sitter?
- Focal point: what is the focus of this image? Is there more than one?



WIDE ANGLE 1.

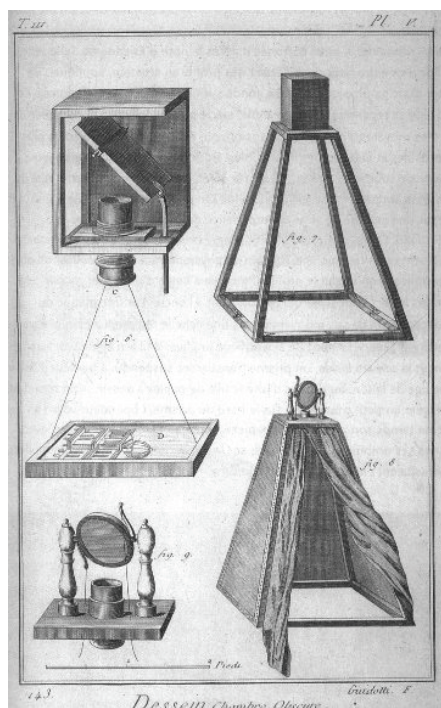
Technical beginnings and early photography

Technical beginnings

Camera obscura

From *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*,

Denis Diderot and
Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 1751
Wikimedia Commons



In the early twenty-first century we are so familiar with the photograph and other technically reproduced imagery, that to imagine a world without these visuals is hard. The invention of photography was such an astonishing achievement in the mid-nineteenth century that perhaps its only imaginable equivalent might be the invention of the internet.

Photography now relates to everything within society and art. In portraiture, the impact of photography is huge; the correlation between 'reality' and 'likeness' as perceived within the format of the photograph is undeniable. This combination of illusion and real life, guarantees its continuing success as a medium for this purpose, whether digital, moving or other lens-based methods of making portraits.

Although the invention of photography is dated at approximately 1839, it is more correct to date the fixing of an image at this time. The basic principles of the medium were known to the Chinese in the fourth century BC, and were first described outside China by the Arabian scholar Alhazen in around 1030. Alhazen was also responsible for working out perspective and the two are linked. It was, however, the chemistry that accompanied the camera obscura that was unknown. The camera obscura, from the latin camera = room, obscura = dark, is literally a darkened room. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camera_obscura

Technical beginnings

A completely darkened room with a small hole in one wall will produce an image on the wall opposite (try this and see). The image will be an inverted picture of what is outside. The bigger the hole, the brighter but more blurred the image. A pin hole camera works the same way.

The Italian, Daniele Barbaro (1513-70), suggested placing an elderly gentleman's spectacle lens (this is a biconvex lens prescribed for correcting long-sightedness), in the pinhole, in order to sharpen the focus of the image. (*La Practica della Perspectiva*, Barbaro, Venice, Italy. 1569.Ch.5.p.192)

A mirror correcting the inversion was demonstrated by Giovanni Battista Benedetti (1530-90) in 1585. He showed how the addition of a mirror at 45° to the plane of the lens would turn the previously inverted image the right way up. The clarity of the image then depends on the quality of the lens and mirror.

Even though the telescope was introduced in 1609, astronomers continued to use a camera obscura for solar observations because of the danger to their eyes when looking directly at the sun. Portable camera obscuras were introduced in the seventeenth century and became popular with artists as an aid to accurate perspective drawing.

Robert Boyle

John Chapman after Johann
Kerseboom,
stipple engraving, published, 1800
NPG D10729

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Technical beginnings

These portable camera obscuras were typically shaped like a pyramid with a mirror and lens at the top. Inside, the image was focused on a sheet of paper, and the artist could trace round the picture accurately. These tents, were consequently refined to the type of 'writing desk' style of equipment used by Robert Boyle, (1627-91), a chemist and natural philosopher, who in his tract, *Of the Systematicall and Cosmical Qualities of Things*, (Oxford, 1669), wrote about a portable box camera he had constructed. Having described how to make a piece of opaque paper transparent by greasing it, he goes on to recount the delights of such a box.

'If a pretty large box be so contrived that there may be towards one end of it a fine sheet of paper stretched like the leather of a drum head at a convenient distance from the remoter end, where there is to be left a hole covered with a lenticular [shaped like a lentil or lens] glass fitted for the purpose, you may, at a little hole left at the upper part of the box, see upon the paper such a lively representation not only of the motions but shapes and colours of outward objects as did not a little delight me when I furst caused this portable darkened room, if I may so call it, to be made ... since when divers ingenious men have tried to imitate mine (which you know was to be drawn out or shortened like a telescope, as occasion required) or improved the practice.

Activity

Discussion points



Imagine and discuss what it would be like to live in a world without photography.



Think up and list alternative ways of doing what this medium does for us.

Projects



Experiment with darkening a space and piercing a hole to replicate early camera obscuras.



Research the life and achievements of Robert Boyle (1627-91) and Alhazen (965-1039).

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Early Photography

In 1826, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833), made the first photograph, see <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions/permanent/wfp/>. His research was continued in 1839, by his then business partner, Louis-Jaques-Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851), see http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/dagu/hd_dagu.htm and independently by an English scientist, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-77).

Photography, one might argue, was invented by both Niépce and Fox Talbot when placing light-sensitive material onto the screen of a camera obscura. From then on, portable photographic camera obscuras evolved into the miniature precision instruments we now use to take our own pictures.

Daguerreotypes (named after Daguerre) were unique, small images made by the action of light on silver-based chemicals coating a silver copper plate. The marvel was the pin-sharp quality of the image; the disadvantage was the difficulty in reading the mirror-like polished surface, where the picture, using a direct positive, was literally reversed.

The first commercial daguerreotype studio in the world was opened by Richard Beard (1802/3-1885) in 1841, and 'daguerreotypomania' soon swept through Europe and America. See

<http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/history/beard.htm>

In 1849, 100,000 daguerreotype portraits were taken in Paris alone. At last, having a portrait made was no longer the prerogative of the very rich. For twelve years the daguerreotype remained supreme in the photographic studios of the world.

The daguerreotypes below measure 55x44mm (2 1/8x1 3/4 inches and 90x38mm (3 1/2x1 1/2 inches):

**George Francis Robert Harris,
3rd Baron Harris**
Richard Beard, daguerrotype, c.1840,
NPG P117

Maria Edgeworth
Richard Beard, daguerrotype, 1841
NPG P5

Early Photography

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Alessandri,
albumen carte-de-visite, 19 June 1860
NPG P1094

Robert Browning

Alessandri,
albumen carte-de-visite, March 1860
NPG P1093



The following quotation from a letter written by poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-63), gives us some idea of the impact of these small portraits:

'My dearest Miss Mitford, do you know anything about that wonderful invention of the day, called the Daguerreotype? – that is, have you seen any portraits produced by means of it? Think of a man sitting down in the sun and leaving his facsimile in all its full completion of outline and shadow, steadfast on a plate, at the end of a minute and a half! The Mesmeric disembodiment of spirits strikes me as a degree less marvellous. And several of these wonderful portraits ... take back like engravings – only exquisite and delicate beyond the work of the engraver – have I seen lately – longing to have such a memorial of every Being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is previous in such cases - but the association, and the sense of nearness involved in the thing ... the face of the very shadow of the person lying

there fixed for ever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think - and it is not at all monstrous in me to say what my brothers cry out against so vehemently ... that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest Artist's work ever produced.'

Stefan Richter, *The Art of the Daguerrotype*, p.5, 14, 15.
Viking, 1989.

Browning's image is reproduced using a later photographic development; the albumen carte-de-visite (literally translated as 'visiting card'). Taken on 19 June 1860, in Florence, she is seated next to her eleven-year-old-son who stands to her left. As was fashionable at the time, the boy wears his curly hair long. These small images relate to Elizabethan miniatures especially in the way that they were kept, often as love tokens. Their scale meant that they could be secreted either about the body (for example in a pocket or a locket) or kept in a drawer.

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Early Photography

Activity

Discussion points



Talk about the importance of scale in photography, from the photobooth miniature portrait to the billboard advertisement.



Discuss the purposes and merits of both. One is domestic and the other is commercial, how do these differences benefit from the dynamics of scale?

Projects



Choose a portrait image and using Photoshop (or similar), print this out in two different sizes.



Now take the same image and enlarge it using Rasterbator™ www.snapfiles.com/get/Rasterbator/html. Choose the image that you like best and work out how you could use it either privately or commercially.

Portraits on light sensitive paper

Unlike Daguerre's process that made unique pictures, W. H. Fox Talbot discovered a way for duplicates to be reproduced, he had invented the paper negative and his work was ultimately preferred to the unique daguerrotype. His invention provided the seeds of the modern photographic process, as the negative allowed for the production of multiple prints.

It was the astronomer Sir John Herschel, 1st Bt (1792-1871) who in the 1840s used the word photography in English, it was taken from the Greek 'photos' meaning light and 'graphein' meaning to draw. He was also the first to use the words 'negative' and 'positive' to describe Fox Talbot's two-stage process. He discovered that sodium thiosulphate (commonly known as hypo) was a more effective fixing agent than the sodium chloride (common salt) used by Talbot and Daguerre, thus further advancing photo-chemical technology.

Sir John Herschel, 1st Bt

Julia Margaret Cameron,
albumen print, 1867
NPG P201

Fox Talbot made his experiments at his home Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire see http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tlbt/hd_tlbt.htm. He used sensitive paper in a dry state which needed an exposure time of up to half an hour. He wrote the following with reference to the copying of engravings, in a paper presented to the Royal Institution entitled:

The Art of Photogenic Drawing

'If the picture so obtained is first preserved (i.e. fixed) so as to bear sunshine, it may be afterwards itself employed as an object to be copied, and by means of this second process the lights and shadows are brought back to their original disposition. In this way we have indeed to contend with the imperfections arising from two processes instead of one, but I believe this will be found merely a difficulty of manipulation. I purpose to employ this for the purpose more particularly of multiplying at small expense copies of rare or unique engravings.'

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Portraits on light sensitive paper

In other words, he had what we now know as a negative. Talbot's breakthrough came accidentally on 20/21 September 1840, re-using a batch of exposed paper (that had failed to produce a visible image), on re-sensitizing the paper (with gallo-nitrate of silver) the latent image appeared. This chemical had accelerated the process . . .

'I now had to watch it (the camera) for barely a minute or so. Portraits were now easily taken in moderate daylight, a condition essential to success.'

It took three minutes for the first portraits to be made in this way. Talbot patented this process on 8th February 1841, and called the result a calotype from the Greek kalos meaning beautiful. See <http://www.nls.uk/pencilsoflight/history.htm>.

The Scottish partnership of Hill and Adamson employed this method in 1843 to help document the 447 faces of all those to appear in the monumental (152cm x 345cm) painting, *'The first General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, signing the Act of Separation and the Deed of Demission'*, which took David Octavius Hill (1802-17) twenty-three years to paint. See <http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/specialcollections/collectionsa-z/hilladamson/hilladamsonbiographies/> and http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/hlad/hd_hlad.htm

David Octavius Hill

David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson,
calotype, c.1843
NPG P6(1)

Robert Adamson

David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson,
calotype, c.1843-1848
NPG P6(181)

 Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Portraits on light sensitive paper

Hill's painting includes the physicist Sir David Brewster (1781-1868), together with Robert Adamson (1821-48) with his camera and David Hill (1802-70) with sketchbook and pencil.

Sir David Brewster

David Octavius Hill and
Robert Adamson,
calotype, 1843
NPG P6(10)

**Study for... the first General
Assembly of the Free Church**

David Octavius Hill and
Robert Adamson,
calotype, 1843
NPG P6(105)

Portraits on light sensitive paper

Jeanie Wilson

David Octavius Hill, and Robert
Adamson,
calotype, 1843-1848
NPG P6(207)



Hill was the painter and Adamson the technician, together they produced photographic albums depicting fishing folk from Newhaven, near Leith Docks, Edinburgh. These provide the first photographic documentation of the working classes, and are a fascinating social record, for example see Jeanie Wilson.

 Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Portraits on light sensitive paper

The next improvement came from Frederick Scott Archer whose wet collodion process (March 1851) was faster and of better quality than any of its predecessors. It revolutionised commercial photography and became the dominant photographic process between 1851-80. It was used by amateur photographers such as Lewis Carroll (1832-98), Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79) and David Wilkie Wynfield (1837-87). Even though the photographer may not have made the 'exposures' themselves, these portraits are definitely 'self-styled' and so can perhaps be seen as self-reflections, in other words, self-portraits. The boost given to photography by the wet collodion process was enormous; in 1851, fifty-one photographers were registered in England; ten years later the number approached 3,000.

Lewis Carroll

Lewis Carroll,
albumen print, 2 June 1857
NPG P7(26)

**Julia Margaret Cameron with her
two children, Henry Herschel Hay
and Charles Hay**

Unknown photographer,
albumen print, c. 1860
NPG P148

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

Portraits on light sensitive paper

Marie Stillman (née Spartali)

Julia Margaret Cameron
albumen cabinet card, 1868
NPG x18051

David Wilkie Wynfield

David Wilkie Wynfield,
albumen print, 1860s
NPG P87

Activity

Discussion points



Cameron was aged forty-eight when she was given her first camera. Talk about how you think life must have been for a woman in 1863 with six children, and a husband twenty years her senior. Try to imagine how unusual she was as a pioneering photographer.



Discuss the importance of early photography in terms of social records.

Projects



Compare the photographs of Carroll and Wynfield. List their similarities. List the positive and negative aspects of working in a collaborative relationship. Work with a friend to produce a drawing and a photograph of the same person. Make notes about each portrait sitting and discuss the relative success of each work.



Find out more about the practical complexities of early photography, the hardware and the chemicals. Research recipes for mixing the basic chemicals to make black and white prints.

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

The Carte-de-visite and the Album

In 1854, André Disdéri patented the 'carte-de-visite' photograph: this was an image measuring approximately 90mm high by 65mm wide, mounted on sturdy card. With his method, multiple poses could be taken on the same negative. The invention sparked off a whole new craze, in 1859 Napoleon III had his own likeness published and issued to his troops. His cousin Julie Bonaparte wrote in her diary in 1856:

'It is the fashion to have your portrait made small in a hundred copies: it only costs fifty francs and it is very handy to give to your friends and to have their images constantly at hand.'

People collected the images and put them into special albums. Queen Victoria had a large collection of these photographic likenesses of famous individuals, and their popularity overshadowed the art of the miniature painters who until this time were still working successfully.

Prince Albert sat 'to a man who makes photographic likenesses' in March 1842, and both he and Queen Victoria were fascinated by photography. He was a keen photographer; having a darkroom constructed at Windsor Castle, and she was the first British monarch to be photographed. Perhaps the earliest example of this, combined with a public national event, was the opening ceremony of the Crystal Palace on 10 June 1854.

In 1861, John Jabez Edwin Mayall's carte-de-visite photographs of Queen Victoria (1819-1901) were sold to the general public for the first time.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha

John Jabez Edwin Mayall,
hand-coloured albumen carte-de-visite,
February 1861
NPG Ax46717

Queen Victoria and Princess Beatrice of Battenberg

Arthur James ('A.J.') Melhuish,
albumen cabinet card, 1879
NPG x76537

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

The Carte-de-visite and the Album

John Brown and Queen Victoria

W. & D. Downey,
albumen print, 1868
NPG P22(4)

Queen Victoria, John Brown and two of her Daughters

Edwin Landseer,
oil on canvas, 1886
The Royal Collection © 2011,
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Photography proved to be a useful aid to painting. The composition of Landseer's *Queen Victoria, John Brown and two of her Daughters* relies directly on a photograph taken by W. Bambridge (of Windsor), and was suggested to the artist for that purpose by the queen.

Landseer substitutes Osborne House as the background, to suit his re-interpretation of the photograph (in a kind of Victorian version of computer manipulated imagery). The image is very similar to that by W&D Downey, 1868, of Queen Victoria and John Brown. This carte-de-visite sold 13,000 copies.

Wide Angle 1. Technical beginnings and early photography

The Carte-de-visite and the Album

Activity

Discussion points



Why was there a craze for the carte-de-visite? What contemporary equivalents could you suggest?



What is the point of collecting images of famous people?

Projects



Using www.npg.org.uk/collections, see how many different photographic images of Queen Victoria (1819-1901) you can find. Compare her poses and the clothing she wears. Analyse how her attire changes after Prince Albert's death in 1861.



Investigate the backgrounds of the photographs. How often do they seem like constructed (fake) interiors? Are there any external backgrounds to be found? Make three small black and white photographs of your friends using a specially constructed interior background and then take another three outside. Which do you prefer?



WIDE ANGLE 2.

Art and photography; the wider context

Art and portrait photography

Isabella Mary Beeton (née Mayson)

Mauill & Polyblank,
hand-tinted albumen print, 1857
NPG P3

Commercial photographers Mauill and Polyblank produced a series of celebrity portraits, for example Isabella Mary Beeton (1836-65) the author of *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, (London, 1861). Her book was an essential guide to running a Victorian household. It included advice on many things including fashion, child-care, science and a large number of recipes. This image was the third photograph to join the National Portrait Gallery Collection and it conforms to a repetitively rigid formula reminiscent of eighteenth-century 'standard' portrait work, significantly different from the type of photographs produced by artists such as Cameron (1815-79) and Wynfield (1837-87). The latter, a member of the 'St John's Wood clique', a nineteenth-century painting group, produced photographic portraits inspired by Old Master and Italian Renaissance painting; sitters assumed appropriate poses and wore period costume.



Art and portrait photography

Sir John Everett Millais 1st Bt, as Dante

David Wilkie Wynfield,
albumen print, 1860s
NPG P79

See the web resource
Portraits in Disguise
[http://www.npg.org.uk/live/
eddisguise00.asp](http://www.npg.org.uk/live/eddisguise00.asp)



The artist Sir John Everett Millais, 1st Bt (1829-96) poses in costume as the Italian poet Dante, he wears a laurel wreath, a traditional symbol for the Renaissance poet. Wilkie Wynfield's portraits inspired Julia Margaret Cameron, who was given her first camera in her forties and practised the art for only twelve years, producing remarkable portraits. Her full-face unfocused

portrait heads acknowledge Wynfield's artistic influence. In a letter to William Michael Rossetti dated 23 January 1866 she wrote about his inspirational work, 'to my feeling about his beautiful photography I owed all my attempts and indeed consequently all my success'.

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Art and portrait photography

The poet Alfred Tennyson, 1st Baron Tennyson (1809-92) was her neighbour in Freshwater, Isle of Wight, and consequently Cameron had access to his famous visitors for her photographic subjects. She made portraits of Alfred Tennyson, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), Charles Darwin (1809-82), Anthony Trollope (1815-82) and Alice Liddell (1852-1934) who was the inspiration for Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

G.F. Watts wrote: 'I wish I could paint such a picture as this', on the mount of her 1872 portrait of Florence Fisher and he signed his name in approval. See <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/about/primary-collection/documents-relating-to-primary-collection-works/victorian-portraits/gf-watts-selected-letters.php>.

Thomas Carlyle (left)

Julia Margaret Cameron,
albumen print, 1867
NPG P122

Thomas Carlyle (right)

G.F. Watts,
oil on canvas, 1868
NPG 1002

Charles Robert Darwin (left)

John Collier,
oil on canvas, 1883
NPG 1024

Charles Robert Darwin (right)

Julia Margaret Cameron,
albumen print, 1868
NPG P8

 Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Art and portrait photography

Alice Liddell

Lewis Carroll,
albumen print, July 1860
NPG P991(8)

Alice Liddell

Julia Margaret Cameron,
albumen print
NPG P988



When Lewis Carroll met Mrs Cameron, he noted wryly, 'In the evening Mrs Cameron and I had a mutual exhibition of photographs. Hers are all taken purposefully out of focus - some are very picturesque - some merely hideous - however, she talks of them as if they were triumphs of art.' Morton N. Cohen, ed., with the assistance of Roger L. Green, *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) No.66

Cameron stated her ambitions in the following way; 'My aspirations are to ennoble photography and to secure for it the character and uses of High Art'. She was writing to Sir William Herschel on 31 December 1864, her letter is now in the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, Bradford.

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Art and portrait photography

Miniature painting might have died with the birth of the camera, but portrait painting was enhanced, with G.F. Watts making good use of the invention. Writing to Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, 2nd Bt (1843-1911) in 1873, he said, of photographs: 'They help to make me acquainted with the peculiarities and shorten the sittings necessary'.

Cecil John Rhodes, (1853-1902), an imperialist who shaped the economic and political development of South Africa also sat for Watts's 'Hall of Fame' (all fifty-nine paintings from this series were bequeathed to the National Portrait Gallery) wrote to him on 12th May 1898, saying: 'I have sent photographs to your house, so that you can begin on Tuesday without me.' It would be wrong, however, to assume that Watts was utterly reliant on photography for his portrait painting. Photographs were used as a convenient tool and aide-memoir.

George Frederic Watts

Edward Steichen,
photogravure, 1903
NPG P168
Permission Joanna T. Steichen

George Frederic Watts

George Frederic Watts,
oil on canvas, c.1879
NPG 1406



Art and portrait photography

Auguste Rodin

Alvin Langdon Coburn,
photogravure, 21 April 1906
NPG Ax7776
© reserved



G.F. Watts, the great portrait painter, championed the renowned American photographer, Edward Steichen (1879-1973). The result of their meeting is an interesting point of contact between two cultural icons who worked in different media, and came from different generations. Steichen also photographed the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) see http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rodn/ho_55.635.9.htm who made this comment in the magazine *Camera Work*, in October 1908. 'I believe that photography can create works of art, but hitherto it has been extraordinarily bourgeois and babbling . . . I consider Steichen a very good artist, and the leading, the greatest photographer of our time. Before him, nothing conclusive had been achieved.' In New York, Steichen was part of an American

movement led by Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946). The aim was the furthering of the genre of pictorial photography, making exhibitions and publishing the reproductions in *Camera Work* (first published 1902), where photography was featured equally alongside the disciplines of painting and sculpture. Alvin Langdon Coburn had this to say about the subject: 'When I began my career photography was hardly considered an art, or a photographer an artist. It had its own battle to fight and win, but it was to achieve victory by virtue of its own merits, by the unique subtlety of its tonal range and its capacity to explore and exploit the infinite gradations of luminosity, rather than by imitating the technique of the draughtsman.'

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Art and portrait photography

Virginia Woolf's great aunt was Julia Margaret Cameron. Woolf was an enthusiastic photographer and developed her own photographs as a teenager, and in later life used photographs to help with her writing.

Virginia Woolf (née Stephen)

George Charles Beresford
platinum print, July 1902
NPG P221

Activity

Discussion points



Talk about whether it is useful to have strong criticism of one's own artwork, can this be beneficial? Or is it destructive?



How much influence did painting have on photography and vice-versa, in Victorian times and does it have any today?

Projects



Find out about different photographic methods for reproducing images. See how many you can discover. Find examples of hand-coloured prints.



Find examples of paintings and photographs of the same person. Decide which method you think is best for making portraits. Find a three-quarter length original photograph you like of someone you admire and make a painting of them inspired by the photograph.

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Photographic connections

William Powell Frith (1819-1909) certainly used photographs to help him with his 1858, elaborate documentary painting entitled, *Derby Day*, a complex and exciting view of the grandstand and other activities at the races. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?workid=4672>

John Ruskin (1819-1900) described the work as 'a kind of cross between John Leech and Wilkie, with a dash of daguerreotype here and there, and some pretty seasoning with Dickens' sentiment.' John Ruskin, *Academy Notes*, 1858, No.128, pp.137-8

William Powell Frith with model

William Powell Frith,
oil on canvas, 1867
NPG 1738

William Bell Scott, John Ruskin & Dante Gabriel Rossetti

William Downey, for W.& D.Downey,
albumen cabinet card, 29 June 1863
NPG x128797

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Photographic connections

William Powell Frith (1819-1909) should not be confused with the photographer Francis Frith (1822-98) who made three expeditions to the Middle East and whose company published nine volumes documenting his journeys. Frith's portable darkroom and equipment weighed 120 pounds and could be carried on his back. see <http://www.francisfrith.com/>.

Francis Frith

Francis Frith,
albumen print on paper, 1857
NPG x13682

Agnews, the publishers, were patrons of another dynamic photographer, Roger Fenton (1819-69). They encouraged him to make a photographic history documenting the Crimean War in 1855, making him a first war photographer. Fenton also spent time documenting the collection at the British Museum.

Roger Fenton

Hugh Welch Diamond,
photogalvanograph, 1868
NPG P226



Photographic connections

Early photographic portraits relied heavily on the conventions of the painted portrait. Victorian artists commonly used pillars and swathes of drapery to enhance the backgrounds of their photographs. In addition to these traditional backdrops, appropriate symbols of wealth or signs of the person's occupation would be included. It was this type of conventional, and sometimes rather turgid photographic portrait practice, that was the hallmark of studios such as that of Maull and Polyblank.

Sir Samuel White Baker

Maull & Co.,
albumen carte-de-visite, 1860s
NPG x369

Unknown woman

Maull & Polyblank,
albumen print, c.1855
NPG P106(20)



Photographic connections

Isambard Kingdom Brunel

John Callcott Horsley,
oil on canvas, 1857
NPG 979

Isambard Kingdom Brunel

Robert Howlett,
albumen print, 1857
NPG P112



These portraits of the great engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel illustrate the widening gap that begins to occur between conventional and more documentary portraits taken by photographers who moved their equipment out of the studios and on location.

The painting by John Callcott Horsley, 1857, reflects a serious, pensive, posed Brunel, working at his desk.

The photograph by Howlett, taken in the same year, is an astonishing record of a man caught briefly resting during the launching of the ship, *Great Eastern*, one of the most momentous occasions of his life. This ship was constructed on the Thames from 1854 and finally launched in 1858; it was five times the size of any other contemporary ship under construction, was revolutionary in design and construction, and was used to lay the first successful transatlantic telegraph cable in 1866. Brunel stands nonchalant, in a relaxed pose with his weight on one leg. He wears muddy boots and trousers, has

his hands in his pockets and a cigar in his mouth (he was an avid smoker), his gaze is determined and his stance solid.

What differentiates this photograph from many taken at that time, and puts it into a new context for photographic portraiture, is the juxtaposition of the man and the huge chains that fill up the background. In this surreal way, the man is literally dwarfed by the trappings of his own creation. Implicit in this portrait is the idea of the lone man controlling huge steam ships, and simultaneously being overwhelmed by their inanimate mass.

The photograph was later cropped and used (both head and shoulders and in full length) as a carte-de-visite. Within two years of the photograph being taken Brunel was dead, and thus the background chains became a symbol of his life's achievement and simultaneously perhaps the things that dragged him down. In turn this image became an icon celebrating Victorian engineering.

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Photographic connections

Activity

Discussion points



Find other works by William Powell Frith and discuss how you think he might have put these works together. Why do you think he wanted to make paintings when he could have simply taken a photograph of the scenes?



Look at different kinds of war photography and discuss how this genre (type) of photography has changed over the years.

Projects



Make a collage using magazine photographs. Make three distinct sections of clusters of more than three people. Connect the clusters so that you construct a workable composition. Scan the collage and heighten colours in some areas.



Take a portrait of someone with a particular hobby or job. Select something that symbolises their profession. Using Photoshop, or another similar programme, enlarge this (in the manner of the Brunel portrait), and use the enlargement as the background to your sitter.

Technical developments and publishing

In the early twentieth century various aspects of photographic usage became common. Photographic documentation of different subjects for different reasons, whether political or commercial, became more widely spread.

The process of photography influenced the worlds of medicine, education, science and individual family histories. In 1888, the Kodak No.1, a small box-type camera was introduced onto the market. This camera took circular pictures, 2 and 3/4 inches in diameter and was a popular accoutrement for wealthy men and women. Soon other box cameras became widely available. See http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/kodk/hd_kodk.htm

These small cameras enabled photographers to leave the studio more easily, producing more informal images outdoors. The cameras, film and developing were relatively cheap, and taking pictures was more simple with such equipment. This all resulted in the democratisation of photography.

Lady Ottoline Morrell

Baron de Meyer
half-plate autochrome, c.1907
NPG P1099

Lady Ottoline Morrell

'Mummy blown away'
possibly by Lady Ottoline Morrell
vintage snapshot print, c.1923
NPG Ax141605

Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873-1938), a leading patron of the arts, was a keen photographer and the National Portrait Gallery possesses twelve of her snapshot albums. The image on the right shows her with her camera. By contrast the picture by the early fashion photographer Baron de Meyer, taken indoors, is consciously posed, in colour and has an impressionistic style. The autochrome process used glass negatives whereas the snapshots taken by Lady Ottoline Morrell would have been on a type of acetate negative. Stieglitz published De Meyer's work in *Camera Work* in 1908.

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Technical developments and publishing

Princess Monchsa by Emil Otto ('E.O.') Hoppé

photogravure, c.1920

NPG Ax132956

© 2010 E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection /
Curatorial Assistance Inc.

Harriet Cohen

unknown photographer

snapshot print, 1930s

NPG x39410



In 1903 the British newspaper the *Daily Mirror* was the first daily paper to be illustrated solely with photographs, thus heralding the profession of photojournalism. The painter Walter Sickert used photographic press imagery to inform his work. He stated in the 1890s that demanding more than one sitting for a portrait, when photographs were available, was 'sheer sadism'. Wendy Baron has suggested the following as his probable portrait method: 'The sitter came to Sickert's

studio. Sickert painted the rough outline of his likeness and form onto the canvas, in what seemed to him a characteristic pose. He then had the sitter photographed in the same pose and worked thereafter from the photograph.' (Sickert, Phaidon, 1973). For more information about Sickert's use of photography. See page 8/14 in this resource:

http://www.npg.org.uk/assets/files/pdf/teachers-notes/NPGTeachersNotes_GerhardRichter.pdf



Technical developments and publishing

In 1913, Dr Oskar Barnack produced the 'Leica', the first simple-to-use small format 35mm camera. By 1925, these were being mass-produced from a factory owned by Leitz in Germany. This was followed in 1929 by the 'Rolleiflex'. A similar camera called a 'Mamiyaflex', appears in a 1960s self-portrait by Ida Kar (see Zoom 1). These technical developments affected visual culture as they had done in the nineteenth century, and the reproduced photographic image flourished. Photographic imagery began to be reproduced in printed publications, this also affected the visual culture and social communications of the time. In 1929, reportage photographs were published in the *Illustrated London News*, where previously the illustrations had been line engravings. The first issue of *Life* magazine, New York, appeared in 1937, *Look*, arrived in 1937, followed by London's *Picture Post* in 1938 - all were photographic image-based publications.

Sir Jacob Epstein (left)

Emil Otto ('E.O.') Hoppé,
modern print on sepia-toned Veribrom
paper, 1911
NPG x132916

King George V, published by *Illustrated London News* (right)

after Emil Otto ('E.O.') Hoppé
gravure printed in colours,
published 26 November 1928 (1921)
NPG D34017

Anna Pavlova (bottom left)

Lafayette (Lafayette Ltd),
whole-plate glass negative, August 1927
NPG x49320

Florence Mills in 'Dover Street to Dixie' at the London Pavilion (bottom right)

Bassano,
vintage print, 1923
NPG x85305

These six portraits, taken in the early twentieth century, are good examples of the breadth and diversity of this developing medium. Indoors or outdoors, thoughtfully posed or playfully and artfully directed, the photographic portrait was here to stay.

Since then, the plethora of photographs has overwhelmed our visual vocabulary, mesmerising us with this 'second-hand' way of seeing. From the still camera, film was developed, then television, video, DVDs, the internet and other digital means of interpreting and reinterpreting our world in pictures.

Wide Angle 2. Art and photography; the wider context

Technical developments and publishing

Activity

Discussion points



How many different types of photographs could be taken once the restrictions of the bulky camera were diminished and the hand-held 'Box Brownie' arrived?



Talk about the way that family portraits changed once every family owned their own camera. How does knowing someone intimately change the type of portrait you make of them?

Projects



Take some portraits that show evidence of specific weather conditions. For example: wind, rain or very bright sunshine.



Design a newspaper front page, either local news or national. Invent stories and stage photographs that describe the events in the headlines. For example: 'Allotment news – Jennifer's giant marrow wins competition' or 'Oil prices soar worldwide'.

Further useful weblinks

www.npg.org.uk/collections/explore/glossary-of-art-terms1/glossary-of-art-terms-a.php

www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/Collection/Photography

www.vam.ac.uk/collections/photography/index

www.photonet.org.uk/index.php?pid=199

<http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/>

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tlbt/hd_tlbt.htm

www.hrc.utexas.edu