# DAGUERREOTYPE *journal*

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*Special Issue*

Sharing the International Cultural and Visual Heritage of Daguerreotypes

KEN JACOBSON
John Ruskin's Lost Daguerreotypes

STEFFEN SIEGEL
Daguerre in the City

JEREMY ROWE
Musings on Scenic Daguerreotypes

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In the Footsteps of John Ruskin

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**KEN JACOBSON** has a Ph.D. in Biophysics from King's College, London and despite having no formal training in photography he has collected extensively and conducted research in the field for 45 years, writing books on 19th century artist's studies, the seascapes of Gustave Le Gray and 'Orientalist Photography'. Together with his wife, Jenny, he has recently co-authored a book about the photography of John Ruskin.

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**JEREMY ROWE** collects, researches and writes about 19th and early 20th century photography, with an emphasis on Arizona, the Far West and early photographic history. He is currently President of the Daguerreian Society, a member of the Board of the Ephemera Society of America, and a Senior Research Scientist at New York University. Jeremy manages the *Vintagephoto.com* website.

**CHRISTOPHE MAURON** studied humanities at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). Since 2002 he has worked as a curator at the Gruérien Museum of Bulle, as the head of the photographic collections. In collaboration with various authors he has organized several exhibitions and publications, including *Miroirs d'argent - Daguerréotypes de Girault de Prangey* (2008) and *Fous de couleur. Autochromes, les premières photographies couleur de Suisse* (2015).

**MARGARET CALVARIN** was the director of the *Maison Louis Braille* until 2008. She is now the curator of the Adrien Mentienne museum and the director of the historical heritage of the town of Bry-sur-Marne. From 1996 to 2013 she supervised the restoration of the diorama of Daguerre, and she initiated the cultural and scientific project regarding the home of Daguerre in Bry-sur-Marne. She conceived and organized the first international exhibition of contemporary daguerreotypes *Héritages de Daguerre*, which was held at Bry-sur-Marne in 2009.

**BENIAMINO TERRANEO** studied photographic and darkroom techniques with various well-known masters and he later specialised in 19th century processes. In 1980 he opened a workshop specialised in Fine-Art printing in Milan and since then he has worked for several world-famous photographers such as Helmut Newton, Fabrizio Ferri, Albert Watson, and James Whitlow Delano. Terraneo's work has been widely exhibited in Italy and abroad and has been published in several art books. In 2012 his work *Hors Seriés n.13* in the *Réponses Photo* competition was awarded second prize in the category for the best 21st century photographs. He is currently producing images using both the daguerreotype and collodion processes, including a series of daguerreotypes of Venice intitled *In the Footsteps of Ruskin.*

# Outside the Studio
# Landscape and Cityscape Daguerreotypes
## *The First Symposium of the European Daguerreotype Association*

by SANDRA MARIA PETRILLO

*"Outside the Studio. Landscape and Cityscape Daguerreotypes" is the first international symposium organized by the European Daguerreotype Association. We have decided to dedicate a special printed issue of the magazine to this event, including essays written by the scholars and experts who have been invited to the symposium to speak about the fascinating topic of daguerreotype images of urban or natural landscapes. These unique and precious daguerreotypes that were taken 'en plein air' provide us with a fascinating insight into the attitudes of the artists, scientists, entrepreneurs and amateurs who adopted this process as a radical new means of creative expression, or for documenting their lives and activities.*

*The EDA and Daguerreobase would like to thank all the authors for their precious contributions, and we wish to take this opportunity to point out that we intend to organize further cultural initiatives and events for our members, including conferences, workshops and excursions to an European location with a particular relevance to the history of the daguerreotype.*

***Ill. 1,*** L.J.M.Daguerre,The Royal Palace, 1840 by J.L.M Daguerre © National Technical Museum, Czech Republic

***Ill. 2,*** Unidentified daguerreotypist. Village scene, South of France (?), ca. 1850-53. Stereo daguerreotype

KEN JACOBSON

# Carrying Off the Palaces: John Ruskin's Lost Daguerreotypes

*Ill.1*, John Ruskin and an unidentified professional daguerreotypist. Rouen. The Cathedral of Notre-Dame. North transept door. Detail of bas-relief, ca.1848. Quarter-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

*ABSTRACT*

The discovery of a previously unknown collection of daguerreotypes belonging to John Ruskin has led to a re-evaluation of Ruskin's relationship with photography. Despite negative sentiments regarding the camera, Ruskin never stopped using the medium and his daguerreotypes clearly influenced the style of his watercolours. His daguerreotypes range from intricate architectural details in Venice to semi-abstract geological studies in Switzerland and these compositions often seem to reflect his state of mind. The high quality and unorthodox style of Ruskin's daguerreotypes will come as a revelation to many photographic historians.

by KEN JACOBSON, *Photographic historian, collector and dealer (K & J Jacobson), UK*

John Ruskin's many ventures, including writing, drawing, architectural preservation and photography, were all suffused with a measure of raging intensity that some of us may find difficult to grasp today. Such undertakings were frankly more important to him than, for example, maintaining his marriage. In a letter dating to 1854 he compares the recent separation from his wife with an amputation:

"*of course it is disagreeable at first to go about with the wooden leg, particularly considering how people stare - But my real griefs are about other matters.*
*I could get another wife, if I wanted one, but I cannot get back the north transept of Rouen Cathedral.*"

But in 1848 Ruskin did in a sense manage to preserve parts of the North Transept of Rouen Cathedral. He spent a portion of his delayed honeymoon trying to pull stonemasons off their scaffolding as he thought they were ruining the cathedral with their insensitive restorations. He commissioned some daguerreotypes to preserve parts of the church for posterity. In Ill. 1 is an extreme close-up of the intricate detail on the register to the right of the cathedral doors on the north facade.

My wife and co-author Jenny and I have spent the last nine years living in Ruskin's shoes and they have proved to be the most exhilarating footwear imaginable if not always the most comfortable. Ruskin was not an easy man to study. His perceptions on a topic photography were gleaned from myriad other disciplines and he then leavened the concoction with his celebrated mental agility. Once he had arrived at a satisfactory interpretation, he usually proceeded to change his mind. Ruskin's observations may not have always coalesced into a neat philosophy but taken one by one they were inevitably compelling. So we must not complain. Like seals at the zoo, we cannot be particular as to whether we receive herring one day and mackerel or cod the next, but must be grateful for a never-ending supply of fresh fish.

Our study of Mr. Ruskin was a case of happenstance. An auction catalogue enticed us to the Lake District in 2006, where adjacent to a large livestock auction, we examined the contents of a battered mahogany box at a small general antiques saleroom. The saleroom regarded the contents as being of minimal value and described them as 'old photographs on metal'. Inside the box we discovered a remarkable trove of 188 daguerreotype scenes. Furthermore, it transpired they all once belonged to John Ruskin; many were indeed taken by him. Nobody had known that these Ruskin views still survived. Later we discovered that the box was something Ruskin kept close at hand in his Brantwood study, finding the daguerreotypes useful to his work even 30 years after they were made.

Suddenly, even leaving the important Ruskin connection aside, we found ourselves owners of the largest collection of daguerreotype views of Venice in the world. After a long and skilful five-year conservation programme, many of the daguerreotype images that were obscured with silver tarnish, became not only highly legible but also proved to be beautiful compositions of tantalising subjects. The temptation to find out more was overwhelming.

So, as well as acquiring a substantial number of Ruskin books and making the usual scholarly trips to museums and libraries, we soon found ourselves in possession of a Venetian *vaporetto* pass and a Swiss rail card. Most of the plates contained no inscription to aid in identifying their location. We proceeded to visit most of the more than twenty Continental sites at which it was either certain or suspected that Ruskin made or commissioned daguerreotypes.

Ruskin made most of his daguerreotypes on summer trips to France, Italy and Switzerland while accompanied by his valets, John Hobbs and Frederick Crawley. The daguerreotypes were the result of collaboration with his valets or with professional daguerreotypists. Our own parallel expeditions involved no valets whatsoever but consisted mostly in studying weather-beaten inkjet copies of the daguerreotypes in order to pinpoint locations where the images were taken. We got endlessly lost ambling through narrow Venetian passageways in the dead of winter. We pleaded with workmen to let us peek at the façades of French cathedrals hidden beneath scaffolding. We climbed hills in Chamonix and battlements in Switzerland.

We started in Venice and sometimes the task of finding the location of daguerreotypes was straightforward. For example Ill. 2., an image dating to 1845 shows the south side of St. Mark's

***Ill. 2***. The 'Frenchman.' Venice. St. Mark's and the Pillars of Acre looking towards the Piazza, ca.1845. Quarter-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

Basilica. This view also shows the Tetrarchs and Pillars of Acre, taken from Constantinople during the Crusades and added as decorative features to the exterior of St. Mark's. Ruskin bought these first daguerreotypes of Venice in early October of 1845, 170 years ago, and they provided him with his real epiphany with the daguerreotype process.

Ruskin was 26 years of age and though he had often travelled to the Continent this was the first time he did so without his parents. He must have felt a great sense of liberation. He was trying to draw the *palazzi* but despite being one of the great draughtsmen of the 19th century, he became intensely frustrated by what he saw as his failure to record details accurately.

He met a 'French artist' who was producing daguerreotype plates and wrote to his father with tremendous excitement, stating,

"*It is very nearly the same thing as carrying off the palace itself - every chip of stone & stain is there ...*"

A week later, his respect for the new process had deepened and he further noted:

"*Well, among all the mechanical poison that this terrible 19th century has poured upon men, it has given us at any rate one antidote, the Daguerreotype. It's a most blessed invention ...*"

Ruskin bought all the Frenchman's daguerreotypes and commissioned more. He was delighted to discover that the daguerreotype could serve as a method of 'preserving' the original palaces for posterity before they could be destroyed by what he considered to be insensitive restoration. Our research suggests that the French artist was a daguerreotypist who called himself 'Le Cavalier Iller'. Iller's studies, particularly those that seem to have been made before he met Ruskin, are beautifully arranged, wonderfully lit and often include people in a composition. Ruskin's discovery of Iller's exceptional daguerreotypes was a revelation to him, and are again so for us as Iller, until now has been little known even among daguerreotype enthusiasts.
Though one can understand why Ruskin admired Iller's images, we will see that his own photographic style was to develop quite differently and his images would contain few figures, concentrating more on close-up architectural and landscape detail. Iller's daguerreotype compositions might be said to derive from the picturesque tradition of producing compositions in nature according to a certain formula. From the 1840s onwards both Ruskin's drawing and daguerreotype style was extensively dedicated instead to the recording of detail in landscape and architecture.

Although Ruskin famously did not have the most successful marriage of the 19th century, it was his wife Effie who persuaded him to take her to Venice in 1849. This completely altered the trajectory of Ruskin's research and writing for the next few years. His first visit to the city was followed by two very lengthy stays between 1849 and 1852. These sojourns developed into the spur for him to write one of his most successful works, the epic three-volume study, *The Stones of Venice*.

Following the 1848–1849 Venetian insurrection, the Ruskins were among the first tourists to re-enter the besieged city after the Austrians had regained control. Despite this flux, Ruskin wasted no time in recording every detail of the Gothic *palazzi*, suffering frostbite and exhaustion while making thousands of observations by ruler, pen but also by the daguerreotype. Ruskin was no longer just buying or commissioning daguerreotypes – now he was making his own. He and his valet, John Hobbs, had refined their technical proficiency while in the Alps during the summer. Incredibly, it was during this 'learning period', that they produced the very first photograph of the Matterhorn (***Ill. 3***).

Ruskin's cumulative visits to Venice between 1845 and 1852 resulted in what we believe to be the largest body of surviving daguerreotypes, some 137 plates, assembled by one individual portraying any city in the world.

Many of Ruskin's studies in drawing and daguerreotype, in Venice and elsewhere on the Continent, were highly accomplished but cannot be described as being outside the mainstream of popular taste. He did make daguerreotype compositions that have their roots in fashionable modes of painting and photography in the 19th century, some derived from the picturesque tradition (*Ill. 4*).

Despite these fine if conventional compositions, there are two recurring themes in much of Ruskin's photographic work, which are particularly distinctive within the history of the daguerreotype. The first is that, like his paintings, these daguerreotypes were undertaken primarily for the purposes of documentation. Secondly, Ruskin created many compositions that are decidedly unconventional. As a rich amateur with myriad interests he lacked the profit motive of commerce and the desire to either enhance his professional stature or be the recipient of approbation from other amateur photographers. These factors allowed him an unusual degree of liberty in producing his compositions.

Ruskin's discovery of the daguerreotype had perhaps deepened his already growing instinct to capture 'what was really there', as he phrased it; this might be described by some to be a photographic style of looking and drawing (*Ills. 5, 6*). So suddenly, as in the daguerreotype of Fribourg in Ill. 5, horizons might not exist, vertiginous viewpoints were not unusual or compositions were radically outside the mainstream of photographic endeavour (*Ill. 7*). But why should Ruskin be so interested in the daguerreotype? He was surely better known for so many other vocations – poet, social reformer,

***Ill. 3,*** John Ruskin and John Hobbs. The Matterhorn and reflection in Alpine lake, 8 August 1849. Quarter-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

art critic, preservationist, geologist, writer, artist, radical economist and much more.

We put forward the case, nevertheless, that Ruskin's gifts and passions made him the most natural candidate to be an instinctive and fine photographer and so it should not come as a surprise to discover that he was exactly that. Ruskin described himself as having,

*"a sensual faculty of pleasure in sight, as far as I know unparalleled. Turner very certainly never took the delight in his own drawings that I did…".*

Despite there being no evidence that he even knew Ruskin made daguerreotypes, one of Ruskin's best biographers, John Rosenberg, described the art critic as 'photoerotic'.

Ruskin's strength as a photographer has been masked not only by his many other talents and the loss until recently of most of his daguerreotype collection but because he had so many rude things to say about the medium. His strong religious beliefs convinced him it was God's influence on man's hand that could create transcendence in painting. He was not convinced that the camera, a metal and glass lens connected to a wooden box, was capable of producing a work of moral consequence. The photographic machine was as much anathema to him as were his despised railways and new-fangled gas lamps of the industrial revolution.

Some of Ruskin's greatest and most unorthodox daguerreotypes were made in 1858, the last year he used the daguerreotype. We believe

***Ill. 4***, John Ruskin and Frederick Crawley. Chamonix. Mer de Glace, Mont Blanc Massif, ca.1854. Half-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

this was due to psychological factors and events in his life as much as him reaching a zenith in his photographic skills. Between October 1857 and May 1858 Ruskin had spent much of his time in the National Gallery of London. With the help of only the odd trusted assistant he began the onerous task of mounting and cataloguing over 19,000 of the works that his hero, J.M.W. Turner, had bequeathed to the nation.

The exhausting physical effort involved in these activities was nothing beside the cerebral whirlwind created by the new discoveries he made about the artist. Among the more troubling revelations for him was a group of previously unknown erotic drawings. The idea was sown in Ruskin's mind that perhaps great art was not merely the preserve of the most righteous and God-fearing of men, a discovery that was distinctly at odds with his evangelical upbringing and he began a conversion to what we might call liberal Christianity.

Though one cannot quite visualise Ruskin as the precursor of Toulouse-Lautrec roaming the squalid back streets of Montmartre, his self-described period of 'libertinage' included some most atypical behaviour. The previously earnest Protestant art historian could be seen painting on Sundays, flirting with Italian ladies in public gardens, attending the Opéra Comique in Turin in the evening and then splurging afterwards on half pints of champagne and stewed lark for dinner.

Ruskin began to intensify the approach that had produced daguerreotypes that we have already seen of an unconventional nature taken during his previous travels. Released from such an omnipresent and heavy sense of duty and piousness, like other photographers before and since that time, he began to include subject matter whose form and content merely pleased him. He was no longer so rigorously tied to documenting only what he felt were worthy geological or Gothic subjects.

After producing dramatic scenes some might describe as 'modern' in Bellinzona (*Ill. 8*), Ruskin visited Arona on Lake Maggiore where he and his valet Frederick Crawley daguerreotyped the elongated shapes of fishing and pleasure boats (*Ill. 9*) The blades of the long oars are partially submerged, creating the appearance of being obliquely dissected, hiding part of the blade beneath the water and thus making the visible portion of the oars resemble oversized spears – much visual ambiguity here. There is complex detail in the daguerreotype which the

***Ill. 5,*** John Ruskin and Frederick Crawley. Fribourg. Rue de la Palme and houses beyond Pont de Berne, ca.1854 or 1856. Half-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

***Ill. 6,*** John Ruskin. Fribourg, ca.1854–1856. Pen, ink, watercolour and bodycolour on blue-grey paper British Museum, London © Trustees of the British Museum

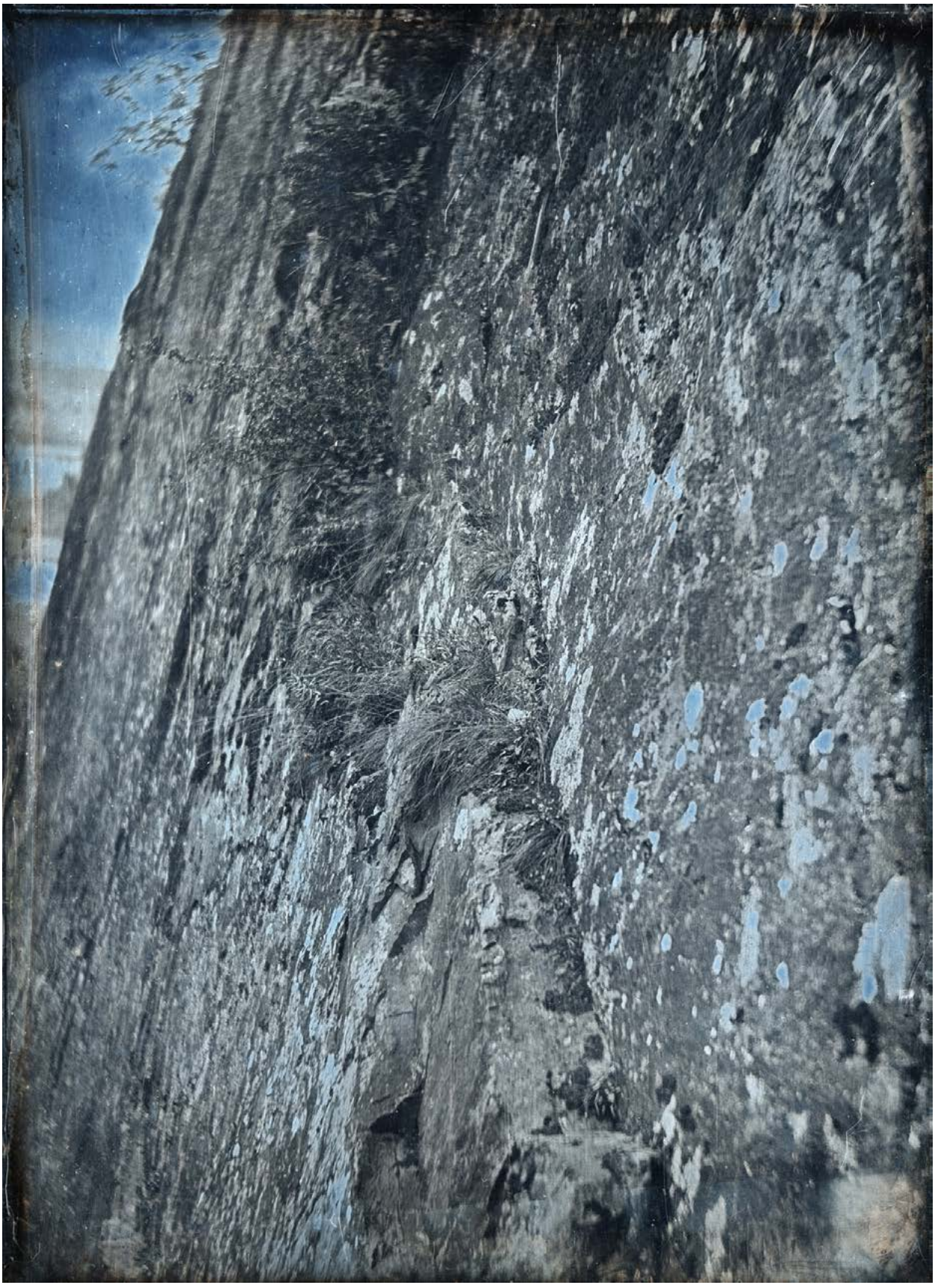
eye takes time to absorb. The bewildering variety of forms and idiosyncratic detail could not fail to appeal to Ruskin, the man who professed to love imperfection and who noted that as a very young child:

*"I… could pass my days contentedly in tracing the squares and comparing the colours of my carpet; - examining the knots in the wood of the floor, or counting the bricks in the opposite houses ... But the carpet, and what patterns I could find in bed-covers, dresses, or wall-papers to be examined, were my chief resources ..."*

A week after arriving in Turin, Ruskin daguerreotyped the singular regional style of striped awnings on the *Strada Doragrossa* (now *Via Garibaldi*) for no other purpose than the pleasure of recording striking patterns and light effects that fascinated him (***Ill. 10***). The style of his composition is rather more reminiscent of architectural photography from the 1930s.

It might seem contradictory that photographs intended as documents can so substantially transcend these aims as art – that word we still struggle perpetually to define. Ruskin would not have been comfortable, however, having the magic that exudes from his daguerreotypes explained by the same spirit of alienation that inspired some modernism in the 20th century. His humility before nature or a work of architecture that he loved was essential. Like Ruskin, we believe that putting a passion for the subject above the ego of the artist has

***Ill. 7,*** John Ruskin and John Hobbs. Venice. The Ducal Palace south façade. 'Eastern windows' tracery looking out towards the Lagoon, ca.1849. Quarter-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson



***Ill. 8,*** John Ruskin and Frederick Crawley. Bellinzona. Wall near Castelgrande, ca.1858. Half-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

***Ill. 9,*** John Ruskin and Frederick Crawley. Arona. Moored boats in the harbour, ca.12–14 July 1858. Half-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

***Ill. 10,*** John Ruskin and Frederick Crawley. Turin. Strada Doragrossa (now Via Giuseppe Garibaldi), ca.20 July 1858. Half-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

always been conducive to the production of the most poignant photographs. Starting with W.H. Fox Talbot, photography of the real has proved to be an enduring strength of the medium.

Ruskin said,

"*Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see*."

Ruskin was the one who could see and his daguerreotypes, in turn, must be seen. His fervent attachment to a crumbling Gothic palace or a lichen-encrusted rock is unmistakable in the image on the mirror-like surface of the daguerreotype plate (***Ill. 11***).

Notwithstanding Ruskin's huge aesthetic triumphs of 1858, some may suggest that this was a year in which the daguerreotype process had already become antiquated; nevertheless, it seems clear that Ruskin planned to continue. Later that same year during wintry London weather, Ruskin sent his valet to post a parcel to a friend along with a note that read,

"*if I lose my man in the fog, you must find me another daguerreotypist*."

His valet and daguerreotypist Crawley returned unscathed but sadly for us, though Ruskin was not yet 40-years old, we know of no other daguerreotypes by him after the summer of 1858 and he appears to have abandoned his 'most blessed invention'.

***Ill. 11***, John Ruskin and Frederick Crawley(?).Chamonix. Cascade du Dard(?). Study of a rock amongst trees, ca.1854. Half-plate daguerreotype © Ken and Jenny Jacobson

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STEFFEN SIEGEL

# *Daguerre in the City*

***Ill. 1***, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre. View of Notre-Dame de Paris, from the Pont des Tournelles, ca. 1838–1839. Daguerreotype, 15,4 × 22,1 cm (plate). University of Texas, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center

*ABSTRACT*

The few remaining daguerreotypes by Daguerre himself that have survived for the last 175 years can be divided into three groups: still-lifes, cityscapes, and portraits. His second series of views of Paris attracted particular interest in the photographic milieu and beyond it. In a general sense, plates like these offer a rare chance to look back into the 'capital of the 19th century', as Walter Benjamin puts it, but there is a lot more to them than that. Daguerre's few photographs of avenues in Paris encourage us to reflect upon his personal strategy of promoting and publishing his photographic process. This entailed a tightly knit web of personal contacts with powerful institutions and influential partners that was an indispensable precondition for Daguerre's success.

by STEFFEN SIEGEL, *Professor for Theory and History of Photography at Folkwang University of Art in Essen*, Germany

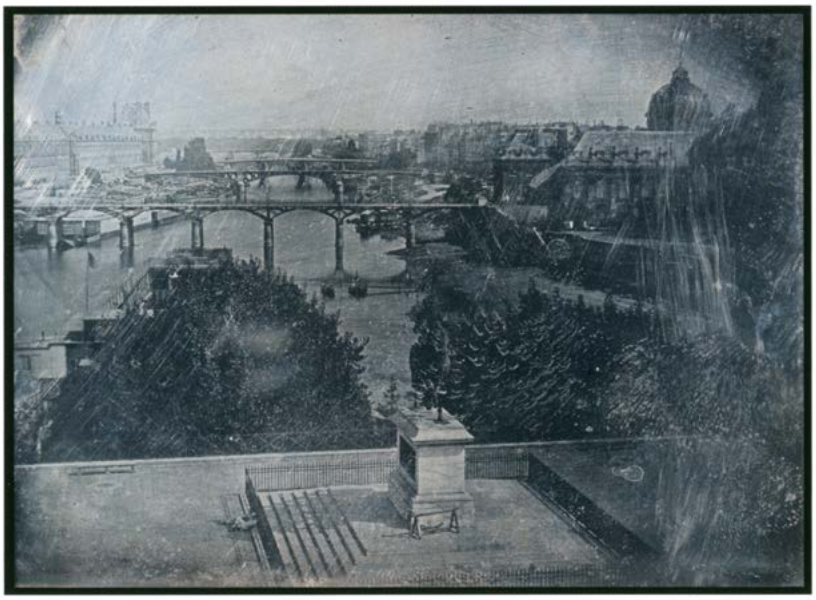
Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre was neither born in the capital of France nor did he die there. Both Cormeilles-en-Parisis and Bry-sur-Marne, the places where his life began and ended, lay far outside the suburbs of the capital city, and yet Daguerre was a Parisian through and through. Not only did he live there from the age of 16 for the longest period of his life – in all, 37 of 64 years.[1] What is more, Daguerre understood in his own day the significance of associating his name inextricably with Paris – even years before the photographic process bearing his name was made public.

Germans travelling to Paris report of their enthusiasm for the diorama,[2] the illusion machine Daguerre had operated since 1822 together with his business partner Charles-Marie Bouton at the *Boulevard du Temple*, which had brought him an oddly ambivalent fame somewhere between commerce and art as theater entrepreneur and visual artist.[3]

It is quite probable that even without the development and public announcement of the daguerreotype, we would still remember Daguerre today as an important figure shaping early 19th century visual aesthetics. From Paris, one of the most important stages of the European theater scene, the diorama played more than a marginal role in the development of a decidedly modern form of visual representation.[4]

Far more than it was true for an artist working with standard image media, Daguerre's artistic activity hinged on public attention. Just how much Daguerre, the business man, was not only aware of, but strategically pursued, this attention is made clear by his correspondence with both Nicéphore Niépce and his son, Isidore, after Nicéphore's death in 1833.

It bears more than passing mention that Daguerre almost jealously protected Paris as his domain, keeping his contractual business partners, the former since 1829 and the later since 1835, far removed from his own Paris circles. He repeatedly writes to Isidore Niépce in Chalon-sur-Saône, telling him he need not come to Paris in order to advance their mutual project.[5] Daguerre's appeals in the letters to stay away always leave unsaid that his own presence in Paris, however, was absolutely necessary.

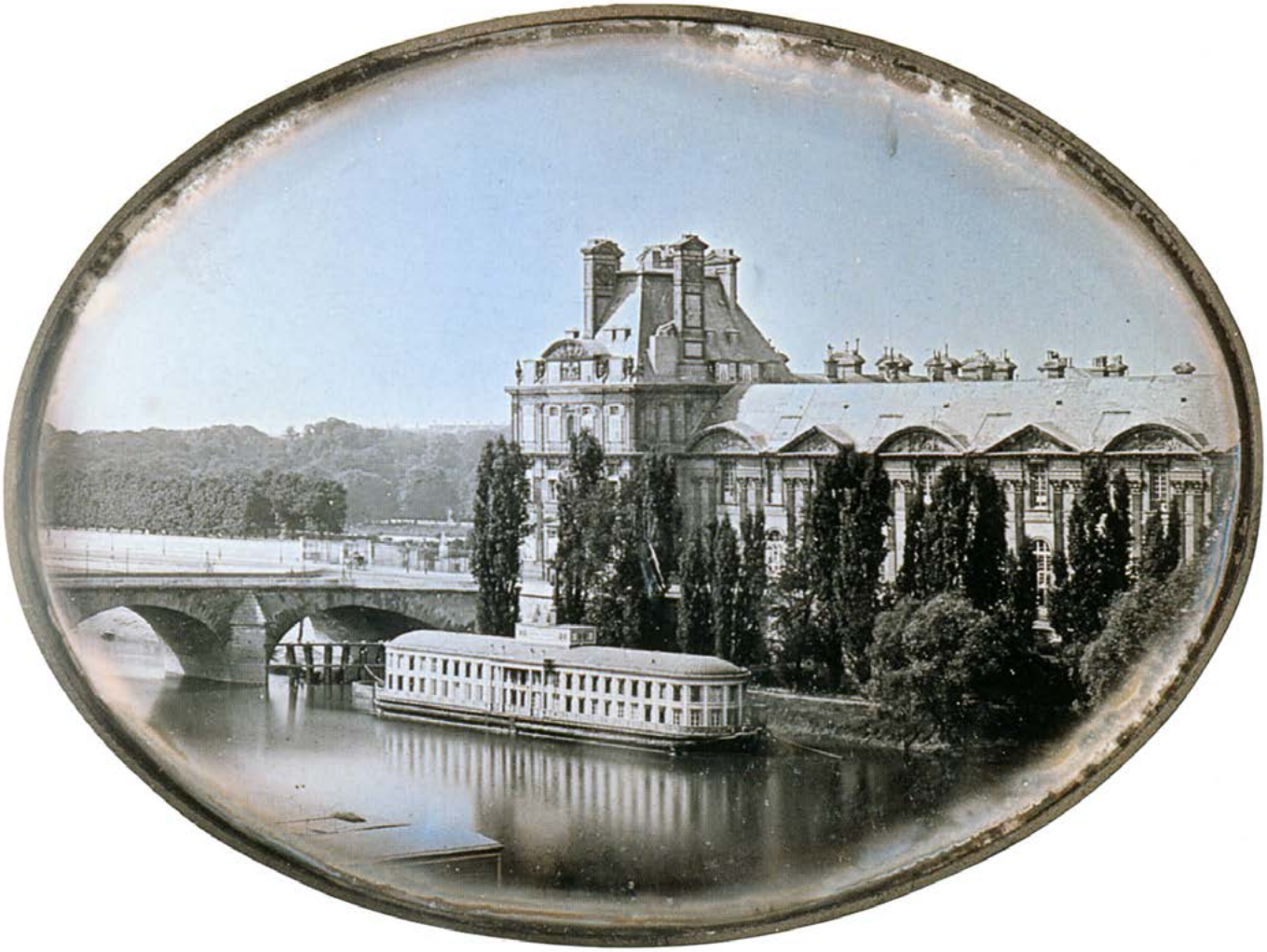


In 1837, or 1838 at the latest, when he began in to seriously look for possibilities to position his newly developed photographic process onto the market as a gainful commercial business, it quickly became clear that without a tightly knit web of personal contacts his plan to earn money with his invention would not come to fruition. Daguerre may have had in mind the story of his now-deceased business partner, Nicéphore Niépce, who a decade earlier, despite similar efforts, miserably failed to get business started in London. In England, Niépce, not merely a Frenchman, but an inventor from the remotest provinces of France, was a complete stranger with absolutely no such network at his disposal.[6]

Indeed, the elation with which Daguerre opens his letter to Isidore Niépce on 2 January 1839, "*Enfin j'ai vu Mr. Arago*", ("Finally I've seen Mr. Arago") denotes nothing less than a breakthrough.[7] The man Daguerre refers to, Dominique François Arago, was the Director of the Paris Observatory, the Permanent Secretary of the Paris Academy of Sciences and, last but by no means least, a member of the French parliament. Simply put, a man ideally situated within a massive and influential network to promote Daguerre's invention. And, indeed,[8] Arago did not disappoint. His endorsement, his personally designed public relations campaign, and his high-level connections within so many different social spheres were most certainly one of the central factors contributing to the early success, already in 1839, of Daguerre's 'project', resulting not only in commercially remunerative life annuities from the French state for both Daguerre and Isidore Niépce, but bringing public renown to Daguerre as the inventor of a new image medium. Arago's campaign, a strategically controlled economy of public attention, left no room for a differentiated view of the far more complex history of the development of photography.[9]

For some time now, scholars have rightly called our attention to the urban context of the modern sciences as a precondition of development, wherein the city serves not merely as stage or background, but as an essential contributing factor to scientific progress.[10] Similarly, we can presume such interdependence between urbanity and mediality in the Modern era. While the cases of Niépce and Talbot may be offered as examples of the intellectual and technological development of the photographic process far beyond the reaches of metropolitan centers – that is, in Chalon-sur-Saône and Lacock Abbey, respectively – the phase of publication, involving

***Ill. 2***,Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre. Mathurin-Joseph Fordos. View from the Pont-Neuf, ca. 1837–1839. Daguerreotype, 7,3 × 10 cm (plate). Musée des arts et métiers - Cnam, Paris



***Ill. 3***, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre. The Pavillon de Flore and the Pont-Royal, 1839. Daguerreotype, 16,2 × 21,2 cm (plate). Musée des arts et métiers - Cnam, Paris

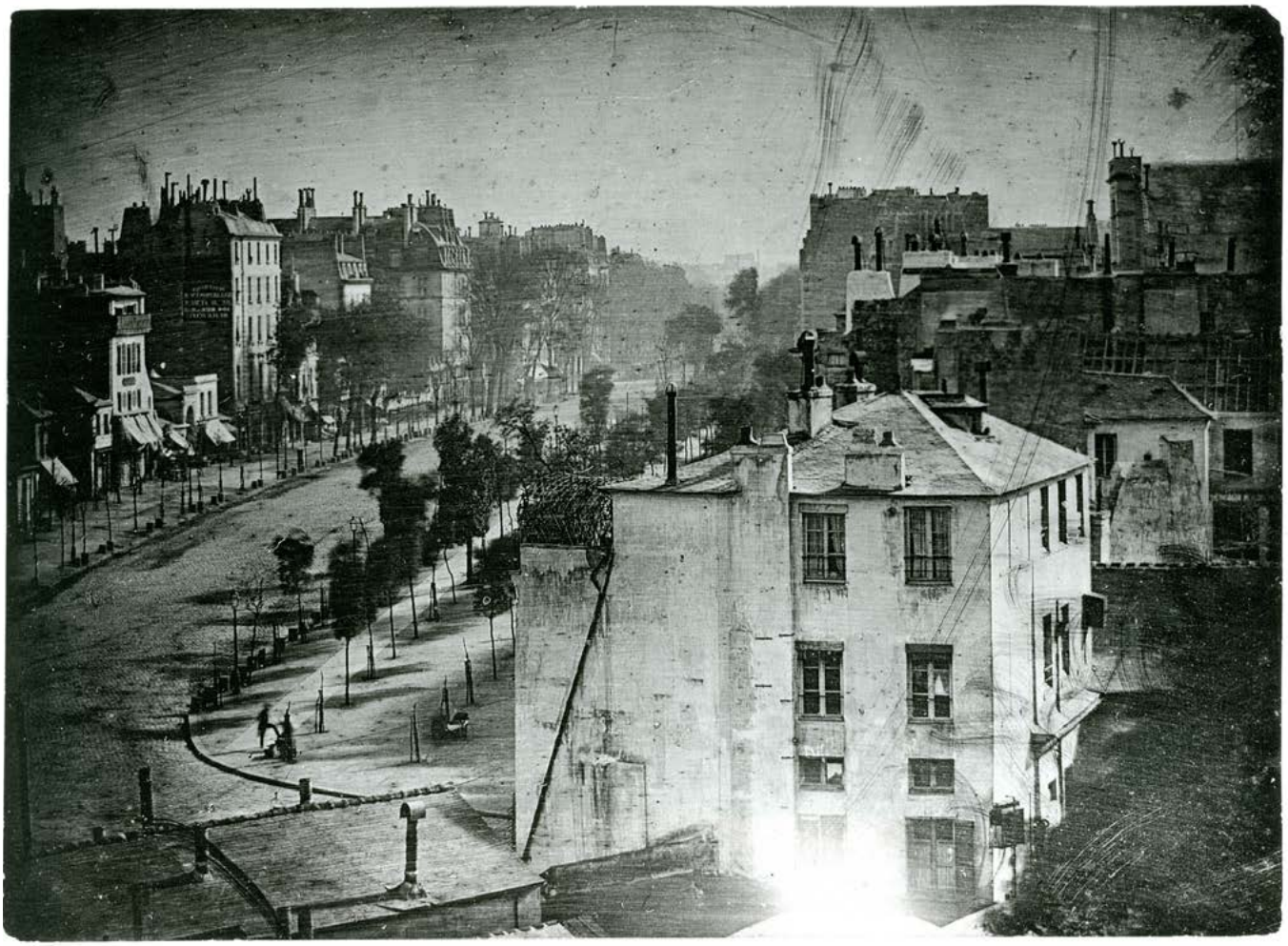
complex strategies for the introduction and penetration of these inventions into public consciousness, was dependent upon an urban infrastructure.

The public relations strategies of Daguerre in Paris and, a few weeks later, of Talbot in London, differences in detail aside, have two key factors in common to generate the necessary publicity: established scientific institutions and the press.[11] Daguerre turned to the Paris Academy of Sciences, Talbot to the Royal Institution and Royal Society; both men exploited the daily and weekly press. These photographic processes could only have been made public in the two capital cities (even if we consider a minor supporting role played by Edinburgh in Talbot's case).

Once Arago got the proverbial ball rolling, it appears to have required little effort on Daguerre's part to attract Paris' star journalists, like Jules Janin, into his atelier.

Quite the contrary, articles by Janin[12] or Samuel Morse,[13] among others, appearing in contemporary newspapers, make it clear that Daguerre organized such visits to his atelier as exclusive receptions. If we examine the various accounts in comparison, it becomes even clearer that Daguerre consistently used the same or similar wording to talk about his invention and, moreover, referred to the same set of images again and again. If we look at the few, in some cases, depending on attribution, little more than twenty existing photographic plates said to have originated from Daguerre himself,[14] we are struck by something peculiar. Although the views of Paris make up about half of the sample images produced by Daguerre, it was almost exclusively his images of the city that were shown within the scope of his interviews with the press. Journalists refer repeatedly, above all, to images of Notre-Dame (*Ill. 1*), of various bridges over the Seine (*Ill. 2*) or of the Louvre (*Ill. 3*).

*Ill. 4*,Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre. Still life with Verospi Jove, 1839. Daguerreotype, 12,1 × 15,5 cm (plate). Országos Müszaki Múzeum, Budapest



Daguerre's cunning is as simple as it was effective – to take advantage of the French capital as a 'resonance chamber' of innovation, while drawing the greatest possible attention to his own invention, the city itself is taken as the primary exhibit. It is not the still lifes Daguerre produced in equal number, with their peculiar iconography requiring exegesis (*Ill. 4*), but the trusted images of the familiar that become emblematic of the new way of seeing. To display views of Paris in Paris almost necessarily challenges viewers to measure the medially recorded reality of photography against the lived reality of the city itself, to provoke a comparison, in other words.

The group of images Daguerre selected for exhibit, as we know from published accounts, already contains the seeds of an idea that would later define the aesthetic of photography, namely, the exact representation of external reality. The inevitable flaws of such an undertaking were not only apparent in the images selected by Daguerre but quickly became a topic of discussion. The image of *Boulevard du Temple* (*Ill. 5*), in particular, became a subject of critique, lacking, as it did, precisely the one thing most associated with a major metropolis – the hustle and bustle of the city streets, something that remained out of reach for the daguerreotype with its long exposure times.

If we take the accounts of contemporary journalists to be true, Daguerre did not shy away from the tumult of street life with his camera but sought it out. The collection of images we have today attributed to Daguerre's

*Ill. 5*, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre. The Boulevard du Temple, 8 o'clock in the morning, ca. 1838 (image data lost after failed restauration). Daguerreotype, 13,1 × 16,4 cm (plate). Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, München


hand is too sparse to judge. Contemporary reports describe scenes, however, in which Daguerre takes photographs on the bridges of the Seine, entirely unnoticed. It remains doubtful, though, that Daguerre actually left the studio to capture the urban space of Paris with his camera. The likelier scenario can be seen in the views of Paris left to us characterized by their conspicuously elevated perspective, suggesting that Daguerre's images of Paris were made through open windows in various quarters of the city. His photographs of the city emerge at the intersection of inside and outside, private and public. It would prove a momentous decision, opening the studio onto urban space and, what is more, inviting the city, that is, its representatives in the form of visitors, into the studio (*Ill. 6*) and thereby giving them the opportunity to stand, perhaps, at the very windows from which the images were made and compare, at their leisure,[15] their own experience of that reality where their gazes fell, for the first time, on Paris as city and as photographic veduta.

***Ill. 6***, Anonymous. *Daguerréotipe. Expérience publique faite par Mr. Daguerre*, ca. 1840, Lithography

## *NOTES*

**1.** Helmut Gernsheim, Alison Gernsheim: L.J.M. Daguerre. The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype, London 1956; 2nd, revised ed. New York 1968.
**2.** August Lewald: Ein Frühstück bei Daguerre. In: ibid.: Album aus Paris, Band, 1, Hamburg 1832, p. 273–281. Carl Gustav Carus: Das Diorama von Daguerre in Paris, gesehen am 4. September 1835. In: ibid.: Paris und die Rheingegenden. Tagebuch einer Reise im Jahr 1835, vol. 1, Leipzig 1836, p. 284–295.
**3.** Stephen C. Pinson: Speculating Daguerre. Art and Enterprise in the Work of L.J.M. Daguerre, Chicago, London 2012.
**4.** Heinz Buddemeier: Panorama, Diorama, Photographie. Entstehung und Wirkung neuer Medien im 19. Jahrhundert, München 1970, p. 15–51. Werner Neite: The Cologne Diorama. In: History of Photography 3 (1979), p. 105–109. R. Derek Wood: The Diorama in Great Britain in the 1820. In: History of Photography 17 (1993), p. 284–295.
**5.** See for instance Daguerre's letters to Isidore Niépce from 5 October 1835, 28 April 1838 and 2 January 1839. In: Manuel Bonnet, Jean-Louis Marignier (ed.): Niépce. Correspondance et papiers, 2 vol., vol. 2, Saint Loup de Varennes 2003, p. 1072–1074, 1095–1097, 1101–1002.
**6.** R.C. Smith: Nicéphore Niépce in England. In: History of Photography 7 (1983), p. 43–50. Larry J. Schaaf: Niépce Abroad: Britain in 1827 & 1839 – Russia in 1839 & 1994. In: Nicéphore Niépce. Une nouvelle image. A New Image, Chalon-sur-Saône 1998, p. 100–106.
**7.** Bonnet, Marignier 2003 (loc. cit., footnote 5), p. 1101.
**8.** François Sarda: Les Arago. François et les autres, Paris 2002.
**9.** Anne McCauley: François Arago and the Politics of the French Invention of Photography. In: Daniel P. Younger (ed.): Multiple Views. Logan Grant Essays on Photography 1983–89, Albuquerque 1991, p. 43–69. François Brunet: La naissance de l'idée de photographie, Paris 2000, p. 57–116.
**10.** Sven Dierig, Jens Lachmund, J. Andrew Mendelsohn: Toward an Urban History of Science. In: Osiris, 2nd series, 18 (2003), p. 1–19.
**11.** Steffen Siegel (ed.): Neues Licht. Daguerre, Talbot und die Veröffentlichung der Fotografie im Jahr 1839, München 2014.
**12.** Jules Janin: La Daguerotype. In: L'Artiste. Journal de la littérature et des beaux-arts, 2nd series, vol. 2, No. 11, 28 January 1839, p. 145–148. Siegel 2014 (loc. cit., footnote 11), p. 67–73.
**13.** Samuel F.B. Morse: The Daguerrotipe. In: New-York Observer 17 (1839), No. 16, 20 April 1839, p. 62. Siegel 2014 (loc. cit., footnote 11), p. 96–98.
**14.** Pinson 2012 (loc. cit., footnote 3), p. 201–220. From my point of view Pinson is too generous in attributing certain plates to Daguerres, especially within his section ‚portraiture'
**15.** As a result of a fire on 8 March 1839, it was no longer possible to stand at the window in the building where Daguerre's diorama was located, from which the images of Boulevard du Temple were made. Shortly after the fire, Daguerre began to photograph the city from the window of his new apartment on Boulevard Saint-Martin.

## *CREDITS*

**Ill. 1**: Stephen C. Pinson: Speculating Daguerre. Art and Enterprise in the Work of L.J.M. Daguerre, Chicago, London 2012, plate 29.
**Ill. 2, 6**: Walter Guadagnini (ed.): Photography, vol. 1, Milano 2010, p. 19, 39.
**Ill. 3**: Quentin Bajac, Dominique Planchon-de-Font-Réaulx (ed.): Le daguerréotype français. Un objet photographique, Paris 2003, p. 155.
**Ill. 4**: Maren Gröning, Monika Faber: Inkunabeln einer neuen Zeit. Pioniere der Daguerreotypie in Österreich 1839–1850, Vienna 2006, p. 10.
**Ill. 5**: Janet E. Buerger: French Daguerreotypes, Chicago, London 1989, p. 7.

# *Musings on Scenic Daguerreotypes*

*ABSTRACT*

The Daguerreotype evolved quickly in both Europe and America, soon diverging and following rather different paths in the two continents. In both areas it began with scenic and still life subjects, then incorporating portraiture as exposure times were reduced. The imagery produced in each continent had its own unique look and feel. This essay will compare and contrast a selection of American and European scenic daguerreotypes of similar topics, such as scenic images, cityscapes, and outdoor occupational images from private and public collections, and discuss aspects of aesthetics, presentation and content.

by JEREMY ROWE, *President of the Daguerreian Society, Senior Research Scientist at New York University and owner of the website* vintagephoto.com *(US)*

The magic of the daguerreotype visually takes us back to the birth of photography over 150 years ago. The initial progress of photography was very similar all over the world and, as the Daguerreian process was refined and exposure times decreased, there was a transition from still lifes and scenic images to portraiture. However, Europe and America soon followed different evolutionary paths in terms of subject matter, presentation and aesthetics. For example in America, due to issues such as licensing rights, the daguerreotype became the process of choice while the various paper processes steadily grew in popularity in Europe and England.

Each photographer had a unique level of skill, sense of aesthetics, commitment to his craft and sense of adventure. As a result their personal *oeuvres* include images that are relatively consistent with the aesthetic conventions of the time, as well as more unusual images that transcend the simple classifications and conventions of the era. Some daguerreotypists were itinerant, creating their images while they travelled far and wide, most of whom are now anonymous. Others were prestigious professionals based in studios who created extensive bodies of work. In America a list of such professional daguerreotypists would have to include Albert Southworth and Josiah Hawes in Boston, Platt Babbitt in Niagara Falls, Thomas Easterly in Saint Louis – Missouri, as well as Isaac Baker, Robert Vance, Carleton Watkins and George Howard Johnson in California. In Europe such a list would include Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gros, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, Pierre-Ambrose Richebourg, Charles-Marie-Isidore Choiselat and Stanislas Ratel.

The early daguerreotypes that have survived can help researchers to infer patterns and relationships between these images that were created over 150 years ago. The survival of

***Ill. 1***, Unknown Maker, American. Traveling Daguerreian Studio, ca. 1850. Daguerreotype, sixth plate, 3 ¼ x 2 ¾ inches (8.3 x 7 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Gift of Hallmark Cards, Inc., inv. 2005.27.6 © Nelson Gallery Foundation. Photo: Thomas Palmer

many daguerreotypes through the generations is largely due to serendipity – to sheer luck or chance - as well as our knowledge of their provenance, their correct labeling and description, and their easy availability for purposes of research and scholarship in private or public collections. Additional factors that can influence the ability of a researcher to interpret an image at any given time are its context, the academic background in terms of collateral research, exhibitions, and publications, and the researcher's knowledge and context, all of which tend to evolve over time.

Spectacular collections of daguerreotypes that shape our understanding of the aesthetics of the era have often come down to us due to lucky finds in unlikely places. For example a number of daguerreotypes showing Washington D.C. and the Capitol were found in a California flea market, and a collection of 120 daguerreotype plates of China, India and the East by Jules Alphonse Eugène Itier were discovered by chance in the 1970s. A collection of images by pioneering American landscape photographer Samuel Bemis were discovered in 1980, during work on his mansion in the White Mountains of New Hampshire a century after his death, and more recently a spectacular collection of 188 previously unknown 'Ruskin Daguerreotypes' was acquired by Ken and Jenny Jacobson at a small English country auction in 2006.

Unfortunately, much precious material has also been lost to serendipity, although we still know of its existence thanks to historic records. Two examples of famous missing collections include the 300 daguerreotype scenes of California and the West by Robert Vance that were exhibited in New York City and St. Louis Missouri before disappearing without a trace in Chicago in the 1870s, and the collections of images by John Ross Dix and J. Wesley Jones, the fate or possible whereabouts of which are now unknown.

Before the advent of the Internet, historians of photography had to scour books and publications for images. Textbooks by Eder, Newhall, Gernsheim, Lécouyer and others created a context for developing visual literacy, within which images were discussed and interpreted. Although some institutions such as the U.S. Library of Congress assembled huge photographic collections in the first century after Daguerre's invention, most collections were assembled by individuals or groups, who often sought donations for purchasing photographic images. These collections, and the exhibitions that often derived from them, were influenced by the classic texts on photographic history and have produced a vocabulary of iconic images, as well as the reputations of the photographers who created them. The flood of publications and exhibitions, in addition to the passion for collecting photographs that emerged in the 1970s, followed by digitally enhanced Internet access to images, have all provided us with resources that even the most optimistic early historians of photography could hardly have imagined. Various online projects such as Daguerreobase have made images and important primary source materials available to historians and researchers, and our understanding of the pioneering photographers and the images that they created continues to evolve.

Since its invention there was a close aesthetic dialogue between photography and painting. European scenic views tend to reflect a more Romantic painterly aesthetic, while many American images exhibit a more documentary approach. American images also tend to have stronger contrasts between light and shade, whereas European images exhibit a broader range of more subtle tonalities. Photographers and painters shared a fascination with travel and with documenting novel and unusual scenes, in addition to creating aesthetically pleasing or 'picturesque' images of cities and towns. A significant feature of English and European photographers, which is much less common in America, consists of individual details of classical architectural elements. For example, details of architecture and rather abstract images, reminiscent of paintings of Turner or Constable, are more common in European daguerreotypes (i.e. Ruskin's images of Switzerland and Rome, Grecian ruins, etc.)

***Ill. 2***, Marie-Charles-Isidore Choiselat. The Pavillon de Flore and the Tuileries Garden, ca. 1849. Daguerreotype 15.2 x 18.7 cm © The Metropolitan Museum of Art Gilman Collection, Purchase, The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation Gift, through Joyce and Robert Menschel, 2005, inv. 2005.100.29

***Ill. 3***, Unidentified Daguerreotypist. Seneca Falls, New York looking upstream, ca. 1850. Half plate daguerreotype © Smithsonian American Art Museum inv. 1994.91.232

Many American, English and European images focus on the beauty of panoramic views of towns or cities, often looking down scenic avenues and boulevards. At first scenic daguerreotypes depicted major cities, such as Paris, London, New York City, Boston and Philadelphia, where the wealthy scientists, artists and amateur experimenters who took these pictures actually lived. Later on emerging metropolitan areas in America such as St. Louis, San Francisco, Portland, New Orleans and Richmond generated substantial bodies of work. Itinerant daguerreotypists soon documented even the smallest towns and villages, and explored the scenic beauty of the natural environment.

European photographers generally used larger whole or half plate formats for scenic daguerreotypes, while smaller half, quarter, and sixth plate sizes were more common in America. Leather cases similar to those used for painted portrait miniatures were more popular in England than on the continent, and this also became the presentation of choice for most American photographers. Decorations or inscriptions were occasionally imprinted or embossed on the cloth pads inside the cover, or embossed gilding was added to the case to identify the studio or the photographer. The large European images were also framed for display, with more elaborate, ornate *passe-partout* mounts and frames than were typically adopted in America.

Rivers and watercourses are often central to the composition in daguerreotype images of major cities, such as Paris, Venice and Philadelphia. European images often incorporate the reflections in their waters in a more painterly manner, with a strong aesthetic emphasis, while many American images feature ships,

***Ill. 4***, Horatio B. King. Seth Eastman at Dighton Rock, July 7, 1853. Quarter plate daguerreotype © J. Paul Getty Museum inv. 03877101 Object 84.XT.182

steamboats or waterfalls as metaphors of power and prosperity that emphasize the importance of waterways in manufacturing, commerce, industrial growth and the passion of the era for Westward expansion. Though relatively long exposure times made it difficult to capture moving subjects, American and European daguerreotypists also strove to document events such as meetings, protests, ceremonies and other public gatherings, initially shooting the streets below from the windows of their studios, and later taking their photographic equipment into the field. Some scenes gain in emotional impact from the blurred moving figures that contrast with the detailed buildings and objects in the background. Others, in which the motion was successfully frozen, seem to be genuine press photos from a bygone era.

Another shared theme consisted of images of strange, exotic and foreign lands. Pioneering European photographers traveled to the Alps, Italy, Greece, Turkey and the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific Islands, while the fascination with westward expansion on the American continent led to many images of life along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, in California and on the West Coast. Images of gold mining in California were made to satisfy public demand, and showed Eastern investors the camps and mines they underwrote. Adventurous traveling daguerreotypists created spectacular images of foreign lands. Examples include Alexander Ellis' photographs of Venice taken in May 1841 and the pictures of Pozzuoli, Naples, Pompei, Rome, Assisi, Pisa and Florence that were published in Noël Marie Paymal Lerebours' *Excursions Daguerriennes*. German photographer Adolph Schaefer traveled to Indonesia in 1843 and made the daguerreotypes of temples and cultural artifacts that are now kept at the University of Leiden. The famous artist, diplomat and daguerreotypist Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gros (Baron Gros) travelled to Greece and Egypt, followed by Columbia, Venezuela, and Argentina. Another famous daguerreotypist, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, photographed in Egypt, Syria, Constantinople and Greece in 1843-44.

Triggered by the discovery of gold in January 1848, thousands of prospectors, as well as many daguerreotypists, traveled around Cape

***Ill. 5***, Rev. G. Bridges. View of the Areopagus - Mars Hill at Athens, ca. 1847. Daguerreotype 5.5cm x 7.5cm © National Media Museum, United Kingdom inv. 1970-333_0006

Horn to San Francisco and into the mountains of California. Some, like Carleton Watkins, Robert Vance, and Charles Fredericks stopped en route, making images of Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela. Scores of images document the California gold mines, as well as the camps and small towns that sprang up around them. Some share certain aesthetic qualities with European scenic images, such as views of the Alps emphasizing the graphic patterns of light and shadow with no human presence. Others document the rapidly growing businesses catering for the miners, or portraits of miners, and occasionally their families, who joined them to start new lives far from their homes in the East.

Finally, native populations and unusual fauna and flora were a shared fascination. Images of Native Americans and indigenous populations in Asia documented the 'other'. An example of the shared passion for the 'odd and unusual' are two images, one by Thomas Easterly of St. Louis in the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City, the other attributed to Faustino Curlo, which is now in the collection of the *Archivio Storico della Città di Torino*, in Turin, Italy. The unusual subject is an elephant posed with its human handlers to give a sense of scale for viewers who had never seen one of these animals in real life.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the pioneer photographers who created such wonderful images, and who have left us a rich visual legacy. Masterpieces were created in both Europe and America and each reflects a certain view of life in the mid nineteenth century. Apart from the various differences in style and aesthetic sensibilities, a common theme that unites all of these images is the shared sense of awe and enthusiasm for the new possibilities of capturing light and documenting the world. This was all encapsulated in the daguerreotype: the latest wonder of the modern world.

***Ill. 9***, Faustino Curlo [attr.]. The Stupinigi Castle near Turin was home to an Indian elephant named Fritz, 1850. Daguerreotype 21 cm X 17 cm © Archivio Storico Città di Torino, Italy inv. ASCT_C4400

***Ills. 10***, Thomas Martin Easterly, American (1809-1882). Man with Elephant, ca. 1850. Daguerreotype, 3 ¼ x 4 ¼ inches (8.3 x 10.8 cm). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Gift of Hallmark Cards, Inc., inv. 2005.27.37 © Nelson Gallery Foundation. Photo: Thomas Palmer

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# *The Last Journey*
## *Views of Switzerland and the Alps, by Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey*

*ABSTRACT*

In 2002, a box was uncovered in the collections of the museum of La Gruyère in the town of Bulle (Switzerland), which contained 61 amazing daguerreotypes by the pioneering French daguerreotypist Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey (1804-1892). Created between 1845 and 1850, just a few years after the famous series he had produced in the Mediterranean, they are some of the oldest photographs known to this day. They show views of Basel, the Jura mountains, Bern and its highlands, Vevey, the *Tête-Noire* pass in the Valais canton and the *Mer-de-Glace* glacier in the Chamonix valley. These works provide us with invaluable information on both the techniques used by Girault de Prangey and the places he photographed, giving us a special insight into his fascinating character and opening up some fascinating avenues for research. De Prangey had a genuine passion for the landscape and the history of European and Middle Eastern architecture, and he was an accomplished draughtsman and landscape artist. The 61 daguerreotypes discovered in the museum at Bulle represent our last known evidence of Girault de Prangey's journeys, and this talented photographer ended his life as a recluse in his home at Courcelles-Val-d'Esnoms, near Langres in France.

by CHRISTOPHE MAURON, *Curator, Musée gruérien, Bulle, Switzerland*

In 2002 a wooden box belonging to the archives of the museum of La Gruyère in Bulle was rediscovered, where it had been stored by a previous curator (*Ill. 1*). It contained 61 daguerreotypes, each one measuring 8 by 9.5 centimetres. These silver-coated copper plates were not framed but were in very good condition. They were accompanied by two sheets of paper. One was a typed list entitled *Daguerreotypes by M. Girault de Prangey 1841-42-43 belonging to the Count of Simony*, which also mentioned a "3rd box of 60 unlabelled Swiss scenes". The other was a smaller hand-written sheet of paper which stated: "1 box of 61 plates 8 – 9 ½, Scenery, Chalets, rocks, monuments, 1 boat. Ruins. In Switzerland. Good. The top of the box is removable".

This discovery was not due to sheer luck or chance, as it was made following an exchange of letters with the heirs of the Count of Simony mentioned in the typed list. They had inherited hundreds of photographic plates made by Girault de Prangey. Three separate series of daguerreotype plates were put up for sale in 2000, 2003 and 2004. During the same period,

*Ill. 1*, The box found in 2002, stored by a former curator of the museum © Christophe Dutoit

plates belonging to the National Library of France were put on display in the exhibition *The French daguerreotype - A photographic work of art* (*Musée d'Orsay,* Paris – Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2003).

The name of Girault de Prangey was no longer known only to enlightened specialists. It had suddenly emerged from oblivion and the general public was able to discover this prolific architectural designer and pioneer of photography who created nearly a thousand daguerreotypes between 1841 and 1844 in Europe and in the Middle-East (in cities such as Paris, Rome, Athens, Istanbul, Jerusalem and Cairo).

The curators of the *Musée gruérien* - an institution chiefly devoted to regional artefacts, which aims to preserve and enhance the heritage of Gruyère in the Swiss canton of Fribourg – are well aware of the incredible scope of their discovery and the truly exceptional value of these unique images for the history of the art of photography. Thanks to the support of the Swiss state and a number of other partners they were able to employ two specialists, Sylvie Henguely and Christophe Dutoit, in order to initiate a research programme. The results of this important project were exhibited in Bulle in 2008 at an exhibition entitled *Silver Mirrors. Daguerreotypes by Girault de Prangey. Views of Switzerland, France and the Middle-East*. A book was also published in connection with the exhibition.

All of the questions that these daguerreotypes raised may not yet have been answered but, at this point, we certainly know a great deal more about the wooden box rediscovered in 2002, including its precious contents and their creator, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey (1804-1892).

The first and foremost task for the museum was to ensure the long-term preservation of the unframed plates which had been stored,

tightly packed in the grooves of the specially made wooden box. Christophe Brandt, director of the Swiss Institute for the Preservation of Photographs in Neuchâtel, was put in charge of this delicate task. The 61 daguerreotypes were cleaned, framed in modern casings to protect them from deterioration, and reproduced in high-definition so that they could be easily viewed and consulted, also online (***Ill. 2***).

The plates were of a size that was quite unusual for that time and the lens used had produced excellent sharpness of the image in the centre with a slight blurring around the edges. The handling and mode of storage of the plates had led to some surface scratching and some of them had traces of oxidation.

A hallmark in the shape of a rosette was also noted. This was the emblem of the manufacturer of the plates but his identity remains a mystery for now. Nevertheless, this hallmark, together with some other elements, has enabled us to confirm that the images are genuine works of Girault de Prangey. In this the museum was assisted by a specialist, Sylvie Aubenas, the former director of the department of engravings and photography at the National Library of France. Had each of the 'Swiss plates' been properly labelled, it would have been easier to date them and determine their locations, but it was soon evident that the brief hand-written sheet found inside the

***Ill. 2***, Showcase at the "Silver Mirrors" exhibition at the Musée gruérien, 2008 © Christophe Dutoit

box was by the same hand as the labels on various other daguerreotypes by de Prangey.

In 2006 four major lines of research had already been developed:

- to reconstruct the biography of the author of the plates on the basis of existing biographies and original manuscripts;
- to conduct an overview of the works of the artist (paintings, drawings, engravings and photographs), which would be as complete as possible;
- to identify, locate and date the views preserved in the museum, in spite of the absence of a genuine travel diary or adequate labelling of the plates;
- to give Girault de Prangey the recognition he deserves in the history of photography, in Switzerland as well as in the world.

In carrying out this research from 2006 to 2009 Christophe Dutoit and Sylvie Henguely retraced the footsteps of the photographer through Switzerland, France and England. Their task gradually became a genuine detective investigation with a multitude of clues, all of which had to be collected, compared and pored over. Possible theories had to be checked out, with some trails leading to good results, others to dead-ends. There were moments of joy when the solutions came to light and other moments of blank discouragement. With the help of the people in charge of various institutions, as well as private researchers and collectors, all the hard work was finally crowned with success and a detailed and informative picture could be presented of the life and the works of this artist and his fascinating character, as well as an insight into the period in which he lived.

The daguerreotypes of the Musée Gruérien are exclusively views of natural scenery and buildings, and there are no portraits, still-lifes or pictures of other genres. All the images were taken during various trips and journeys to Switzerland. The only written trace of a visit by the artist to Switzerland is his signature in the register of foreigners who stayed at the Hotel des Trois-Rois in Basel in August 1849. On the other hand, specialists on the lakes of the area have claimed that a picture he took of a steamboat near Interlaken (Canton of Bern) can only have been taken between 1843 and 1847. Other clues such as the dates of the inauguration of monuments, or of the conversion of buildings, lead us to the conclusion that the pictures taken in Switzerland can reliably be dated between 1845 and 1850.

Prior to 1845 Switzerland was not entirely unfamiliar to our daguerreotypist. His family had taken refuge here during the French Revolution and in 1834, on a return trip from Italy, he had also travelled through Switzerland, where he stopped to draw a picture in Baden and another in Zurich (of the cathedral cloister). A few years later he entered into a correspondence with the archaeologist Désiré Raoul-Rochette, the author of *Lettres sur la Suisse* who, although French, had a particular interest in Switzerland.

Another discovery was that, in spite of the indications written on the two sheets of paper found in the box, not all the pictures were actually taken in Switzerland. The pictures that have been identified – and this is not the case for all of them – included pictures taken in Chamonix (the *Mer-de-Glace* glacier) and Aix-les-Bains (the Roman arch dedicated to Lucius Pompeius Campanus) (***Ill. 3***). It should however be noted that the guide books of the period generally associate these locations with Switzerland. Nevertheless there is also a picture of the church of Avrigney, in Haute-Saône in the region of Franche-Comté (this may have been taken during a trip between the artist's home in Courcelles-Val-d'Esnoms and Switzerland), and four pictures of the ruins of the former spa of Mont-Doré in Auvergne.

If one considers the collection from a geographical point of view, all three of the main regions of Switzerland are represented: the Jura (with views and rocky gorges between Basel and Bienne), the central plateau (with pictures of the towns of Bern, Basel and Vevey) and the Alps (with the Bernese Oberland and the Valais) (***Ill. 4***). As regards the actual pictures themselves, Girault de Prangey was

***Ill. 3***, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, Mer-de-Glace, Mont-Blanc mountain range, 1845-1850
© Musée gruérien, Bulle, inv. GP-DAG-027

***Ill. 4***, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, Hemp drying in front of a barn, Bernese Oberland, 1845-1850
© Musée gruérien, Bulle, inv. GP-DAG-043

quite eclectic, and this was a fairly typical quality of the amateur daguerreotypists of the time, most of whom were knowledgeable and wealthy travellers, who were among the very first to experiment with this wonderful new technique. The themes that had attracted de Prangey on his travels in the Mediterranean crop up once more in these 'Swiss' pictures: natural scenery, scenes of geological and botanical interest, archaeological sites, townscapes and village streets, monuments and architecture (featuring buildings of various different styles and periods, often with fountains and statues) (*Ill. 5*). There are also some particularly individual choices that do not seem to fit in with what is otherwise a selection made with in a rather systematic way.

The photographer recorded (possibly at the request of the owners) a number of buildings that had been recently completed, such as the Schilthof in Basel and the Château de l'Aile in Vevey, the first in Neoclassical style and the second in Neo-Gothic style (*Ill. 6*). He also took a picture of a steamboat, docked at a wharf in Interlaken, as well as one of a man in a top-hat sitting on a rock near the Hotel de la Tête-Noire in the Valais, seen from a mountain path. This man can, however, only be discerned with the help of a magnifying glass.

In order to better understand the aims of de Prangey and his photographic techniques it is worth examining his use of focussing. In his pictures the artist often focussed upon one element that he deemed to be more important

***Ill. 5***, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, Rock face in the Alps, 1845-1850 © Musée gruérien, Bulle, inv. GP-DAG-041

and worthy of an exceptionally clear definition. Sometimes it is rather difficult for us to understand why certain details such as a tympanum supported by a Roman column in the cloister of the cathedral of Basel, specific rock or glacier formations or a particular house in a street in Unterseen (canton Bern) were emphasised in this way. Occasionally, the artist even took two pictures of the same subject, one close-up and the other from further away. He sometimes took a series of plates of rocky cliffs that can be viewed one next to the other in order to create a wide panorama.

One is inevitably led to the conclusion that Girault de Prangey was not merely concerned with the more picturesque aspects of photography. He did not just produce overall views but often chose to focus more on certain key elements or details. This kind of emphasis can be explained by the use the artist made of his daguerreotypes from 1841 onwards, which is similar to his use of sketches and drawings before then[1]. It seems that in creating most of the views on his 'Grand Tour' between 1842 and 1844, Girault de Prangey considered photography not so much as an end in itself, but as the means to achieve a final result, and as a step in the process of creating other images.
He undoubtedly saw the ability of daguerreotypes to precisely and faithfully reproduce the world as an essential quality and he used them, with the help of water-colour sketches to record the exact colours of the scenes he photographed, to create the large sized albums of coloured lithographic prints entitled *Arabian Monuments of Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor, drawn and measured between 1842 and 1845* (1846) and *Monuments and Scenes of the East* (1851). The only other artist of the time who worked in a similar way and who can be compared to de Prangey as regards the quantity, quality and use of daguerreotype plates he used, including the same attention towards focussing, was John Ruskin. There are some differences, however, especially since the Englishman employed other people to make the plates, whereas the Frenchman made his own.

It should be noted that Girault de Prangey never used the term 'daguerreotype', in the titles, footnotes or captions of his published works. Instead he referred only to 'drawings' and 'measurements'. As far as we know his daguerreotypes were, moreover, never exhibited to the public during his lifetime. While most painters at the time used hand-drawn sketches or designs to create their final paintings, our artist used his silver-plated photographic plates as a means to an end rather than as work of art in themselves. In this sense Girault de Prangey was following the advice of Paul Delaroche, who at that time was a member of the *Academie des Beaux-Arts*:

*"If daguerreotypes were to be included in the notion of artistic creation, it could only be as a support to be used in the art of painting: the painter could make use of this process to quickly make a collection of study-designs. Otherwise, personal sketches and drawings would be far more time-consuming and less precise, however talented the artist*[2]".

Prior to the invention of photography, it is very likely that Girault de Prangey, who was fascinated by the precise details of architecture, used a technical process similar to that of the 'camera obscura'. This was the 'camera lucida' which projected an image of the real world onto a blank sheet of paper, where it could be accurately duplicated by hand. He seems to have worked along the same lines as Dutch painters of outdoor scenes such as Vermeer or Italian painters like Canaletto, who were already using the 'camera obscura' in the 17th century. In this sense he can be considered as an artist who used photography as an aid or support for his art, rather than as a photographer as such.

This explanation gives an interesting clue to the intended use of the daguerreotypes that our artist made during his travels between 1842 and 1844, but it does not really give us a clear insight into the reasons behind the daguerreotypes he made during his Swiss

travels. In fact Girault de Prangey never published an album of *Remarkable monuments and scenery in Switzerland and the Alps* and no engraving, drawing or painting with his signature has ever come to light representing any of the places he visited in Switzerland. This is all rather mysterious. Did Girault de Prangey have a project like this that he was never able to complete? Did he intend these images to be used as a support for further works on architecture and landscape or did he just intend to keep them as souvenirs of his travels?

As far as we know, Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey's travels in Switzerland were the last of his photographic expeditions outside France. From 1851 onwards our adventurous traveller seems to have progressively cut himself off from the world, living like a hermit in the 'Villa Orientale' which he had built in *Courcelle Val d'Esnoms*. He was unmarried with no children and was considered by his neighbours to be somewhat eccentric. He cultivated exotic plants in greenhouses (although the Langres regions is one of the coldest in France) and from 1860 to 1870 he created a few more daguerreotypes and took some stereoscopic photos of nearby areas. Eventually he died in 1892 at the age of 88.

As regards Girault de Prangey's Swiss pictures it is of course possible that he had no intention of using them to make engravings at all, because he felt that these scenes were pleasing just as they were. Perhaps they had simply caught his eye and he had recorded them on the daguerreotype plates without wishing to use them as the basis for a further project. This idea is supported by the fact that during his previous travels he recorded other images – now in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* – which show scenes such as cedar trees in Lebanon, a palm tree near Athens and a girl smoking a hookah in Cairo. These photographs seem to comply to a similar pattern, being taken for the sake of the beauty and interest of the image in itself.

***Ill. 6*** Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey, The Schilthof, Basel, 1845-1850 © Musée gruérien, Bulle, inv. GP-DAG-054

## *NOTES*

**1.** Jacobson, Ken and Jenny Jacobson. *Carrying Off the Palaces. John Ruskin's Lost Daguerreotypes*, London: Quaritch, 2015, p.140

**2.** Planchon de Font-Réaulx, Dominique. *Peinture et photographie. Les enjeux d'une rencontre (1839-1914)*, Paris: Flammarion, 2012, p. 51

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This paper is based on the research conducted for the exhibition and the book:


Mauron, Christophe, ed. *Miroirs d'argent. Daguerréotypes de Girault de Prangey*. Genève: Ed. Slatkine, 2008. Exposition, Bulle, Musée gruérien, 30.11. 2008 - 29.03. 2009.

MARGARET CALVARIN

# The Diorama in Bry-sur-Marne
## *A Singular Conservation Project 2007-2013*

***Ill.1***, Restorer working on the painted faux marble in the church *Saint Gervais et Saint Protais*, Bry-sur-Marne. Photo: Ariel Bertrand

*ABSTRACT*

Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre is well known as a photographer, but he was also a painter, a theatrical set designer and organizer of spectacular scenic displays and visual shows. In 1822 he invented the "diorama", which was a painted realistic illusion of a panoramic view.
In 1840 Daguerre moved to Bry-sur-Marne, where he had bought a large house opposite the parish church of *St. Gervais et St. Protais*. In 1842 he created his last diorama in this church. This *trompe l'œil* work created the extraordinary illusion that the chancel of the modest church extended into a much larger Gothic church. The efficacy of the diorama was enhanced by the cunning use of the transparency of the paint and the canvas, as well as the play of natural light, which also gave it a dynamic impact. In 1913 this monumental painting measuring 5.35 by 6 meters was officially classified as a historical monument.
In February 2007 the fourth restoration of the diorama was begun, involving 12 conservators working on the layers of paint and their support. The uneven and yellowed paint and the parts that had been repainted in previous restorations were removed and the thick linen cloth that had been added as a lining was removed. Between 2010 and 2013 the conservation of the translucent canvas of the diorama continued, alongside restoration work on the church itself. The restored diorama was put back in its original position and was officially presented to the public in September 2013, on the occasion of the French national heritage celebrations.

by MARGARET CALVARIN, *curator at the Musée Adrien Mentienne in Bry-sur-Marne, France*

The commune of Bry-sur-Marne houses the last of the many dioramas created by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (18 November 1787 – 10 July 1851), who is well known for inventing the first effective photographic process in 1839, after he had developed and perfected the procedure of Nicéphore Nièpce. The first commercially viable form of photography was named after him, as these images were called 'daguerreotypes'. Daguerre was however also a painter and a theatrical set designer who worked as an entertainment entrepreneur, planning and organizing spectacular scenic displays and visual shows. In 1822 he invented the 'diorama', a kind of visual entertainment can be considered as being something between a painting and a theatrical spectacle. It consisted of a painted realistic illusion of a panoramic view, often changing according to the way it was illuminated. Daguerre developed various other 'realistic illusions' but this was certainly the most spectacular and successful.
In 1840 Daguerre moved to Bry-sur-Marne where, at the request of Geneviève de Rigny, the *chatelaine* of this small town, he created the diorama in the parish church of *Saint Gervais et Saint Protais*. This is the only such work of his that has survived to the present day.

## *The installation of the diorama*

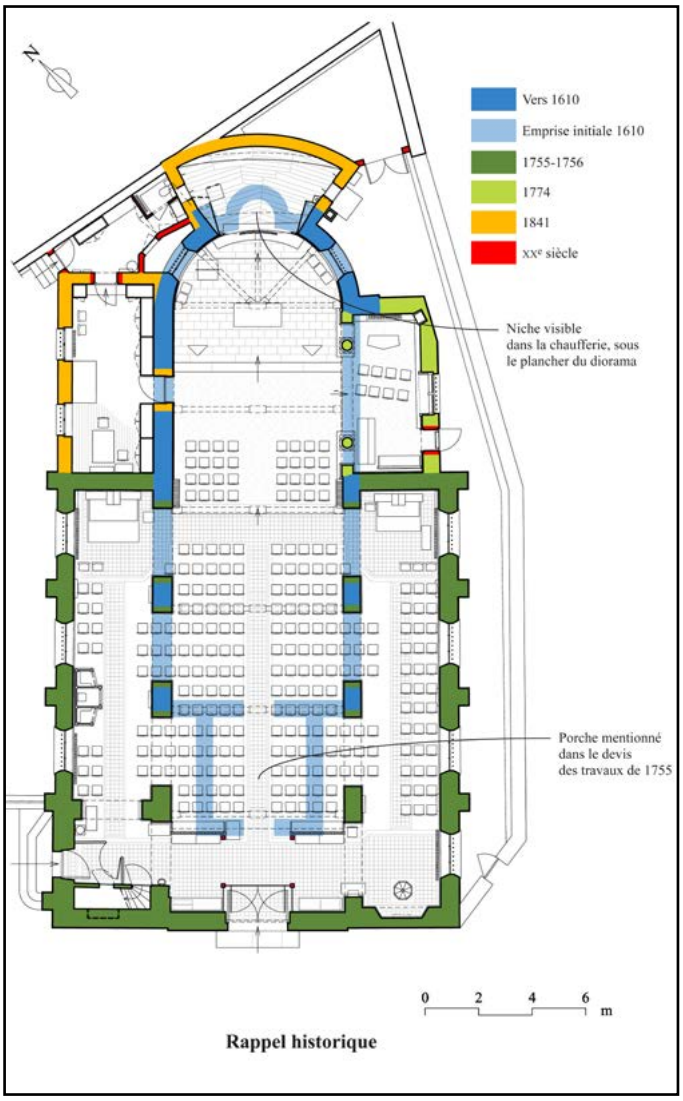
From 1841 to 1842 a major modification was made to the small church, with the construction of an extension to the choir, which projected beyond the original position of the apse. It was four meters deep and at its far end it was as wide as the choir. A continuous canvas designed and painted by Louis Daguerre was then hung in such a way as to completely cover the view of its walls. This painting was brought to life by various carefully planned lighting effects. Daguerre also made some modifications to the interior decoration of the church so as to harmonize it with this newly installed creation.

## *The theatrical modifications made to the church*

Daguerre darkened some of the windows of the nave and painted the walls of the chancel

with fake marbling in black and dark green in order to create a twilight mood. In this way it was almost impossible for a person in the nave to see where the cleverly lit painting began or to locate the source of the light. Treating the choir like the stage of a theatre, Daguerre created a sort of stage behind the altar, flanked by two genuine life-size statues in niches, and he installed oak panels at the base of the diorama, which was framed by heavy curtains hanging from the ceiling. All of this was planned to increase the illusion of continuity between the diorama and the building, with various *trompe l'oeil* effects, combining painted and real three-dimensional decorative elements, which were used to further enhance the work's impact. This complex trickery was intended to persuade the visitor to the modest church that its choir opened into the interior of a vast gothic nave, with arcaded pillars, religious paintings, stained glass windows, confessionals, banners, hanging draperies and bouquets.

The diorama in Bry-sur-Marne is a truly monumental pictorial work. It measures 5.35 by 6 meters (just over 32 square meters) and in 1913 it was officially classified as a historical monument. It was the last major European diorama in the history of this kind of visual entertainment.




## *The technique of painting the diorama to produce a 'double effect' or living illusion*

The diorama was painted on both sides of three vertical strips of fine linen canvas cloth, tightened and stretched on a frame of curved crossbars. The base, supported by a counterweight system, was at the eye level of a person seated in the church. The curtains at the sides concealed the natural light source for illuminating the canvas, which was exceptionally transparent and evenly woven, so that it could give a bright daytime effect when illuminated from the front and a more sombre nocturnal effect when illuminated from behind. Daguerre himself describes how similar effects could be achieved:

*"The first effect, which should be the lightest of the two, is applied to the front of the canvas and no white paint is used in the first effect. The colours used are mixed with oil and applied to the canvas using spirits; no white or opaque colours may be applied in layers as these would produce spots that are more or less coloured, depending on their opacity.*
*The second effect is painted on the back of the canvas. During its application, there should be no other light except that which filters through the canvas from the front…. During the application of the second effect, one should concentrate on black and white modelling and not worry about the colours of the first effect*

***Ill.2***, Architectural plan of the church of *Saint Gervais et Saint Protais*, Bry-sur-Marne © Moulin, Jacques. *Etude préalable à la repose du diorama et la mise en valeur de l'église* - 2BDM architects, October 2010

*which are visible through the transparent cloth; the modelling is obtained by adding a small amount of "noir de pêche" to a white base so as to make a gray whose intensity is determined by applying it to the back of the canvas and then looking at it from the front to make sure it is not visible*".[1]

With the use of daylight shining through the cloth Daguerre thus added certain details on the back of the canvas that he wished to be hidden when the painting was viewed from the front, until the right light conditions would almost magically reveal them to the viewer.

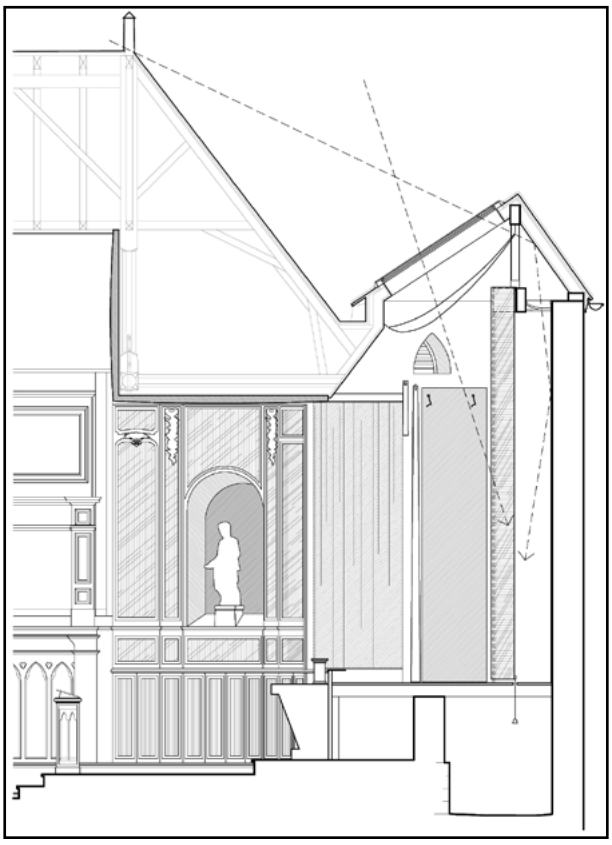
### *The light does not make the show, it is the show*

The diorama was lit by a skylight set in the roof, allowing natural light to play across the surface of the canvas, in addition to two small side windows behind the painting, the light of which was softened and moderated by the heavy lateral curtains. These windows created flickering effects caused by the position of the sun and movement of clouds in the sky. The orientation of the church allowed sunlight to illuminate various parts of the picture as the sun changed its position throughout the day. Only the light was mobile, with the first effects of brilliant or muted sunlight falling on the top of the painting from the front, gradually being replaced by a second effect in the evening. To achieve this second effect the brick walls behind the work of art were painted in white to reflect and augment the light behind the painting.

Between these two extremes the varying effects of constantly changing reflected or refracted light, falling onto the painting either from the top or diagonally crossing through the painting from behind, produced an infinity of entrancing effects. Certain details emerged or faded due to the gradual modulation in the direction of light by day and by night. These details included painted candles that seemed to be lit at night. The light thus completed and enhanced the illusion of space and depth, bringing it to life in a spellbinding way, with increasing or decreasing gradations that produced a sense of movement, change and transformation, during the gradual natural transition from day to night.

### *The inauguration of the diorama in june 1842*

Daguerre's diorama was unveiled on June 19th 1842, the day of the annual town festival. After such a long wait the locals could finally see this extraordinary creation and satisfy their avid curiosity. It had taken Daguerre six full months to complete, hidden behind a curtain and working from five am to eight pm even on Sundays. It was said that while he was painting the canvas he frequently went to check the effect of each brushstroke, as seen from various parts of the church.
Everyone who beheld the results of Daguerre's labours was overwhelmed, and people came



***Ill.3***, Cross section of the *Saint Gervais et Saint Protais* church choir © Moulin, Jacques. *Etude préalable à la repose du diorama et la mise en valeur de l'église* - 2BDM architects, October 2010

The restoration of this unique work was funded by the French State, the department of the Val de Marne, the region of Ile de France, the Fondation du Patrimoine and The Getty Foundation.

*Ill. 4*, The Diorama in the church after restoration © *Musée Adrien Mentienne* in Bry-sur-Marne

from all over the world to admire the diorama. Nevertheless those of more fastidious taste felt that its location in a village church was inappropriate. For example, one of Daguerre's contemporaries wrote the following disapproving comments:

"We would especially like to insist upon the inappropriateness of placing such a work in a church. (...) The Bry-sur-Marne church spectacle is complete, including even the curtain which opens and closes at the beginning and end of the service. (...) we were pained to see the audience hurry up the steps of the altar and ask that the curtain be opened once again in order to see the marvellous composition more closely".[2]

The diorama was criticized by the clergy who felt that it distracted the attention of the members of the congregation, as they frequently ceased praying to gasp with amazement as they watched the changing display in the apse. Around 1860 the parish priest of Bry-sur-Marne had a curtain installed over the diorama and this stayed in place throughout the twentieth century.

### *The restoration of the diorama*

In 1913 the diorama was classified as a historical monument, the first contemporary work designated as such, but it remained out of sight behind the curtain. A series of ruinous restorations in 1950, 1961 and 1975 caused terrible damage to the painting at the hands of conservators who failed to realise that it was a diorama and not merely a *trompe l'oeil* painting. Finally in February 2007, with the help of funds from the Getty Foundation, the fourth restoration of the diorama was begun, involving 12 conservators working on the layers of paint and their canvas support. The diorama was restored in a specially constructed workshop, where the ravages of time, damage and neglect were repaired and its original translucent aspect was recreated. The uneven and yellowed paint and the parts that had been repainted in previous restorations were painstakingly removed and the thick linen cloth that had been added as a lining was detached. Between 2010 and 2013 the conservation of the translucent canvas of the diorama was effected, alongside important restoration work on the church itself. In 2013 at long last Daguerre's restored diorama was returned to its original position in the church, where it can now be admired by visitors who are as impressed as those who saw it when it was first inaugurated.

### *The restoration work in the church and final installation of Daguerre's diorama (2010-2013)*

In order to properly house the diorama in its former place in the church so that it could be admired in the context for which it was originally created, a renovation of the interior decoration of the church of Saint Gervais and Saint Protais in Bry-sur-Marne was also carried out. This involved the restoration of the painted faux marble and faux wood on the panelling of the choir. The two side windows in the choir that had been opened in 1970 were closed up again in accordance with the conditions in 1842 and the two statues were returned to their original places. The original lighting effects were restored thanks to the reinstallation of the skylight with isothermal glazing and adjustable shutters to avoid any overheating of the canvas. The former *mise en scène* was completed with the installation of a valance and a curtain, while the lateral screens were covered with red pleated cloth.

After 6 years of work on the diorama and the church, Daguerre's restored creation was returned to its original location, fixed to tie-beams and held vertically by a suspension-tension system. The diorama was officially presented to the public in September 2013, on the occasion of the French national heritage celebrations. It had finally been reinstalled in a state that was as close as possible to its original conditions and appearance.

## *A timeline for Daguerre's diorama*

| | |
|---|---|
| **1841 - 1842** | The vaulted ceiling of the nave of the church of Saint Gervais and Saint Protais is replaced by plaster-covered panelling. The altarpiece is removed and an extension is added to the choir. Louis Daguerre's diorama, a huge painted canvas lit from above, is installed. The interior is renovated to harmonize with the diorama. |
| **1869** | The wooden frame of the glass skylight is replaced by a metallic one. Around this time a curtain is installed over the diorama. |
| **1873** | The diorama is repaired after being slashed by a Prussian soldier's sabre. |
| **1910** | The old tombstones are removed from the apse (they may have been sold in 1926) and the apse decoration by Daguerre is repainted in lighter tones. |
| **1913** | The diorama is registered as a national historic monument. |
| **1925** | Central heating is installed (with a boiler beneath the floor of the room housing the diorama). |
| **1928** | Stained-glass windows are installed in the side aisles. |
| **1930** | The terracotta roof tiles of the room housing the diorama are replaced by slate tiles. |
| **1950** | The diorama is restored for the first time (by Jean Malesset and Paul-Hubert Lepage). The back of the work is scraped and it is transferred to a new canvas to reinforce it, thereby eliminating the transparency which made it effective as a diorama. |
| **1961** | The diorama is restored for the second time (by Jean Malesset). |
| **1970** | Two side windows are opened in the choir. The paintings on the walls of the nave are removed (about twenty, according to the 1905 inventory). |
| **1974** | A large cross in cement is installed in the window of the west façade and the original glass is replaced by stained glass (designed by Pierre Le Cacheux). |
| **1975** | The diorama is restored for the third time (again by Jean Malesset). These three interventions have considerably affected its appearance. |
| **1988** | Stained glass (designed by Ewa Stykala) is installed in the two side windows of the choir. |
| **1999** | The outside of the church is refaced. A glass airlock is installed in the west door. |
| **1999 -2000** | A feasibility study is carried out concerning the restoration of the diorama (LRMH). |
| **2007** | The diorama is removed and the fourth restoration begins. |
| **2010 - 2013** | The church is substantially restored. |
| **2013** | The restored diorama is officially presented to the public on the occasion of the French national heritage celebrations. |

## *NOTES*

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2.Duchaine, Abbé. “Diorama de M. Daguerre, appliqué à l’église de Bry-sur-Marne”, in *L’ami de la religion, journal ecclésiastique, politique et littéraire*, vol. 114, 1842, pp. 191-19

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# A Contemporary Daguerreotypist in Venice in the Footsteps of John Ruskin

by BENIAMINO TERRANEO, *contemporary Daguerreotypist, Italy*

*"For some years now I have been making daguerreotypes and I consider this to be a perfect procedure for my photographic work at present. I like the characteristic sharpness of daguerreotypes, the purity of the thickly deposited silver, its brilliance, and the image that is simultaneously negative and positive, appearing or disappearing like a divinity, depending on the angle at which the plate is viewed.*

*In the series "In the Footsteps of Ruskin" I tried to create a timeless setting and to evoke reality instead of just imitating the past. I felt that a return to the original technique would help me to savour once again the unique wonder of the landscape that so fascinated Ruskin and that still attracts the modern traveller. I advocate an honest kind of photography that is simple rather than sensational. My intention is to produce photographs that are objects to be viewed closely, just as if one were reading a book: images that suggest something precious, living and organic.*

*In the nineteenth century Ruskin was one of the first visitors to take home a very lifelike souvenir of the beauty of Italy, but today there is no longer the same pressing need to create a "portrait" of things. Everything has been photographed already, and yet the daguerreotype has a clear relationship with atmosphere, dust and memories. In these times of the digital flood what interests me is these oases of the true, the simple and the natural, far away from any screens or pixels".*

*Ill.1*,Benimino Terraneo, Ponte dei Consafelzi, Venezia, 2014

***Ill.2***, Beniamino Terraneo, Scala del Bovolo, Venezia, 2013

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L.J.M.Daguerre,The Royal Palace (detail), 1840 © National Technical Museum, Czech Republic

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