

**J**uan Laurent (1816–1886) is one of the most recognized figures in the history of Spanish photography. In his late twenties he moved from his native France to Madrid, where he lived and worked for forty-three years.<sup>1</sup> Initially, he worked as a luxury paper and cardboard manufacturer, receiving a bronze medal at the 1845 Exposición de Industrias in Madrid and a silver medal at the 1850 Exposición Española for his marbled papers. Later, in 1856, he opened a photography studio on the Carrera de San Jerónimo in Madrid and quickly established a thriving portrait business, photographing prominent politicians and artists. His reputation as a skilled photographer led to his appointment as “Photographer to H. M. the Queen,” a title he prominently displayed in his trademark until 1868 when Queen Isabella II of Spain was dethroned. In 1858, in collaboration with the British photographer Charles Clifford, he was commissioned by the Spanish government to photograph the construction of the railroad line from Madrid to Alicante. This was the first of extensive projects Laurent undertook photographing Spanish public works, including railroad stations (13), bridges, ports, canals, and lighthouses. One such project was the preparation of five presentation albums of Spanish public works for the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1867.

In the early 1860s Laurent launched his encyclopedic photographic survey of Spanish and Portuguese architecture, which he initiated without institutional support. Laurent hired and trained professional photographers to travel all over the Iberian Peninsula to help with this vast undertaking. He soon had an archive of more than 6,340 negatives of Spanish and Portuguese city views, architecture, museum collections, and the contemporary art exhibited in national expositions. Photographs of regional inhabitants dressed in the traditional costumes of the Spanish provinces and situated in their native surroundings formed another facet of his repertoire (22 and 23). Notably, Laurent’s was the first commercial firm to photograph the art collections of the Prado Museum (19), the Royal Armory (20), and the Academy of San Fernando, earning him a place of honor with other distinguished European photography houses like Alinari in Italy and Adolphe Braun in France.

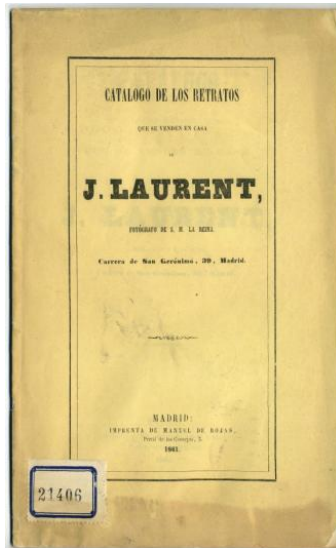
Over time, Laurent assumed the role of editor and delegated much of the actual photographic work to his partners, associates, and assistants. He used the new Spanish railroads to transport his field laboratories and the new telegraph system to manage communications. He also acquired existing collections of negatives from other professional photographers like his peer and associate José Martínez Sánchez (1808–1874) for his archive. In 1868 he opened a sales outlet in Paris, where his views of Spain reached an ever-widening European market.

By 1878 he had thirty correspondents selling his photographs across Spain and abroad. To expand his business further, he advertised on handbills and in newspapers; between 1861 and 1879 he published numerous photographic catalogues assembled from his offerings. Laurent made available a range of products appealing to every taste, from low-cost *cartes de visite* and stereoscopic prints to large single sheets that could be compiled into albums according to customer preference. He became the most important and recognizable trade photographer in nineteenth-century Spain through the successful commercialization of his excellent archive of Spanish art and architecture.

Long after Laurent had retired from business, family members and successor administrators continued to commercialize his archive of glass negatives. Images from the archive were published in postcards, newspapers, periodicals, guidebooks, encyclopedias, and art history tomes well into the twentieth century. In 1881 Laurent ceded his share of Laurent and Company to his stepdaughter, Catalina Melina Dosch de Roswag, who then managed it with the help of her husband, Alfonso Roswag, Laurent’s longstanding business partner. After Laurent’s death in 1886 at age seventy the firm eventually foundered, and was sold.<sup>2</sup> Another Frenchman, Joseph Lacoste (born 1872), bought the archive in 1900 and profitably administered it for the next fifteen years. When Lacoste left Spain to fight for the French armed forces in 1915, the archive passed to various new owners such as Juana Roig and Joaquín Ruiz

Vernacci. The family of Ruiz Vernacci sold the twelve thousand glass negatives to the Spanish Ministry of Culture in 1975, where today they are a treasured resource for the study and conservation of Spanish national patrimony.

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Juan Laurent's 1861 retail catalogue—courtesy of Carlos Teixidor

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Some writers have erroneously theorized that Juan Laurent began as a daguerreotypist in Paris and moved to Spain in 1856. Researchers have found evidence in Spanish municipal records that proves Laurent established himself as a luxury paper manufacturer in Madrid in 1843 or 1844. Priego et al., *Jean Laurent en el Museo Municipal de Madrid*, 26–36.

<sup>2</sup> Laurent's date of death was unknown or thought to be 1892 until Ana Gutiérrez Martínez of the Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España announced in 2005 that she had discovered his grave in the Cementerio de La Almudena in Madrid. The tombstone, which is ruined and fragmented like a jigsaw puzzle, is inscribed with the date November 25, 1886. A marble piece of the stone with lead letters affixed to it was later found by Carlos Teixidor, allowing the first name engraved on it to be read. The missing piece proved that Laurent was buried with the Spanish form of his first name, Juan, and not the French Jean. Priego et al., *Jean Laurent en el Museo Municipal de Madrid*, 31–32. For a discussion of the continuing effort in 2011 to conserve Laurent's tomb and have it named an historic site, see Gil-Díez Usandizaga, *Las fotografías de J. Laurent (1816–1886) y La Rioja*, 13–18.

Checklist of the exhibition *The Solemnity of Shadows: Juan Laurent's Vision of Spain*, November 7–December 30, 2011.

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