

PHOTOGRAPHY

**THE GROUNDBREAKING
MOMENTS**



PHOTOGRAVURE
GEORGET & RAMOND

PLANS
D'ÉTAT

PHOTOGRAPHY

THE GROUNDBREAKING MOMENTS

FLORIAN HEINE

Before Photography

Invention Of Photography

Portraits

Landscapes

Still Lifes

War Photography

Self-Portraits

The Nude

X-Ray Photography

Chronophotography

Pictorialism

Straight Photography

Street Photography

Color Photography

Photojournalism

Surrealism

Night Photography

Fashion Photography

Animal Photography

Photobook

Instant Photography

Conceptual Photography

Painting

Staged Photography

Humor

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INTRODUCTION

“Those who are ignorant of photography, rather than those who cannot read, will be the true illiterates of the future.” This comment, made by the photographer and Bauhaus teacher László Moholy-Nagy in 1927, seems more relevant than ever today. It has never been easier to take photos, and photography is not only all pervasive but also widely recognized as a significant artistic medium. From the very beginning, photography was a mass medium and a mass phenomenon, and never more so than now, when every cell phone is equipped with a camera and it is possible to photograph anything at any time. Joseph Beuys’s observation that everyone is an artist becomes a real possibility through photography. And so it seems all the more important that we should be aware of the history of this medium, this art form, so as not to be among the “illiterates of the future.”

In *Groundbreaking Moments in Photography*, the history of photography is not told in the usual chronological fashion. The book is subdivided according to genres and styles, which are described in detail. Some genres are familiar from the field of painting, while others arose because of the specific opportunities provided

by photography, such as street photography and photojournalism. The borders are fluid, because very few photographers limit themselves to a single genre, but prefer to experiment with a variety of genres. During its almost 180-year history, from its beginnings in the 19th century to the invention of digital photography in 1974 and its technical sophistication today, photography has continued to develop technologically at a rapid pace. What has remained, however, is the fact that despite all the technology it is still the photographer who determines what a photo looks like. “The tool of photography is the photographer, not the camera” (Eve Arnold). Ultimately, technique is only a means to an end. During each era photographers have always made use of the technology that was available to them and that seemed most suitable for their purpose and for the task of creating their type of pictures. For the viewer, it really makes no difference what sort of camera was used to take the photo. What is more important is whether the picture tells a story, evokes a mood, or depicts a person—in fact, arouses emotions. *Groundbreaking Moments in Photography* aims above all to encourage a love of photography—whether in taking photographs or viewing them. In the words of the British photographer Martin Parr: “Photography is the most accessible, democratic medium available in the world. This has to be celebrated, and we must continually remind photographers of this.”



BEFORE PHOTOGRAPHY

“The spirits have sought to fix these fleeting images; they have made a subtle substance by means of which a picture is formed in the twinkling of an eye. They coat a piece of canvas with this substance, and place it in front of the object to be taken. The first effect of this cloth is similar to that of a mirror, but by means of its viscous nature the prepared canvas [...] retains a facsimile of the image. The mirror represents images faithfully, but retains none; our canvas reflects them no less faithfully, but retains them all. This impression of the image is instantaneous. The canvas is then removed and deposited in a dark place. An hour later the impression is dry, and you have a picture the more precious in that no art can imitate its truthfulness.”

This quotation reads like a somewhat romanticized account of the creation of a photograph. Surprisingly, it is an excerpt of the novel *Giphantie* by the French writer Tiphaigne de la Roche (1722–1774), which was published in 1760, almost 80 years before the first photograph was produced. This fictional description shows that the desire to create pictures without the

involvement of a skilled artist existed long before the invention of photography.

From the Renaissance onwards, painters sought devices that would both make their work easier and also solve problems such as the correct representation of perspective and proportions. The grid used by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) is one example (fig. p. 10, above). Concave mirrors were already in use before that, allowing the projection of a scene onto a surface, on which it could then be traced. The *Grandes Chroniques de France* by the French painter Jean Fouquet (c. 1420–c. 1480) includes remarkable illuminations such as *The Arrival of Emperor Charles IV in St. Denis* (fig. p. 11). This shows a paved street that is so warped that the picture looks like an image created by a wide-angle lens. While there are no records regarding the use of optical devices in Fouquet’s work, this depiction strongly suggests that Fouquet used a mirror projection for the illustration. Why else would he paint with such systematic distortion, unless he were using an optical projection?

The most important and best-known optical device used by artists was the camera obscura, which was already in use in classical times. Originally, it consisted of a darkened room (a “camera obscura”) in which rays of light were projected through a hole in one wall onto the opposite wall. In order to turn

1503–1540 Parmigianino

1528–1588 Paolo Veronese

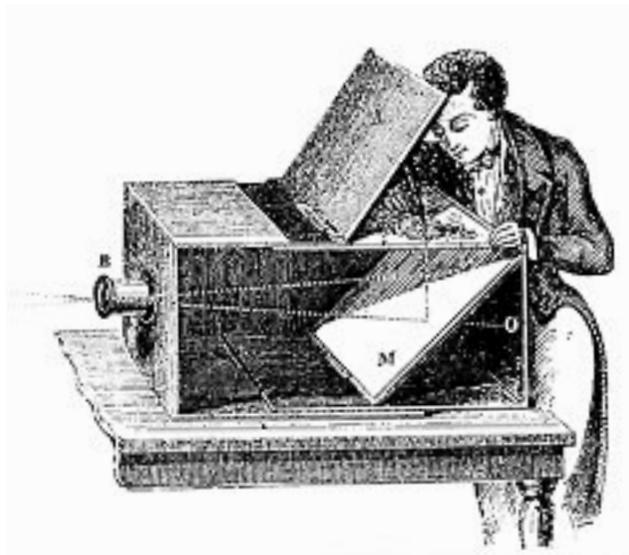
1571–1610 Caravaggio



the camera obscura into a practical tool for artists, it was reduced to a portable box—and so the precursor to the modern camera was created. Light enters the box through a lens and, by means of a mirror, is projected onto a glass pane, from which the image it creates can be copied (right). This method was used by a large number of painters, the Dutch artist Jan Vermeer (1632–1675) and the Venetian Canaletto (1697–1768) being among the most famous.

In his painting *Girl with the Red Hat* (fig. p. 8), which is remarkably small (23 x 18 cm, 9 x 7 in) and would therefore have been well suited to the size of a camera obscura, Vermeer appears to have copied the image projected onto a pane of glass very faithfully, so that the pointillist painting visible, for example, in the lions' heads on the armrests on the left and right, is the result of the variations in focus created by the camera obscura he used. Unlike many of his colleagues who used a camera obscura, Vermeer did not “correct” the blurs and inaccuracies caused by the lenses of the time, but instead replicated precisely these subtle visual effects in his paintings.

Canaletto used a camera obscura to help him to paint his views of Venice (fig. p. 12) and London. He transferred the comparatively small images



produced by the camera obscura onto canvas, and used these as a basis for his paintings. To this day, we can see with just how accurately he captured scenes by comparing his paintings with photos of the same views (fig. p. 13).

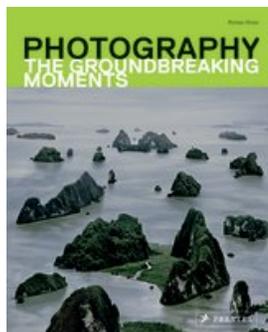
The increasingly accurate paintings that resulted from the use of the camera obscura awakened a



left, above—**ALBRECHT DÜRER: THE GRID** | from *The Art of Measurement* | 1525

left, below—**A CAMERA OBSCURA** | 19th-century illustration

above—**JEAN FOUQUET: THE ARRIVAL OF EMPEROR CHARLES IV IN ST. DENIS**
from *Grandes Chroniques de France* | c. 1455–60 | Paris | Bibliothèque Nationale
de France | Département des Manuscrits Français 6465 | fol. 442 (Livre
de Charles V)



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