

**Louis Daguerre and the Beginnings of Photography
in France**

In addition to the printing techniques of lithography and wood engraving, a new process of chemical printing was

10-37 **Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre**, *The Artist's Studio*, 1837. Daguerreotype, 6 x 8" (16.5 x 21.7 cm). Société Française de Photographie, Paris.





10-38 **Honoré Daumier**, *Photography. A New Procedure, Used To Ensure Graceful Poses*. From the series *Croquis Parisiens* (Parisian Sketches). Illustration in *Le Charivari*, 1856. Lithograph. University of California, Los Angeles, Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

developed in the 1830s by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851). One of the most inventive men of his time, Daguerre was a stage designer, a painter, a printmaker, an amateur scientist, and an entrepreneur. Before he became involved with photography, he had obtained international fame as the inventor of the “diorama,” a form of artistic entertainment analogous to the panorama (see *Girtin and the Vogue for the Painted Panorama*, page 187) that owed its illusionary effects to the manipulation of light.

Together with Joseph Nicéphore Niepce, Daguerre developed one of the first of the numerous photographic processes that were to be used in the nineteenth century. His “daguerreotype” differed from other processes in that it was printed not on paper but on thin silver-coated copper plates. Daguerreotypes were known for their clarity and sharpness. The disadvantage of the process was that it only allowed for a single impression.

One of Daguerre’s earliest photographs, dating from 1837, is of a still life arrangement of plaster casts and other objects placed in a window embrasure in the artist’s studio (FIG. 10-37). Daguerre has carefully manipulated the light in order to achieve dramatic contrasts of light and dark. Still life was a common subject in early photography. Exposure times were so long, initially 15–30 minutes, that it was impossible to photograph anything that moved. Already by 1842, however, the process had been improved

to allow for much shorter exposure times of 10–50 seconds. By the mid-1840s the daguerreotype could be used for portrait photography, as long as the models sat very still. To meet this challenge, photographers used a special apparatus that clamped and effectively immobilized the sitter’s head (FIG. 10-38). This explains the stiff formality of many early portrait photographs (for example, FIG. 10-39), which, paradoxically, often seem less lively than painted portraits of the same period.

Portraiture was probably the most common early use of photography. The camera offered members of the middle class an opportunity to record likenesses of themselves and their loved ones without having to lay out the cash to have a portrait painted. Yet photography was also commonly used to document places, as we see in the *View of the Seine and the Louvre* (FIG. 10-40), of 1847, by Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gros (1793–1870). Such photographs were the predecessors of the picture postcard of modern times.

Daguerre’s process was only one of many that were developed in various parts of Europe in the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. Among these the calotype (Greek for “beautiful print”), invented in Britain by William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877), was the first process that made it possible to print on paper rather than a metallic surface (see page 333).



10-39 **E. Thiesson**, *Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre*, 1844. Daguerreotype. Musée Carnavalet, Paris.



10-40 **Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gros**, *View of the Seine and the Louvre*, 1847. Daguerreotype. George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

Photography

Manet's *Portrait of Emile Zola* demonstrates that portrait painting survived in Second-Empire France, despite the increasing competition of photography. Since portrait photography took over the documentary as well as the publicity roles of portraiture (see page 254), portrait painters needed to change to survive. Unlike photographs, paintings left considerable room for subjectivity. Painters could import into the portrait indications of the sitter's character or contribution to society. They could also convey something about their own personal relationship to the sitter. Manet's *Portrait of Zola*, as we have seen, is filled with references to Manet himself, making it a true "friendship" portrait.

Yet, while portrait painting was changing to compete with photography, portrait photography itself was evol-

ing from a technique of convenience to a true art form. Perhaps the greatest photographer of the period was Félix Tournachon (1820–1910), who used the pseudonym Nadar. Nadar began his career as a portrait caricaturist, and had a sharp sensitivity to the facial characteristics of his sitters. In his portrait photographs he brought out the physical and psychological essence of his sitters through posing, lighting, and various darkroom manipulations.

Nadar's *Portrait of Edouard Manet* (FIG. 12-39) conveys both the artist's intensity and his anti-authoritarian attitude. By lighting Manet's face from above, so that the eyebrows shade the eyes, he has intensified the artist's penetrating gaze; similarly, by photographing the artist close-up, Nadar has put him "in your face," emphasizing his rebellious nature.

Nadar made a specialty of photographing the political and artistic celebrities of his time. There was a great demand



12-39 **Nadar** (pseudonym of Félix Tournachon), *Portrait of Edouard Manet*, c.1865. Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques et de Sites, Archives Photographiques, Paris.

for celebrity photographs during the nineteenth century, and competition in the "star market" became increasingly stiff. This led the photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri (1819–1889) to develop a new, convenient, and inexpensive portrait format that he referred to as a *carte-de-visite*. This was a full-length portrait photograph pasted on a mount the size of a calling card. First produced in the late 1850s, *cartes-de-visite* became fashionable in the 1860s, when they were collected by adults much the way that children today collect baseball cards. People had special albums, with photographs of celebrities as well as of relatives and friends.

Disdéri's *carte-de-visite* of Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III (FIG. 12-40), is a typical celebrity portrait. Because they were small and full-length, *cartes-de-visite* could not offer the psychological insight of Nadar's *Portrait of Manet*. Instead, pose, dress, and setting played an impor-

tant role in the characterization of the figure. In Disdéri's photograph of Eugénie the Empress is shown in a private moment, perusing an album. Dressed, according to the latest fashion, in the stiff crinoline that made sitting quite difficult for women, she is both pretty and modest, fitting the ideals of French nineteenth-century womanhood.

New Roles for Photography

Disdéri's *cartes-de-visite* are a symptom of the ever-growing popularity of images, a phenomenon that began during the July Monarchy and escalated throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Photography contributed immensely to this phenomenon. Just as Disdéri flooded the world with portrait photographs, so other photogra-



12-40 **André Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri**, *Portrait of Empress Eugénie*, c.1858. Carte-de-visite photograph. Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Paris.



12-41 **Gustave Le Gray and O. Mestral**, *Central Portal of the Church of St. Jacques, Aubeterre*, 1851. Salted paper print from paper negative, 9³/₁₆ x 11¹/₁₆" (23.3 x 28.1 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

phers produced large numbers of photographs of sites. Site photography served two related purposes: one was documentary, as with Marville's photographs of old Paris (see page 271), the other informational and entertaining. Maxime Du Camp's album of photographs of the Near East (see page 283) was meant in the first instance for the armchair traveler, who could acquaint himself with the sights of Egypt, Nubia, and Syria from the comfort of the living room.

Perhaps the most important French site photographer of the mid-nineteenth century was Gustave Le Gray (1820–1884). Though trained as an artist, Le Gray turned to photography early on and quickly acquired great technical expertise. This led him, in 1850, to publish an important treatise on photography. He also became one of the first teachers of photography. In an old factory building on the outskirts of Paris, he trained numerous professional as well as amateur photographers. In 1851 the Committee on Historic Monuments (Commission des Monuments Historiques) commissioned Le Gray and other photographers to document ancient monuments in France. Together with his student O. Mestral (active 1848–56), Le Gray traveled throughout France to photograph architectural monuments, including churches, monasteries, and fortifications. Their photograph of the central entrance portal of the medieval church of St. Jacques in Aubeterre (FIG. 12-41), shows how seriously the two men took their documentary

purpose. By carefully lighting the portal, they managed to bring out not only every architectural detail but also the signs of age that mark the stone surface. But there is more to this photograph than accurate documentation. By leaving one of the doors to the church open, Le Gray and Mestral created a dark hole in the center of the photograph that lends it an air of mystery. This, and the emphasis on the worn surface of the portal, connects their photograph to the Romantic picturesque tradition of the *Voyages Pittoresques* of the July Monarchy (see page 240).

In addition to documentary photographs, Le Gray also produced pure landscape photographs that were conceived and marketed as independent works of art. He submitted these to the Salon and other exhibitions and sold them to collectors. Most famous among them were two sets of photographs of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean that he produced in 1856 and 1857. *Solar Effect – Ocean* (FIG. 12-42) shows the sun bursting through a dark cloud, dramatically illuminating the calm water surface. Photographs like this had never been seen before, and they were immensely successful when they were exhibited, first in Paris and then in London. A British critic, writing for the *Journal of the Photographic Society*, described *Solar Effect* in these terms: "From the midst of this 'pothor' of dimness falls a gush of liquid light, full and flush on the sea, where it leaves a glow of glory." To achieve the dramatic contrast between light and dark in his seascapes, Gray used



12-42 **Gustave Le Gray**, *Solar Effect – Ocean*, 1857, Albumen print from a collodion-on-glass negative, 12 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 16" (31.3 x 40.5 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

two glass plates, one for the bright sky, the other for the dark surface of the sea, so that neither area would be over- or underexposed.

Another important new role of photography, finally, was the reproduction of works of art, both paintings and sculptures. By the middle of the nineteenth century, photography had become a serious competitor to the reproductive handmade engraving (see page 33). In the background of Manet's portrait of Zola is a photograph of *Olympia* (see FIG. 12-37). Such photographs were commissioned by artists for documentary as well as promotional purposes. In addition, like prints, photographs of works of art were sold to

collectors to be framed and hung on the wall. As the printing of photographs from negatives was a laborious process in the nineteenth century, the number of reproductions pulled from a negative was usually small. To overcome this problem, photographers and printmakers began to experiment with new processes that combined printmaking and photography. A wide array of such processes was invented, from 1827 onwards. By the end of the Second Empire, major dealers in art reproduction, such as Adolphe Goupil in Paris, sold large numbers of photomechanically produced prints, though Goupil, for one, continued to commission and sell handmade prints as well.



14-26 **William Frith**, *At the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)*, 1854. Oil on canvas, 30 x 60" (76.2 cm x 1.54 m). Royal Collection, St James's Palace, London.

Genre Painting and Photography in the Mid-Victorian Period

While the Pre-Raphaelites tried to give painting a religious or moralizing significance, genre painting, eminently popular before their entrance upon the artistic scene, remained so even after the middle of the nineteenth century. Its focus, however, gradually shifted from the anecdotal toward the descriptive. A new fashion rose for paintings that depicted middle-class life in a detailed, documentary manner. William Frith (1819–1909), from the mid-1850s onwards, painted a series of pictures that documented public life of the middle class at the seashore, the races, or the railroad station. *At the Seaside (Ramsgate Sands)* (FIG. 14-26) was the first in the series. Exhibited at the Royal Academy summer exhibition in 1854, it was bought by Queen Victoria herself, which underscored its enormous success. Frith was an exact contemporary of Gustave Courbet, and the two men shared an interest in depicting contemporary reality. Yet their approach was entirely different. Frith had none of Courbet's political zeal. Instead, he aimed at entertaining the viewer, using a miniaturist style of painting that shows every detail

of clothing and every nuance of facial expression. There is no end to the amusement that his paintings have to offer because the viewer has ever more to discover.

Although descriptive genre paintings were the "new thing" during the mid-Victorian period, anecdotal genre paintings such as Redgrave's *The Poor Teacher* remained popular for much of the nineteenth century. *Nameless and Friendless* (FIG. 14-27), by Emily Mary Osborn (1834–1913), is an interesting example dating from the 1850s. It was painted by one of the numerous female painters who were active in Britain in the mid-Victorian period. Women were not allowed to exhibit at the Academy and often had a difficult time breaking into the art world, since they were outside the "old boys' network." Although Osborn herself was quite successful, she must have been aware of the plight of other female artists. In *Nameless and Friendless* she shows a young woman artist offering a painting for sale to an art dealer. While she and her young son wait anxiously, the dealer casts a deprecating glance at the picture. No doubt, he is feigning dislike so that he can offer the lowest possible price for the picture, even though, judging by the keen interest of his assistant, it is quite good.

Narrative genre imagery remained so successful in the mid-Victorian era that it was taken up by photographers. The best-known practitioner was Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901), who was famous for his "art photographs," one of which he published every year beginning in 1858. The first one, *Fading Away* (FIG. 14-28), shows a young girl on her deathbed, surrounded by members of her family. Deathbed scenes of children and adolescents were common fare in sentimental novels of the day. Sadly, such scenes were rooted in the reality of the nineteenth cen-



14-27 **Emily Mary Osborn**, *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857.
Oil on canvas, 32 x 41"
(82.5 cm x 1.04 m).
Private Collection.

tury, when diseases such as "consumption" (tuberculosis), cholera, and diphtheria struck many young people.

Robinson carefully staged his pictures and hired models to pose for the figures. At the time it was impossible to shoot the entire scene in sharp focus, so he shot it in several sections and then combined the negatives to create a "combination print." In so doing he could achieve dramatic contrasts between light and dark as well as a sharp focus.

Photographs such as Robinson's were shown at the special exhibitions organized by any one of the numerous photographic societies that had sprung up all over Britain. To market them better, they were mounted on cardboard, matted, and framed. The title of the photograph would often be printed in engraved or embossed letters on the mat and sometimes a text was added to enhance the meaning. The mat of *Fading Away*, for example, was inscribed with a strophe from a poem by the British Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822):

Must then, that peerless form
Which love and admiration cannot view
Without a beating heart; those azure veins,
Which steal like streams along a field of snow,
That lovely outline, which is fair
As breathing marble, perish?

Another photographer who booked considerable success with his art photographs showing anecdotal scenes of mod-

ern life was the Swedish-born Oscar Gustav Rejlander (1813–1875). However, Rejlander became most famous for an unusually large photograph called *Two Ways of Life* (FIG. 14-29), in which he subsumed several carefully staged genre scenes under a large allegorical theme. *Two Ways of Life* represents an old sage who shows two young men what are their life choices. On his right side (our left), is the path of dissolution: here we see the interior of a bar with gamblers, in addition to prostitutes, drinkers, and idlers. On his left (our right) we see examples of the virtuous life, including scenes of work, religion, family, and charity. Printed from thirty negatives, Rejlander's photograph was exceptional for both its size and complexity. It also attracted attention for the prominent presence of nudity. Exhibited at the famous "Art Treasures" exhibition in Manchester in 1857, it was criticized on both artistic and moral grounds. Yet, Queen Victoria bought a copy of *Two Ways of Life* for the substantial sum of 10 guineas, thus putting her seal of approval on Rejlander's work.

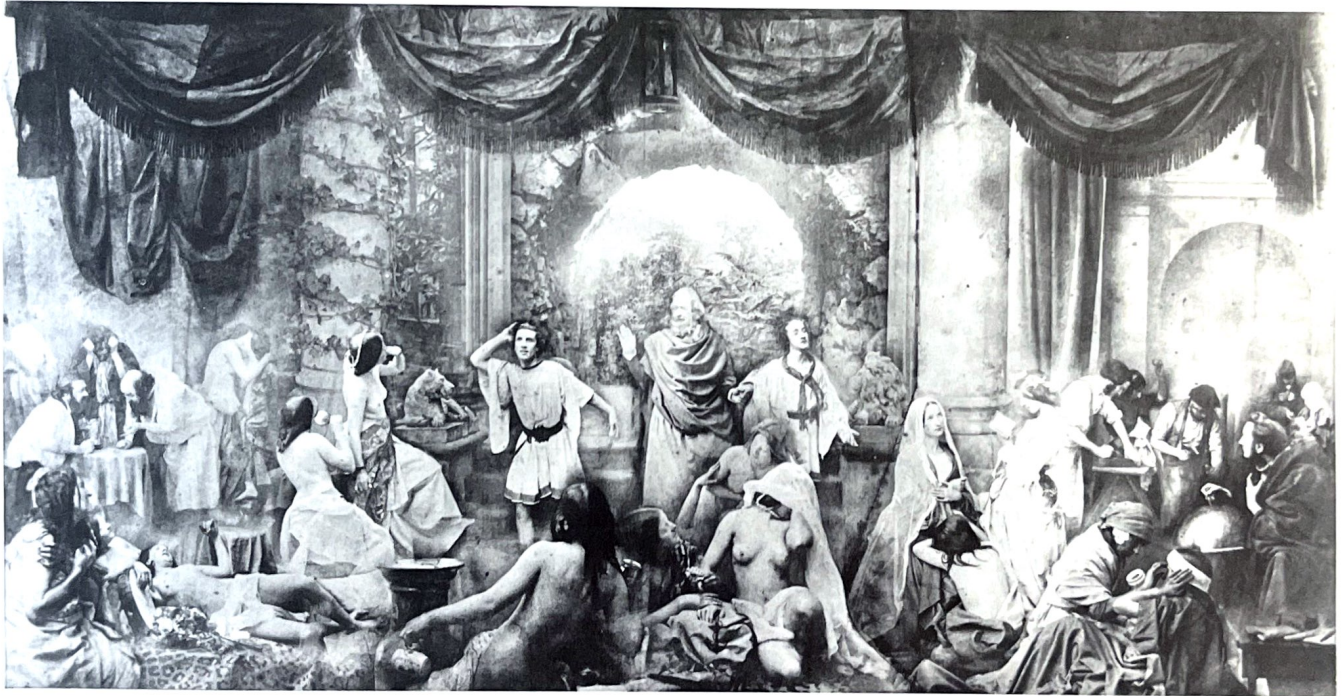
From Pre-Raphaelitism to the Aesthetic Movement

By the mid-1850s the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had begun to lose coherence. Millais married in 1855 and became increasingly aware that, to provide for his family, he needed to pander to middle-class tastes. He became enormously successful painting sentimental genre scenes,



14-28 **Henry Peach Robinson**, *Fading Away*, 1858. Photograph, 9½" x 15" (24.4 x 39.3 cm). Royal Photographic Society, London.

14-29 **Oscar Gustav Rejlander**, *Two Ways of Life*, 1858. Gelatin silver print, 16⅞" x 31⅞" (41 x 79 cm). George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.



often centered on pretty children. Elected president of the Royal Academy in 1863, he was, perhaps, the best-known British painter of his time. Hunt, the most religious of the Pre-Raphaelites, made several trips to the Holy Land in order to bring greater authenticity to his biblical pictures.

Rossetti, who had painted little since the negative reception of his *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, moved into new circles. In 1857 he befriended Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), a controversial poet. Swinburne's poetry was criticized both for its form and for the "feverish carnality"