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#### Audio:

*In the Darkroom:  
Photographic Processes  
Before the Digital Age*  
Press Event

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(1:13 min, 33.9 MB)

#### Curators:

[Sarah Kennel](#)

[Diane Waggoner](#)

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Release Date: October 16, 2009

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**EXTRAORDINARY RANGE OF PHOTOGRAPHIC  
PROCESSES ARE EXPLORED IN PERMANENT  
COLLECTION EXHIBITION AT NATIONAL GALLERY  
OF ART  
OCTOBER 25, 2009 THROUGH MARCH 14, 2010**

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#### **Anna Atkins**

#### ***Ferns, Specimen of Cyanotype, 1840s***

cyanotype

overall: 26.3 x 20.8 cm (10 3/8 x 8 3/16 in.)

R.K. Mellon Family Foundation Fund

Washington, DC—The extraordinary range and complexity of the photographic process is explored, from the origins of the medium in the 1840s up to the advent of digital photography at the end of the 20th century, in a comprehensive exhibition and its accompanying guidebook at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. On view in the West Building, from October 25, 2009 through March 14, 2010, ***In the Darkroom: Photographic Processes Before the Digital Age*** chronicles the major technological developments in the 170-year history of photography and presents the virtuosity of the medium's

practitioners. Drawn from the Gallery's permanent collection are some 90 photographs—ranging from William Henry Fox Talbot's images of the 1840s to Andy Warhol's Polaroid prints of the 1980s.

**"In the Darkroom** and the accompanying guidebook provide a valuable overview of the medium as well as an introduction to the most commonly used photographic processes from its earliest days," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art.

### **Exhibition Support**

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund.

### **In the Darkroom**

Organized chronologically, the exhibition opens with *Lace* (1839–1844), a photogenic drawing by William Henry Fox Talbot. Made without the aid of a camera, the image was produced by placing a swath of lace onto a sheet of sensitized paper and then exposing it to light to yield a tonally reversed image.

Talbot's greatest achievement—the invention of the first negative-positive photographic process—is also celebrated in this section with paper negatives by Charles Nègre and Baron Louis-Adolphe Humbert de Molard as well as salted paper prints made from paper negatives by Nègre, partners David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, and others.

The daguerreotype, the first publicly introduced photographic process and the most popular form of photography during the medium's first decade, is represented by a selection of British and American works, including an exquisite large-plate work by the American photographers Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes. By the mid-1850s, the daguerreotype's popularity was eclipsed by two new processes, the ambrotype and the tintype. These portable photographs on glass or metal were relatively inexpensive to produce and were especially popular for portraiture.

The year 1851 marked a turning point in photographic history with the introduction of the collodion negative on glass and the albumen print process. Most often paired together, this negative-print combination yielded lustrous prints with a subtle gradation of tones from dark to light and became the most common form of photography in the 19th century, seen here in works by Julia

Margaret Cameron, Roger Fenton, and Gustave Le Gray.

Near the turn of the 20th century, a number of new, complex print processes emerged, such as platinum and palladium, gum dichromate, and bromoil. Often requiring significant manipulation by the hand of the artist, these processes were favored by photographers such as Gertrude Käsebier, Alfred Stieglitz, and Edward Weston.

One of the most significant developments of the late 19th century was the introduction of gelatin into photographic processes, which led to the invention of the film negative and the gelatin silver print. These became the standard for 20th-century black-and-white photography. A chronological selection of gelatin silver prints, including a contact print made by André Kertész in 1912; a grainy, blurred image of Little Italy's San Gennaro festival at night by Sid Grossman from 1948; and a coolly precise industrial landscape by Frank Gohlke from 1975, reveals how the introduction of the film negative and changes in the gelatin silver print process profoundly shaped the direction of modern photography. This section also explores the development of ink-based, photomechanical processes such as photogravure, Woodburytype, and halftone that enabled the large-scale, high-quality reproduction of photographs in books and magazines.

The final section of the exhibition explores the rise of color photography in the 20th century. Although the introduction of chromogenic color processes made color photography commercially viable by the 1930s, it was not widely employed by artists until the 1970s. The exhibition celebrates the pioneers of color photography, including Harry Callahan and William Eggleston, who made exceptional work using the complicated dye transfer process. The exhibition also explores the range of processes developed by the Polaroid Corporation that provided instant gratification to the user, from Andy Warhol's small SX-70 prints to the large-scale Polaroid prints represented by the work of contemporary photographer David Levinthal.

### **Curators and Guidebook**

Sarah Kennel, associate curator of photographs, and Diane Waggoner, assistant curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, are the curators of the exhibition.

Copublished by the National Gallery of Art and Thames and Hudson, ***In the Darkroom: An Illustrated Guide to Photographic Processes before the Digital Age*** is a compilation of essential information about the predominant negative, positive, and photomechanical processes in use since 1839. Written by Kennel with Waggoner and Alice Carver-Kubik, the book offers concise technical descriptions of the processes and their common uses, illustrated with museum-quality illustrations (some at high magnification to show print characteristics) and diagrams indicating the basic structure of each negative or print process.

The guidebook is organized alphabetically for convenient reference and includes a time line with the major dates of use for each process, an extensive glossary, and an index of variant names. The 104-page softcover book features 57 color illustrations and 27 diagrams, and will be available in late October 2009 for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, please visit our Web site at <http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

The publication is made possible by a generous grant from The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, Inc.

#### **Short Description:**

#### **In the Darkroom: Photographic Processes**

National Gallery of Art, Washington—October 25, 2009–March 14, 2010



Harry Callahan, *Providence*, 1977, dye transfer print, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David C. Ruttenberg courtesy of the Ruttenberg Arts Foundation

This exhibition chronicles the major technological developments in photographic processes from the origins of the medium until the advent of digital photography. Drawn from the Gallery's permanent collection, the exhibition, which is organized chronologically, displays some 90 photographs that range from an early photogenic drawing by William Henry Fox Talbot to Polaroid prints by Andy Warhol.

Superb examples of the major photographic processes, including salted paper, albumen, gelatin silver, and chromogenic prints, will be on view, along with examples of photomechanical processes such as photogravure and half-tone. The selections in the exhibition will highlight the artistic vitality and technological virtuosity of the medium's practitioners and demonstrate the many factors—not only the choice of process, but also scale, tone, cropping, enlarging, and paper selection—that shape the aesthetic quality and meaning of a photograph.

The exhibition will be accompanied by an illustrated book describing the main photographic processes from the invention of the medium up to the dawn of the digital age.

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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 at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). The Gallery is now on Facebook—become a fan at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering the East and West Buildings. 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 x 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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## Biography

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### SARAH KENNEL

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Sarah Kennel is associate curator in the department of photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. She holds a PhD in art history from the University of California, Berkeley completing her dissertation on the relationship between dance and the visual arts in early 20th-century Paris. Kennel was at the National Gallery of Art from 1999 to 2001 as a Mary Davis Predoctoral Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts. She has taught classes in the history of art at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Princeton University. Kennel was a contributor for *The Art of Romare Bearden* (2003) and then joined the department of photographs where she has worked on or contributed to numerous shows, including *André Kertész* (2005), *Irving Penn: The Platinum Prints* (2005), and *The Art of the American Snapshot* (2007). She was the curator for *Paris in Transition: Photographs from the National Gallery of Art* (2006) and for the photography section of *In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet* (2008).

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September 14, 2003  
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and 9th Streets at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). The Gallery is now on Facebook—become a fan at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt).

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## Biography

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### DIANE WAGGONER

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Diane Waggoner is assistant curator in the department of photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. She received a PhD in art history from Yale University, writing a dissertation on the photographs of Lewis Carroll. Prior to joining the National Gallery in 2004, she held positions at the Yale University Art Gallery and The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. At the Huntington, she was the curator of *The Beauty of Life: William Morris and the Art of Design* (2003). Since joining the department of photographs, she has co-curated *Photographic Discoveries: Recent Acquisitions* (2006) and *The Streets of New York: American Photographs from the Collection, 1938-1958* (2006-07). Most recently, she was co-curator of *The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson* (2007). The exhibition's catalogue was the 2008 winner of the College Art Association's Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Award for distinguished museum publication. A specialist in the 19th century, she has also published on the photographs of Lewis Carroll.

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