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Outstanding Photographs from the First Century of the Medium on View at the National Gallery of Art, March 26–July 30

—Works by Talbot, Atget, Stieglitz, Rodchenko, Fenton, Brassai and Others—

Washington, DC. In the last few years the National Gallery has significantly expanded its collection of both 19th- and 20th-century European and American photographs. Visitors to the museum can now see some of the finest examples in **Photographic Discoveries: Recent Acquisitions**, which presents 70 works by such celebrated photographers as William Henry Fox Talbot, Roger Fenton, Eugène Atget, Alfred Stieglitz, Aleksandr Rodchenko, and Brassai. The exhibition is on view in the photography galleries, West Building, Ground Floor, from March 26 through July 30, 2006.

The exhibition showcases photographs made during the first century of the medium's history, from the early 1840s to the 1940s. Organized around the theme of discovery, the show demonstrates how photographers sought to understand the process by which they could make pictures using this new medium and found wholly new ways of examining and representing the world.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund and The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation.

“This exhibition attests to the importance and growing strength of the photography collection,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “Recent additions have enhanced the collection’s value as a resource for appreciation and scholarship. We are indebted to our many donors whose generosity has made these acquisitions possible, and to the Trellis Fund and The Ryna and Melvin Cohen Family Foundation for their continuing support of exhibitions of photographs.”

The Exhibition

The works in this exhibition, ranging in date from the 1840s to the 1940s, were acquired by the National Gallery of Art since 1998. Organized chronologically, the exhibition highlights many of the most significant developments in photography in its first century.

In 1839 the British scientist and scholar William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877) and the French painter Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787–1851) announced entirely new ways of depicting the world, and the response to this new invention—photography—was immediate and wildly enthusiastic. The photographers whose work is included in this exhibition embraced the challenges of the new medium. While early photographers explored subjects traditionally depicted by the other arts—portraiture, landscape, and still life, for example—the exhibition also presents how they came to recognize and exploit the distinctive ways in which the camera frames and presents the world to create highly original works of art.

Early Photographs. The first section of the exhibition begins with examples of early photographs, such as the salted paper prints *Orléans Cathedral* (1843) by Talbot and *Market Scene at the Port of the Hotel de Ville, Paris* (before February 1852) by Charles Nègre (1820–1880), and daguerreotypes *The Letter* (c. 1850) and *Boy with Cap* (1853–1855) by Albert Sands Southworth (1811–1894) and Josiah Johnson Hawes (1808–1901).

Fruit and Flowers (1860) is one of the very rare still lifes by British photographer Roger Fenton (1819–1869). Among the most ambitious photographs of his career, Fenton’s striking composition is one of the most acclaimed works in 19th-century photography.

Fruit and Flowers is one of four Fenton photographs acquired recently by the National Gallery of Art through the Paul Mellon Fund; two others, *Moscow, Domes of Churches in the Kremlin* (1852) and *Lichfield Cathedral from the North-west* (1858) are also on view in the exhibition.

In France, Charles Marville (1816–1879) was commissioned to record the streets and buildings that the urban planner Baron Haussmann had slated for imminent destruction in his campaign to modernize Paris. Though made for a documentary purpose, Marville's view of a meandering street in the medieval Latin quarter, *Rue de la Bûcherie* (1865/1869), sensitively captures the play of shadow and light against the building facades.

Turn-of-the-Century Works. The second section of the exhibition displays works from the turn of the century, ranging from the documentary but evocative images of Eugène Atget (1857–1927) and Lewis Hine (1874–1940) to the delicate, tonal painterly effects of photographs by Edward Steichen (1879–1973), Gertrude Käsebier (1852–1934), Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), and Laura Gilpin (1891–1979). A fierce proponent of the artistic merit of photography, Stieglitz is represented in the exhibition in the recently discovered album *Sun Prints* (1894–1895), containing previously unknown early photographs. Until recently only four *Sun Prints* volumes were known to exist, all in the National Gallery's Stieglitz Collection. With the addition of the fifth album, the National Gallery is now the repository of the complete set.

In the 20th century, photographers also moved away from traditional late-19th century subject matter to create more modern photographs, often influenced by abstract painting and sculpture. In 1916, American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966) invented a device that reflected and fractured images. Widely celebrated as the first consciously created abstract photographs, Coburn's Vortographs are exceptionally rare, and many, like *Vortograph* (1917) on view, appear to exist only in one print.

Photographs from the 1920s to the 1940s. The third and final section of the exhibition focuses on works from the 1920s to early 1940s, including those by photographers such as Brassai (1899–1984), Gertrud Arndt (1903–2000), Dora Maar (1907–1997), and Ilse Bing (1899–1998), each of whom captured various aspects of

the changing social and physical conditions of modernity. In 1925 the Russian photographer Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956) began using a small, lightweight, handheld camera that allowed him to roam the streets of Moscow and explore radically new points of view. The oblique angle of photographs such as *Columns of the Museum of the Revolution* (1926) became a cornerstone of Rodchenko's photography.

Also on view in the exhibition are works by British photographer Bill Brandt (1904–1983). Brandt's *November in the Suburb* (1933) is one of his many photographs examining the urban environment of London, and Hampstead, *London* (1945), one of a decades' long series of explorations of the female nude.

Curator and Related Activities

The exhibition curators are Sarah Greenough, curator and head of the department of photographs, and Diane Waggoner, assistant curator, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art.

“Photographic Beginnings: Selections from the National Gallery of Art Library,” an exhibit of books and publications related to the birth of photography, is on view in Gallery 21 (in the Sculpture Galleries) in the West Building Ground Floor from March 26 through July 30, 2006. Items on view range from pre-photographic experiments with the *camera obscura*, to Daguerre's original 1839 publication in which he describes his process, early descriptions of Talbot's “sun pictures,” and the first publications featuring photographic illustrations.

Gallery Talks include: “Photographic Discoveries: Focus on Global Architecture,” given by graduate student lecturer Anna O. Marley on April 15 and 17 at 12:00 noon and April 24 at 1:00 p.m.; and “The Pencil of Nature and the Mirror with a Memory: The Photographic Process as Art and Science,” given by intern Yali Lewis on May 1 at 12:00 noon and May 8 and 13 at 2:00 p.m. The talks begin in the West Building Rotunda.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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