

#14 THE CLASSIC

AUTUMN 2025

A print and digital magazine about classic photography



PARIS PHOTO | CECIL BEATON | MUSÉE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE, CHARLEROI
CURZIO MALAPARTE | "BY WHO EXACTLY?" – Questions of Attribution & Identification

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DOROTHEA LANGE Nettie Featherston,
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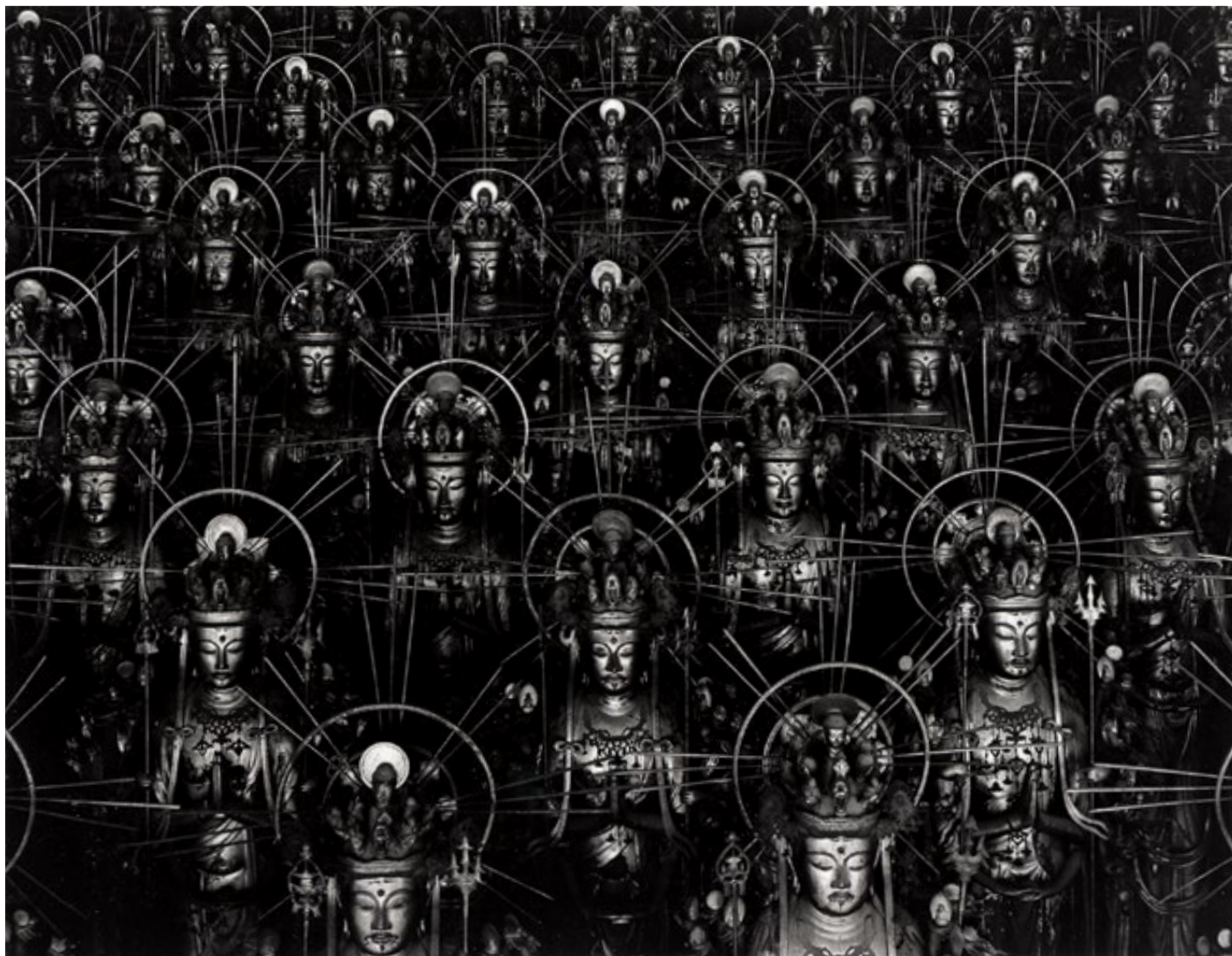


Otto Steinert, mask of a dancer, Paris 1952, vintage silver print

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Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Sea of Buddha (#033)*, silver print, 1994. Estimate \$8,000 to \$12,000.

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14

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“By Who Exactly?”

Questions of Attribution & Identification

By Michael Diemar

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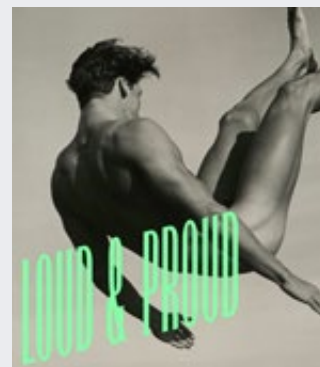
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From the editor

Do you like the cover? The portrait of Gwili Andre is included in *Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World*, currently on show at the National Portrait Gallery, London. During my conversation with curator Robin Muir, we discussed the hard work Beaton put into reinventing himself and Muir told me, "He was performing Cecil Beaton for most of his life."

There's another performer in this issue, Curzio Malaparte, who changed his name from Kurt Erich Suckert and wrote two devastating accounts of WWII, *Kaputt* and *The Skin*. Laura Leonelli met up with Michele Bonuomo to discuss Malaparte, (whom even many admirers of his books will describe as a scoundrel) and how he discovered the late author's photographs.

As I have written previously, our magazine grew out of the community for classic photography and I see it very much as a collaboration with that community. The so-called little fairs are an important part of it, that is, tabletop fairs that are focused on the history of photography. And there's growing activity on that front. In addition to fairs in Paris and London, in recent years, several new fairs have started up, in Amsterdam, Vienna and Senigallia on Italy's Adriatic coast.

I felt it would make sense to start an organisation to promote the fairs and classic photography in general and in August this year, Vintage Photo Fairs Europe was born. You can read more about it in the In Brief section.

Finally, and as always, I'm grateful to Jasmine Durand and Mike Derez for their outstanding work.

Michael Diemar
Editor-in-chief



The international art fair dedicated to photography in Italy

William Wegman, Ionian, 2005, Courtesy of William Wegman and Galeria Alta

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Léon HERSCHTRITT (1936-2020). *Noël à Berlin, sur le toit*, 1961, exhibition print.

Henri CARTIER-BRESSON (1908-2004). *Grenadines, Alicante*, 1933, silver print.



Léon HERSCHTRITT (1936-2020). *Les amoureux de Paris*, 1960, silver print.



Jean-Baptiste FRÉNET (1814-1889). *Mère et son fils*, c. 1855, albumenised salt print.

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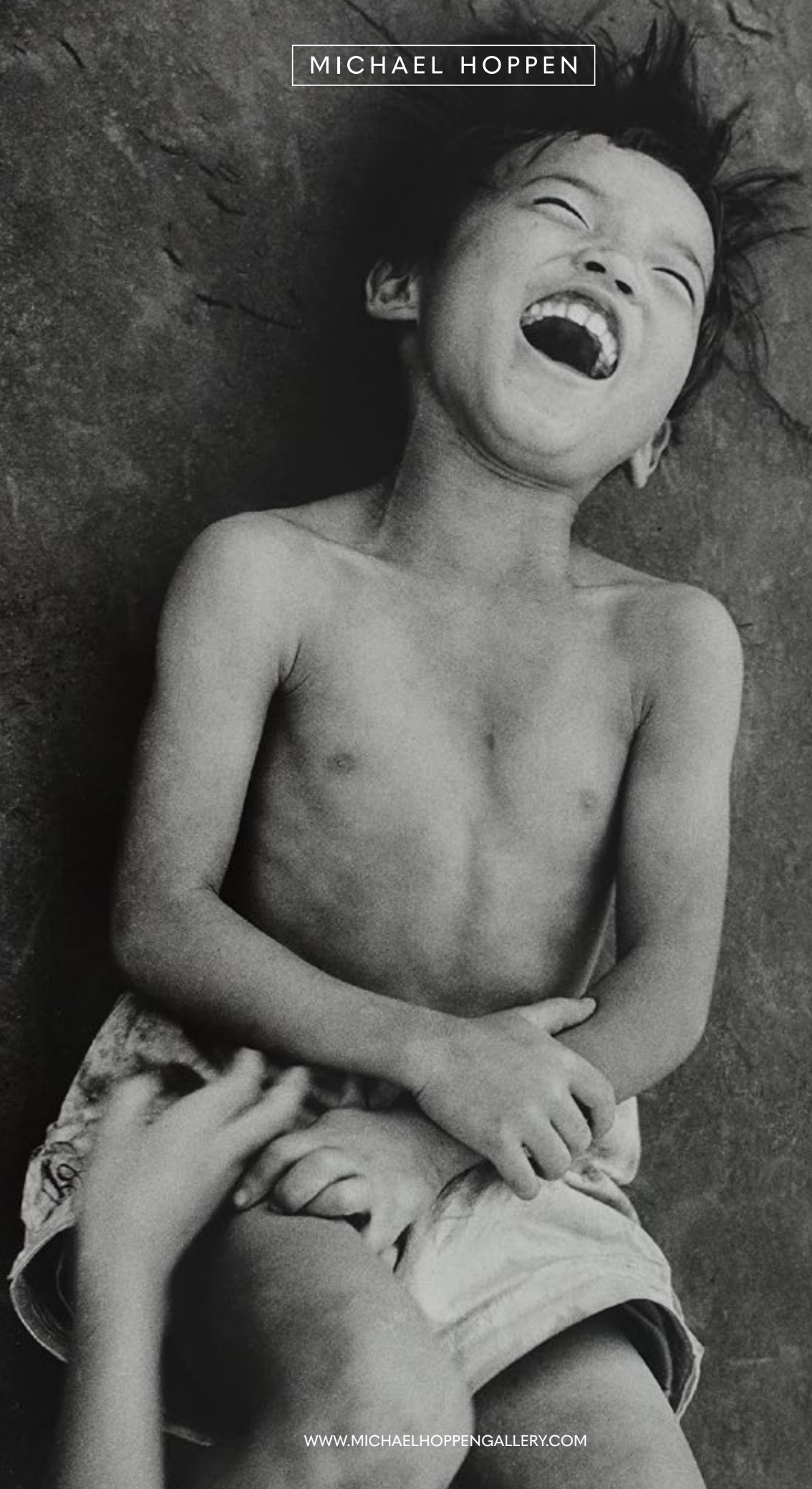
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Nobuyoshi Araki, *Satchin*, 1963. Silver gelatin print

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JASON LEE & FRANK GOHLKE: *ALTERNATIVE VIEWS*



© Jason Lee, *Highway 90, Texas*, 2022, Courtesy of Etherton Gallery



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W.H. Guebhard, *Alley of Trees*, salt print from a paper negative, 1854,
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Poverty for Sale – Edith Tudor Hart in Britain



In the early 1930s, Edith Tudor Hart, née Edith Suschitzky, visited Caledonian Market in Islington, a working-class district in North London, several times. With some 3 000 stalls, it was the city's largest open-air market. For some, selling their belongings was the only way to pay that week's rent. On one occasion, she took a self-portrait, with an unknown man, a reflection in the mirror of a dressing table, its price, 37/6, scrawled in white paint. The self-portrait is one of the photographs she took at the market that's included in the book *Poverty for Sale – Edith Tudor Hart in Britain*, edited by Shirley Read. Divided into twenty chapters, it provides a valuable insight into her life and work during her 40 years in Britain.

Born in Vienna in 1908, her parents ran a small publishing house and bookshop in the city's working-class district. Barely into her teens, she joined the youth wing of the Austrian communist party. She became interested in photography, moved to Dessau in 1929 to study at Bauhaus under photographer Walter Peterhans, and later passing on the knowledge to her brother, Wolfgang Suschitzky, who would go on to be a successful photographer and cinematographer. In the late 20s, she met a British doctor and fellow communist, Alexander Tudor-Hart, whom she would marry in 1933, and then divorced in 1944.

Despite studying at the Bauhaus and documenting the construction of the famous Isokon Building, Lawn Road Flats in North London, she would abandon the school's modernist aesthetic in favour of social documentary photography, regarding the camera as a

political weapon. In October 1930, her presence at a meeting of the Workers' Charter in Trafalgar Square was noted by the security services, resulting in her being ordered to leave the UK. In 1933, she was arrested and imprisoned in Vienna for her political beliefs. Through her marriage, she became a British citizen and the couple returned to London. One of the many fascinating chapters in the book, "Political Exile in 1930s London", written by Marilyn Moos, deals with her life among fellow refugees in the city. Another chapter, "Art in the Service of Social Change: Edith Tudor Hart and Pearl Binder", delves deeper into the collaborative working relationship between her and Binder. They bonded politically and creatively in the 1930s through their membership of the Artists' International Association.

Edith Tudor Hart's work was published in *Lilliput* and *Picture Post*, and she carried out commercial work, but the security services kept her under observation. Committed to the antifascist cause and travelling widely as a photographer, she became a courier for the communist party and pointed Soviet intelligence operatives in the direction of idealistic young students willing to work for the other side. One of them was Kim Philby. Another of the Cambridge Five, art historian Anthony Blunt, would later call her "The Mother of us all". MI5 conducted 24-hour surveillance of her at one point, but she was never caught spying and never received any money for her services. Following her divorce, and the pressures of the surveillance, in 1951 she had a nervous breakdown, destroyed her negatives and the catalogue of her negatives and prints. In 1962, she opened a small antique shop in Brighton. She died in 1973.



Left page. **Edith Tudor Hart.** Self-portrait with Unknown Man, Caledonian Market, London, c.1931. Families Suschitzky/Donat, courtesy FOTOHOF archiv.

Top. **Edith Tudor Hart.** Untitled, England, 1930s. Families Suschitzky/Donat, courtesy National Galleries of Scotland, Edith Tudor Hart Archive.

Right. **Edith Tudor Hart.** Untitled. Families Suschitzky/Donat, courtesy National Galleries of Scotland, Edith Tudor Hart Archive.

Bottom. **Edith Tudor Hart.** Demonstration for the Release of Ernst Thälmann, Hyde Park, London c.1933. Families Suschitzky/Donat, courtesy Open Eye Gallery.

Poverty for Sale – Edith Tudor Hart in Britain
is published by MuseumsEtc

Italy's leading photography fair returns for its 15th edition

FRANCESCA MALGARA



MIA Photo Fair was founded in 2011 as Italy's first contemporary art fair dedicated exclusively to photography. Today MIA Photo Fair BNP Paribas has become an important centre for galleries, photographers and photography collectors

Organised by Fiere di Parma and directed for the third year by Francesca Malgara, the fair returns for its 15th edition in March 2026, confirming its role as a leading platform for the photography market and a place for dialogue between visual languages and cultural reflection. At the heart of the fair is the concept of "image", understood not only as the outcome of a photographic shot, but as a complex creative process – shaped by research, experimentation, and hybridization of visual languages, including the use of innovative tools such as artificial intelligence. Francesca Malgara explains.

– The 2025 edition of the fair was a great success and brought together 114 national and international exhibitors and 13 000 visitors. The theme chosen for next year's edition is *Metamorphosis*: a vital process of transformation that influences visual languages, identities, artistic practices, and image-making codes. The theme echoes Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where change is portrayed as a universal condition of existence. Today, *Metamorphosis* is also a key concept for interpreting contemporary culture, from the evolution of photography – both analogue and digital post-production – to the broader cultural and social shifts of our time. Bringing the theme to life is the fair's key visual: a historic Polaroid by American artist William Wegman. Chosen for its ironic and direct language, the image captures conceptual depth without the use of digital manipulation.

In addition to the main section, which is dedicated to established galleries showcasing vintage and contemporary photography, there will also be three themed sections.



– *Beyond Photography – Dialogue*, curated by Domenico de Chirico, will explore photography's relationship with sculpture, painting, installation, performance, and video, fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue and the redefinition of creative boundaries.

Reportage Beyond Reportage is curated by Emanuela Mazzonis di Pralafra and will investigate the evolution of contemporary documentary photography, where reportage transforms into intimate and complex storytelling, restoring meaning and depth to the photographic act. Finally, *Focus Latino*, curated by Rischa Paterlini, will showcase Latin American, Iberian, and diasporic artists, reinterpreting the term *Latinx* as a gateway to fluid identities and diverse visual narratives. Here, photography becomes a vehicle for both aesthetic and cultural transformation.

The fair will once again be held at Superstudio Più, located in the heart of one of Milan's liveliest districts, but there will also be some changes next year, Francesca Malgara explains.

– The layout of the fair has been completely redesigned, enhanced to meet both exhibition and experiential needs, allowing the fair to function as both a commercial space and a cultural and social meeting point. And just as in previous years, there will be a vibrant cultural programme of events and talks aimed at encouraging informed and thoughtful collecting, with prominent guests from both the Italian and international art scenes.

Gallery applications for the 2026 edition are open until 15 December.

For more information, go to www.miafair.it



March 19-22, 2026
Preview: March 18, 2026
MIA Photo Fair BNP Paribas
Superstudio Più, Via Tortona 27
Milan

Francesca Malgara © Giovanni Gastel.
MIA Photo Fair BNP Paribas © Mattia Micheli.



Vintage Photo Fairs Europe The Tabletop Fairs Join Forces

In August this year, a new organisation was founded, Vintage Photo Fairs Europe. It happened on the initiative of Barnabé Moinard, promoter of the 24.39 Classic Photography Fair (Paris), Mila Palm, Reinhold Mittersakschmöller and Stefan Fiedler, promoters of Vienna Vintage Photo Fair, Eric Bos Waaldijk, promoter of Dialogue Vintage Photography (Amsterdam) and Michael Diemar, editor-in-chief of *The Classic*. Since then, two more fairs have joined the organisation, Bloomsbury Photograph Fair (London) and Fiera di Senigallia (Senigallia, Italy).

Barnabé Moinard explains, “The growth of tabletop fairs in Europe in recent years has made the creation of this organisation and its platform an absolute necessity. These independent fairs already operate and interact with one another: this organisation and its platform will serve to unify the network, enabling more effective communication. Our ambition is to raise awareness about these fairs, spread knowledge about classic photography and hopefully inspire others to start tabletop fairs of their own.”

The tabletop fairs attract both new and seasoned collectors, as well as curators from leading museums, but they fill important functions beyond commerce. As Moinard points out, “The world of photography has increasingly moved online and the fairs are among the few opportunities for the community of classic photography to meet up in the physical world to share their passions and exchange information and ideas. And yes, of course we have a website and gradually, we will add more interviews and articles.”

But why just Europe? There are tabletop fairs elsewhere. Barnabé explains, “We decided that covering a larger geographical area would become too unwieldy. It would be great if fair promoters in other parts of the world started their own organisations, and we would of course, be happy to collaborate with them.”

www.vintagephotofaireurope.com



Vienna Vintage Photo Fair. Credit Stefan Fiedler



ELSEWHERE DURING PARIS PHOTO...

24.39 Classic Photography Fair

The Paris tabletop fair, known as Photo Discovery – The Fair, until Barnabé Moinard took it over last year, has become as much of a magnet for classic photography aficionados as the main fair. This year, the 24.39 fair brings together nearly fifty international exhibitors at the Pavillon Wagram for a single day dedicated to classic as well as modern photography. Moinard comments, “Visitors don’t just come to buy; they come to discover, learn, converse, and be surprised. This is not a fair to be “prepared” for; it is an event to be experienced. There is no list of exhibits; a student might meet a museum curator, or a novice might share a favourite find with a seasoned collector. I want to shift perspectives, spark curiosity, present new ideas, and continually surprise.”

15 November

24.39

Pavillon Wagram

47 avenue de Wagram

75017 Paris

Anonymous photograph. Parachutist, 1961, gelatin silver print.

Courtesy Barnabé Moinard, 24.39 Fair.



Johannes Faber in the Marais

In the last few years, Viennese gallerist Johannes Faber opted out of Paris Photo, choosing instead to exhibit at Galerie David Guiraud in the Marais district of Paris. Faber explains, “It was a gamble, of course to move from the fair but the venture has proved to be very successful and I have had very good results.”

Faber started out in 1973 as a photography collector and self-taught photographer, and in 1983, opened his gallery. “The emphasis is on Austrian and Czech photographers such as Heinrich Kühn, Rudolf Koppitz, Josef Sudek and Frantisek Drtikol, as well as European and American masters including Edward Weston, Irving Penn, and Man Ray.”

The exhibition at Galerie David Guiraud focuses on vintage classic photography from Europe and the USA from the period 1900-2000 and includes important works by Otto Steinert, Jaroslav Rössler Brassai, Horst P. Horst and many others.

10 – 17 November

Galerie David Guiraud

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Jaroslav Rössler. *Skylight, Prague 1923*, gelatin silver print.

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Paris Photo

Grand Palais



13-16 November 2025



PARIS PHOTO

PARIS PHOTO, the world's leading art fair devoted to photography, returns to the Grand Palais for its 28th edition. This year, the event will bring together 183 galleries and 41 publishers from 33 countries, with 59 who are participating for the first time.

This edition welcomes major new galleries as well as returning ones, including Eva Presenhuber (Zurich, Vienna, New York), Peter Kilchmann (Zurich), Richard Saltoun (London), Rose Gallery (Los Angeles), Papillon (Paris) and Poggi (Paris). These will be joined by Vadehra Art (New Delhi), Ayyam Gallery (Dubai) and Hafez Gallery (Jeddah), which will help to broaden artistic representation in the nave.

Paris Photo's loyal galleries will also be present, including Pace (New York, London, Seoul), Fraenkel (San Francisco), Thomas Zander (Cologne), Taka Ishii (Tokyo), christian berst art brut (Paris), Luisotti (Los Angeles), MEM (Tokyo) and Yancey Richardson (New York), confirming the fair's well-established central role in the photography market.

Scattered throughout the nave are Prismes projects, which feature wide-ranging propositions like those of Poggi and Klemm's (Berlin). After its inaugural edition in 2024, the curated Voices sector is this year being located at the heart of the nave. Voices has two main axes: exploring relationships and forms of kinship as well as the critical reflection of the ambivalent dynamic between photographer and portrayed; and reflecting on the social, political, ecological and personal dimensions of landscape.

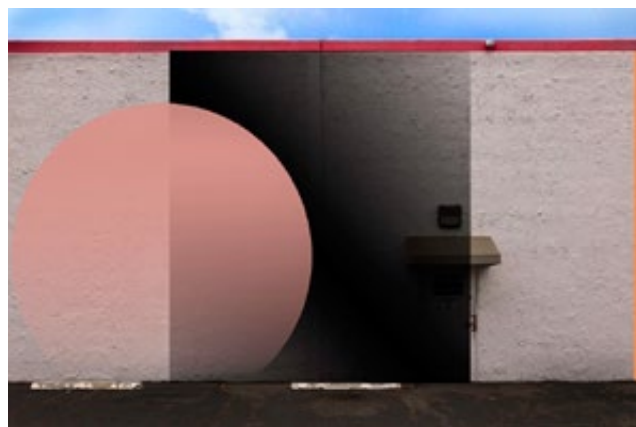
Once again, *The Classic* is an official media partner with Paris Photo, so should you need more copies of the new issue, you will find them at several distribution points, in the racks by the entrance of the fair, the kiosk, and the VIP area.

There's much going on outside the fair, 24.39, the satellite fair for classic photography is held at Pavillon Wagram on 15 November. There are several interesting exhibitions, including *Sibylle Bergemann – The Monument* at Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson and *Edward Weston – Becoming Modern* at Maison Européenne de la Photographie. The photography auction calendar is as busy as always. To keep yourself updated, visit:

www.theclassicphotomag.com/the-classic-auction-calendar

Grand Palais
13-16 Nov. 2025
Preview 12 Nov.

www.parisphoto.com



Bruno Tartarin

Bruno Tartarin, Paris, Arnaville, made an impressive debut at the fair last year. A special section is devoted to daguerreotypes, including a portrait of a man in turban by an unknown maker and a portrait of Alexandre Dumas fils. The presentation also includes an impressive group of views of Paris by Gustave Le Gray and Eugène Atget, a 1902 view by Gabriel Loppé of the Eiffel Tower caught in a lightning storm and a rare self-portrait by Auguste Lumière.

Also on show are paper negatives, as well as works as works from the interwar period.

Unknown photographer. Man in Turban, Daguerreotype. Courtesy of Bruno Tartarin.

Galerie Julian Sander

Galerie Julian Sander, Cologne, left many visitors speechless last year when it showed all 619 prints of August Sander's *People of the 20th Century*. This year, Julian Sander, the photographer's great-grandson, has opted for a large, eclectic group of masterpieces, by among others, Lisette Model, Elfriede Stegemeyer, Peter Keetman, Louis Faurer, Claude Tolmer, Josef Sudek and August Sander.

August Sander. *Painter Willi Bongard*, vintage gelatin silver print, 1922-1925.

Persons Project

Persons Project, Berlin, is showing a selection of works by Grey Crawford's series *Baltz*. Lewis Baltz's monochromatic photographs of suburban development helped to redefine American landscape photography in the early 1970s. Five decades later, Crawford revisited all 51 Baltz locations, documenting the changes that had taken place in this ever-changing urban California environment. Crawford approached this reinterpretation in a completely different manner by using his interest in masked geometric shapes, as we saw in his earlier works from the *Umbra* and the *Chroma* series. In addition, one wall is devoted to female artists from the Helsinki School.

Grey Crawford. *Baltz #24B*, from the series *Baltz*, pigment print, 2025. © the artist, courtesy: Persons Projects.



Bruce Silverstein Gallery

Bruce Silverstein Gallery, New York, is presenting an exceptional selection of photographic masterworks spanning the 20th and 21st centuries, including works by František Drtikol, Edward Weston, Barbara Morgan, Man Ray, Florence Henri, Dora Maar, and Germain Krull, as well as *Ryan Weideman: Taxi-Dermist*, a compelling series of 16 photographs capturing intimate and candid moments of the artist's taxi passengers and himself from 1981 to 2015.

František Drtikol. *Cut-outs of dancing nude figures*, gelatin silver print, circa 1931.

in camera galerie & Galerie Anne-Laure Buffard

in camera galerie, and Galerie Anne-Laure Buffard, both in Paris, are teaming up for a solo exhibition with Marie-Laure de Decker (1947-2023). A major figure in photojournalism, she travelled through the history of the second half of the twentieth century with her camera, capturing the major upheavals of her era as she met people and made commitments. She made her mark in a largely male-dominated environment, where working as a photographer was – and still is – a real-life choice, driven by passion, adrenaline, risks and renunciations. At a time when few women dared to enter this field, she did so with fierce determination and extraordinary courage.

Marie-Laure de Decker. *Autoportrait, Saigon, Vietnam, 1971*, gelatin silver print. in camera galerie/ Galerie Anne-Laure Buffard.

MEM

MEM, Tokyo, has been at the forefront of presenting not just recognised masters of Japanese photography but also hitherto unknown talents to an international audience. MEM stands Multiply Encoded Messages and this year the gallery is presenting a group exhibition with works by Kouichi Kaihatsu, Kuniyoshi Ootaki, Kyoko Watanuki, Toshiko Suto and others.

Kyoko Watanuki. *Suntory Building (Hacchobori)*, gelatin silver print, 1969.
©Kyoko Watanuki, courtesy of MEM, Tokyo.



Galerie Olivier Waltman

Galerie Olivier Waltman, Paris, is presenting a solo exhibition with Hungarian photographer Gyula Zaránd (1943-2020). He started taking photography at the age of 15, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and his two parents, all photographers. He began by photographing everyday life in his hometown, then became interested in the political and social unrest that swept through Hungary after 1956. Gyula Zaránd was often censored and some of his images considered as subversive – street children, military parades, beggars – were never published in his country at the time. He left Hungary in 1971 and settled in Paris, and became passionate about its neighbourhoods and inhabitants.

Gyula Zaránd. *Pickpocket*, vintage gelatin silver print, 1964. Galerie Olivier Waltman.

Roland Belgrave

Roland Belgrave, Brighton, makes his debut at the fair with a presentation that explores new ways of looking at photography, in terms of display, methodology, context and proposed future techniques and meaning. Baud Postma, known for his labour intensive, analogue works, has changed gears with *Death of the Author*, by incorporating AI. Postma's choice of subject matter, the cowboy and its connection to the frontier, offers a powerful metaphor for the AI revolution.

Baud Postma. *Untitled (Cowboy 1)*, photopolymer intaglio, 2025.

Don Gallery

Don Gallery, Shanghai, is presenting a solo exhibition with Wang Ningde. He started out as a photojournalist during the period of China's explosive economic and cultural transformation. Departing from documentary photography, Wang returned to his northern hometown to begin his *Some Days* series, which he worked on between 1999 and 2009. With his striking black and white photographs, the artist has been able to capture the tension between an ever-changing contemporary China and the always-present memory of the Cultural Revolution.

Wang Ningde. *Some Days No. 30, 1999 - Present*, inkjet print. Courtesy of the artist and Don Gallery.



Richard Saltoun

Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome, New York, specialises in post-war art with a particular emphasis on conceptual, feminist and performance artists that emerged during the 1970s and has been at the forefront of reintroducing and promoting the work of exceptional artists from the period such as Helen Chadwick, Bob Law, John Hilliard and Jo Spence. The presentation includes works by Chadwick, Eleanor Antin, Stella Snead and others.

Helen Chadwick. *In the Kitchen (Fridge)*, 1977, colour archival print.

Copyright The Estate of Helen Chadwick.
Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery London, Rome, New York.

Galeria Alta

Galeria Alta, Andorra, is presenting a solo exhibition with Ghanaian artist, photographer and filmmaker Carlos Idun-Tawiah. Inspired by archival treasures from the African continent, he seeks to highlight and reimagine its dynamic landscapes, seamlessly weaving together fiction and non-fiction, past and present, memory and imagination. His acclaimed series “*Sunday Special*” draws inspiration from his childhood memories of growing up in a Christian Ghanaian home.

Carlos Idun-Tawiah. *Grace Flows Like A River Accra, Ghana*, archival pigment print, 2022.

Jecza Gallery

Jecza Gallery, Timisoara, is presenting a group show, *Experimental Photography in Romania from Sigmund group to New Bucharest School of Photography*. Experimental photography in Romania evolved in the 1970s, from the Sigmund Group’s Bauhaus-inspired, interdisciplinary experiments and pedagogy programmes to the 1990s in Bucharest, with subREAL’s conceptual, critical use of photography to question post-communist identity.

Serving Art 1, black and white print of negative from the *Arta* magazine archive, printed by subREAL in 1997.



Hans P. Kraus, Jr.

Hans P. Kraus, Jr., New York, is focusing on portraits this year, by French, British and American photographers, including William Henry Fox Talbot, Charles Nègre, Louis-Auguste Bisson and Julia Margaret Cameron, as well as a few related works by contemporary artists. Fox Talbot's *Bust of Patroclus* is a portrait of a stationary plaster cast, his favourite sitter. The lengthy exposure times then at Talbot's disposal had made it all but impossible to photograph live sitters.

William Henry Fox Talbot. *Bust of Patroclus*, salt print from a calotype negative, 1842.

Howard Greenberg Gallery

Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, is showing a diverse group of works, including new work by Nadav Kander and Edward Burtynsky, alongside classics by William Klein, Roy DeCarava, Gordon Parks, Bruce Davidson and Louis Stettner. The presentation also features works by female photographers including Dorothea Lange, Berenice Abbott, Lisette Model, Barbara Morgan and Michiko Yamawaki.

William Klein. *Smoke + Veil x 3, Paris (Vogue)*, 1958, gelatin silver print with applied enamel, created 2010.

Michael Hoppen Gallery

This year, Michael Hoppen Gallery, London, explores the canon of street photography. Presented for the first time to the public, Sohei Nishino's latest diorama map *Tokyo, 2024* will be shown in conjunction with earlier dioramas of New York and Paris. Exhibited alongside Nishino's monumental contemporary maps, are vintage prints by Pál Funk Angelo, Nobuyoshi Araki, Eugene Atget, Brassai, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Krass Clement, Masahisa Fukase, Kati Horna, Charles Nègre, Ishiuchi Miyako, Tod Papageorge, Shomei Tomatsu, and Garry Winogrand and others.

Sohei Nishino. *Tokyo, 2024*, Light jet print on Kodak Endura paper.

LAMA White Glove Sales & Other Stories

WITH AUCTION HOUSE SPECIALIST
ALEXANDRA FIERRO



In August 2023, LAMA (LA Modern Auctions) held its first photography sale, with Alexandra Fierro as specialist in charge. It wasn't the first time that photographs had appeared in its sales but it was the first sale that was solely dedicated to the medium. LAMA was founded in 1992 by Peter Loughrey, a leading authority on 20th-century design and California art, well known to US television viewers as an expert on the PBS program *Antiques Roadshow*. Loughrey sadly passed away in 2020 at the age of 52 but his spirit lives on in the company, Alexandra Fierro tells me.

– Peter and his wife Shannon were the tastemakers in the LA market. I always kept tabs on what they were doing. Their taste was impeccable and they would create living room settings in their showroom, pairing mid-century modern furniture with classic California artists. An interior decorator, art consultant or client could simply stop by and purchase the whole thing. They set a very high bar and it has remained the standard for the company.

LAMA is based in Hollywood, California. In 2021, the house joined forces with Rago and Wright auction houses and together they have since grown into a network of independent auction houses across the US, adding Landry Pop Auctions (LPA), Toomey & Co and Poster Auctions International (PAI).

– When an auction house merges with, or takes over another, they usually use their own name and the name and identity of the other house disappear.

When our brands merged, the founders set a goal of combining what made each house a regional gem, uniquely curated single owner sales, thematic categories and decades of expertise in their respective specialities. We have offices on both the West and East Coasts, the Midwest and recently opened our New York gallery space in Chelsea. It has been a pleasure being a part of this growing team.

Fierro started her career in 2009.

– I graduated from U.C.S.B. with a B.A. in Art History and moved to Los Angeles with the last \$800 of my student loan, hoping to find work in a gallery or museum. But in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, opportunities were scarce. I first found a position in the antiques import business, and soon after, discovered Bergamot Station Art Center, then home to about 25 galleries. By chance, I crossed paths with Robert Berman of Robert Berman Gallery and Santa Monica Auctions. When I asked if they needed interns, the director shook his head, but Robert had an auction in just two days and needed all the help he could get. A few months later, he hired me, and within two years, I was promoted to director of both the gallery and the auction house. In that role, I did everything, from appraisals and sales to marketing, website design, exhibition design, and artist collaboration. If something needed to get done and I didn't know how, I taught myself. Over eight years, while wearing both hats, I gained what felt like sixteen years of experience.

In 2022, Fierro joined LAMA.

– I was originally hired as a fine art specialist, but having worked with photography, I suggested introducing it to our program. At the time, none of the other houses in our network were offering dedicated photography sales. Photography first appeared as part of a multimedia fine art auction, and the strong results encouraged the company to let me explore a standalone sale. In August 2023, we held our first dedicated photography auction. Since then, we’ve presented seven live photography auctions and two online sales. A highlight was securing consignments from the Polaroid Collection, which led to two white glove auctions this summer: *Photographs from the Polaroid Collection* featuring works by a range of artists, and another devoted to *Faces of Fame: Philippe Halsman from the Polaroid Collection*. To date, our photography auctions have achieved an overall 90% sell-through rate and nearly \$5 million in total sales.



I asked Fierro about how consignments and the photography auctions are assembled.

– Consignments come to us from a wide range of sources: private collectors, galleries, designers, and art consultants, much like at any other auction house. Before we introduced dedicated photography sales, photography consignments were few and far between. If you don’t offer the material, you won’t then receive the inquiries. I’m very open to photographs from all periods, in all media.

The sales are carefully curated.

– When I think about curation in the context of auctions, I always say “attempting” curation because you



never quite know what will come through the door. But having been raised in both the gallery world and the auction world, I can’t help but approach an auction as if I’m building a gallery exhibition. I see images on a wall, with order and rhythm, and I consider how works speak to one another. For me, it’s not just about scrolling through images decade

Top left: *Faces of Fame: Philippe Halsman from The Polaroid Collection*, 27 August 2025.

Top right: *Photographs from the Polaroid Collection*, 10 June 2025.
The Polaroid sales were white glove sales, meaning all lots sold.

Bottom right: *Photographs*, 2 August 2023.

Edmund Teske. *Roses*, vintage gelatin silver duotone solarised print mounted to vellum, circa 1960. Estimate: \$700-900, sold for \$6930.

Bottom left: *Photographs*, 25 October 2024.

Gregory Crewdson. *Untitled (Ophelia)*, laser direct C-print mounted to aluminium in artist’s frame, 2021. Estimate: \$8000-12000, sold for \$30240.



after decade, it's about creating moments of dialogue that spark curiosity. If we receive a nude from around 1890, for instance, I might place it alongside a Nan Goldin nude. By juxtaposing eras, we subtly encourage collectors to expand their perspective and make unexpected connections. I also value bringing process into focus: showing a mammoth plate albumen print and explaining the extraordinary effort behind it, the photographer carrying a 20 x 24 glass plate negative and equipment on his back. And I notice how those stories resonate, especially with younger audiences, who are rediscovering the beauty of cyanotypes and other early processes.

In August this year, LAMA held *Loud & Proud: LGBTQ+ Art*.

– I proposed the idea of introducing sales dedicated to queer art, and last fall management was

enthusiastic about supporting it. We held our second sale this past August. In addition to photography, painting, sculpture, and multiples, these auctions also feature ephemera, reflecting the breadth of creativity within the community. Given the moment we're living in, I feel a strong responsibility to elevate and share the voices of the LGBTQ+ community. That's why I named the series *Loud & Proud*, to celebrate the extraordinary contributions of queer artists and ensure their work receives the recognition it deserves.

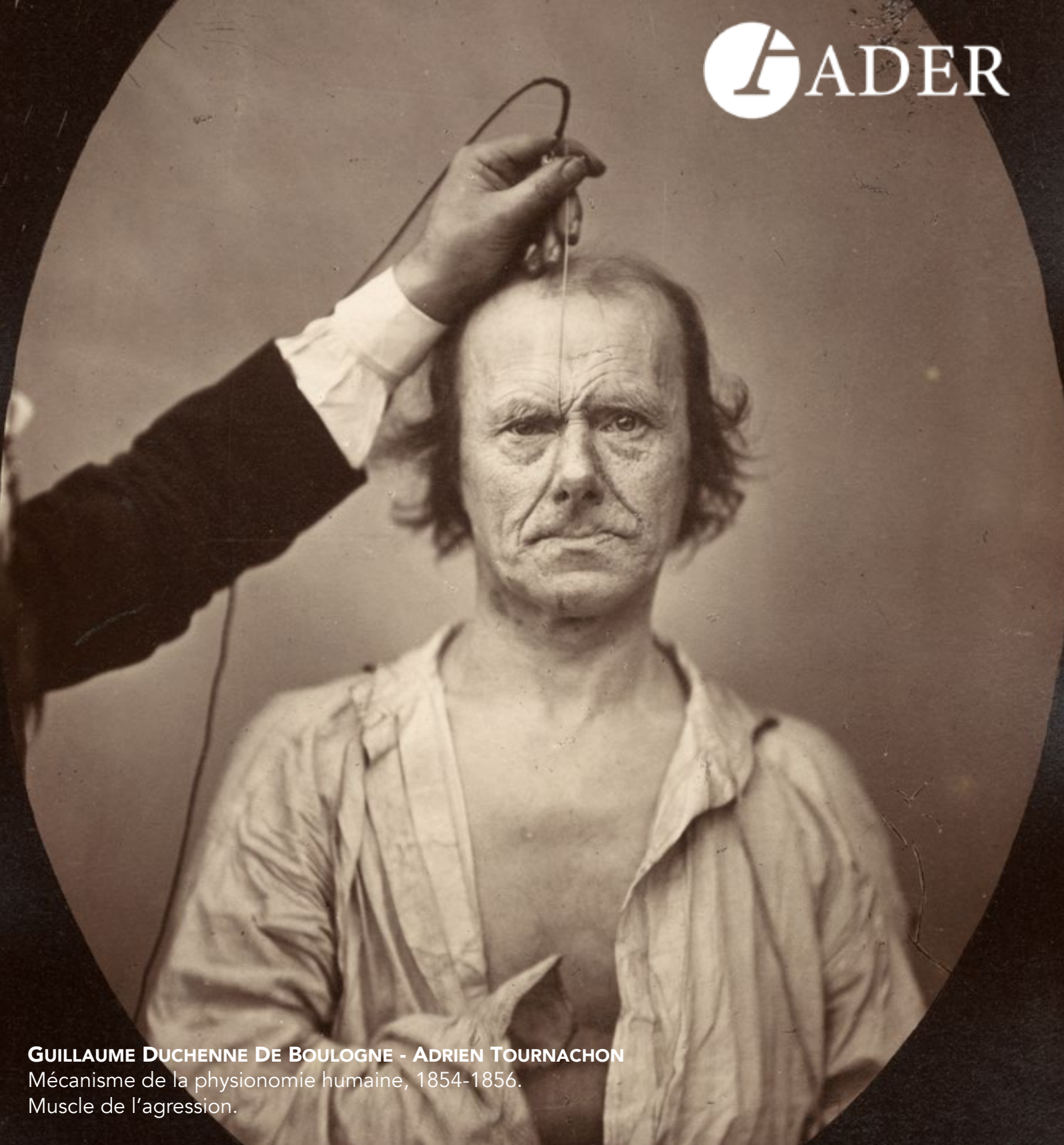
I asked Fierro for her opinion on the present market. – We've had two white glove sales with the Polaroid material, and this summer both the general photography auction and the Loud & Proud queer art sale achieved results over 100% by value. These numbers speak to the strength of the market and the appetite for thoughtfully curated material. Of course, the art market never exists in a vacuum, periods of unpredictability in the broader economy can echo moments I first experienced in 2009 when starting out in this business. That history has shaped my approach: when setting estimates, I aim to be strategic rather than speculative, positioning works at levels that generate genuine interest and competitive bidding. That approach has consistently resulted in strong outcomes. Our Prints & Multiples sales, for example, are now regularly surpassing \$1 million per auction, underscoring the depth of demand. I believe that by diversifying categories and presenting material responsibly, an auction house can not only attract consignors and buyers but also thrive in any market environment.

www.lamodern.com



Left: 20th Century Art, 21 February 2024.
Chris Burden. 747, gelatin silver print, 1973.
 Estimate: \$8000-12000, sold for £47880.

Right: Loud & Proud: LGBTQ+ Art, 1 August 2025.



GUILLAUME DUCHENNE DE BOULOGNE - ADRIEN TOURNACHON

Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine, 1854-1856.

Muscle de l'agression.

PHOTOGRAPHS - AUCTION



Saturday November 15th 2025

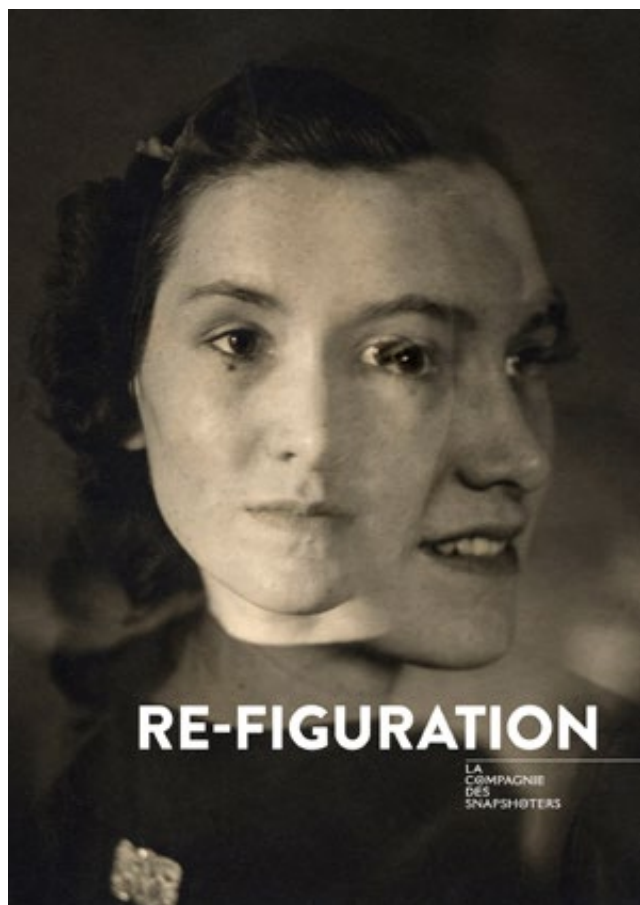
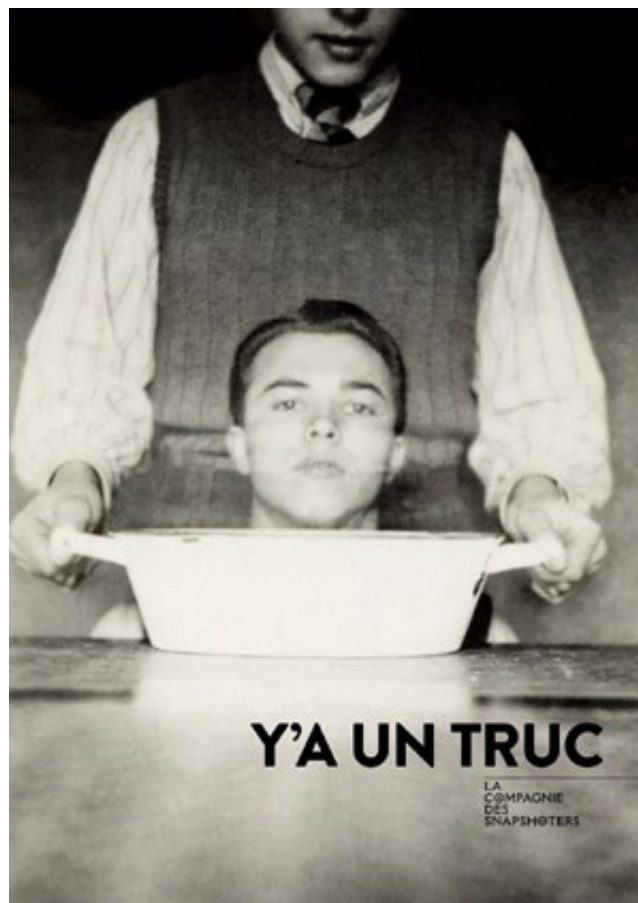
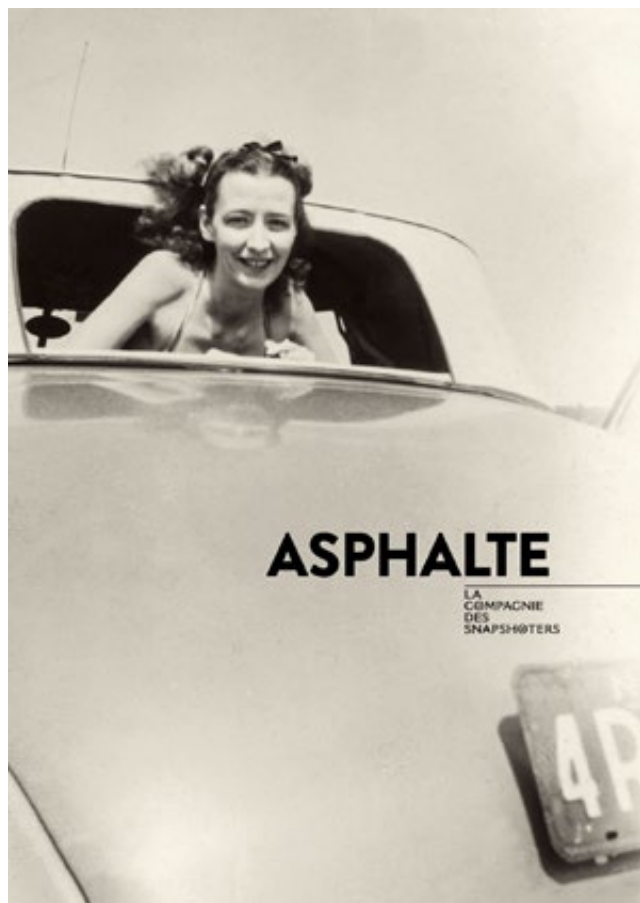
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MARCEL MINCK

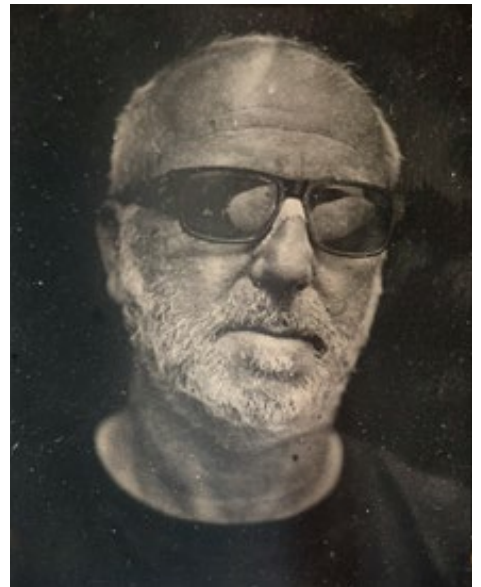
La Compagnie des Snapshoters

All images are courtesy of Marcel Minck.

A moment weighs a gram, and its existential unit of measurement is the photograph. Just a few centimetres of paper, which for at least a century of analogue photography, recorded and secretly preserved the joys, silences, loves and fantasies of each family. In the 19th century the family was the raw material of European literature. Today, Marcel Minck, one of France's leading dealers in instant photographs, with hundreds of thousands of images in his archives and a personal collection of over twenty thousand masterpieces, can be described as the head of a unique family of researchers and enthusiasts who, together, have rewritten a highly original version of the *Comédie humaine*. An atypical character at the Vanves flea market for thirty-five years, a leading figure in the world of instant photography for twenty-five years and since 2005, head of La Compagnie des Snapshoters, Marcel Minck recounts how this passion was born. Without ever having taken a single photograph himself.

La Compagnie des Snapshoters covers of books 1, 2, 9 and 10.

MARCEL MINCK



When and how did you become interested in photography?

– I discovered photography when I discovered one of its favourite places, the Vanves flea market in Paris. As a child, I used to accompany my father, a scrap metal dealer, when he went to see his friends there and in Saint-Ouen on Saturdays. I felt the unique character of this place, where the storms of life threw up rags and treasures every week. The markets in Saint-Ouen and Vanves still had something very libertarian and unconventional about them, and that won me over. The Vanves flea market developed in the mid-20th century after dealers in second-hand goods and scrap metal were driven out of Paris by a prefectural decree in 1884. The idea of being outside the system has always excited me. I'm an anarchist, as you may have guessed.



Before becoming a dealer, what path did you follow?

– I studied physiotherapy until I was twenty-three. Funnily enough, on the day I got my state diploma, I was unpacking my wares at a garage sale in Bois-Colombes. Between anatomy classes, I had become a *brocanteur*, a dealer in second-hand goods. A friend of my father who introduced me to it, a *brocanteur*, from Nice, a very original personality who collected beautiful women and cars and made his fortune clearing out houses on the Côte d’Azur.

You were buying and selling photography books before becoming a dealer in snapshots.

– Selling them, but first reading them and, above all, looking at them. Books by old and contemporary photographers still occupy a large part of my studio in Lisbon, where I now live and continue my online activity (Delcampe: Diop). I refined my eye

with Brassai, Jacques Henri Lartigue, Germaine Krull, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau and *La banlieue de Paris*, which was a decisive encounter, then André Kertész and Bill Brandt for nudes, Robert Frank, Saul Leiter, William Klein, all of Chris Marker’s work, as well as the greats of Japanese photography, from Shomei Tomatsu to Daido Moriyama, not forgetting Masahisa Fukase. In addition to books, I started buying lots of family albums. It became obsessive and addictive, mainly because the family is the ultimate repository of amateur photography. Although each photo has its own interest, after a while the problem of where to store the albums arose. A friend, Emmanuelle Fructus, now an archivist and artist of anonymous photography, suggested that I could extract a single photograph from each album. It was a revelation! That’s how my collection began. In anonymous photography, which everyone defines in their own way, the snapshot is the most honest, richest and most surprising, I think. The snap is unique. No two families are the same. After twenty years of research in this field, I am happy to be able to contradict Leo Tolstoy, who wrote in the famous opening lines of *Anna Karenina*: “All happy families are alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” This is not true. Even happy families retain their originality. And all are unique, and so are their albums.

You must now have the sensitivity of a psychoanalyst.

– After two or three pages of an album, you can predict what you are going to find, whether the woman you saw at the beginning is going to undress, whether there have been violent events, a death, a divorce, why someone has intervened in the images, torn them up or perhaps censored the face of someone who has fallen into disgrace. But beyond love and complicity, we also see unpleasant things, family secrets, resentments and enmities. Over time, we end up feeling them, and we always have to keep a certain distance because snaps are always intrusive. They are doubly so, first by entering the intimacy of the person who took the pictures, and then into



that of the person who collects them. I found the albums of a soldier and keen sportsman in Algeria, which showed him in action, then, without transition, with one leg amputated and continuing to have his photo taken as a bodybuilder. Another had photographed his dog over a period of fifteen years in a dozen albums. Its birth, its life, its death and even its burial and grave in the family garden. The last album was devoted to his new puppy. The same in every way.

There is another place in Paris that was decisive in your training: the Hôtel Drouot.

– Since I started this work, there hasn't been a day in my life when I haven't been to Drouot. I made my "official debut" in 1983 and gradually became immersed in its inner workings. It's the oldest





auction house in the world, with its own rules, customs and strict hierarchies. In the 2000s, I realised that photography was my world. At Drouot, out of habit and a lack of commercial interest, the photographic heritage of various families remained unsold and was returned to the heirs or sent directly to the

rag-and-bone men, the main suppliers of snapshots. I started buying everything systematically in bulk from them. A photograph weighs one gram, so ten kilos is 10 000 images. I was the biggest buyer of snapshots in terms of quantity, up to 300 kilos a week, and I looked at all these images at least once. I may have monopolised the market, which may have aroused some jealousy among collectors who were hunting for individual pieces.

Yet your first major purchase of photographs took place outside the walls of Drouot.

– It was a stroke of luck. One day, a French friend who owned a restaurant in Copenhagen called me and told me that one of his customers had a collection of 100 000 photographs from various British and American press agencies, taken between 1925 and 1935, and stored in large wooden fishing crates. I set off with my truck and all my savings at the time, 15 000 euros, and bought them. Everyone told me I had thrown my money away, that they were worthless. Afraid that I had made a mistake and a little hurt, I hid the crates, telling people I had sold everything. Ten years later, the scene was very different. I showed them at the Salon du Papier at the Porte Champerret. Michel Frizot, who was then finishing his extraordinary *A New History of Photography*, appeared in front of my stand. He asked to see the photos, and I replied, “Which ones?” because I had sorted everything into categories, and he replied, “All of them”. He sat at my stand for five days! For me, his enthusiasm and interest were decisive and confirmed that photography was the right path for me to follow. Today, I am delighted to keep the negatives from the lots I buy for Anne Frizot, his daughter.



"Showing off his war wound". Unknown photographer.
Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Who are your clients? And what have you discovered about collectors?

– They include artists such as Annette Messager, Eduardo Arroyo, Joachim Ferrer, Gerardo Chávez, Daniel Spoerri, Sophie Calle, Pol Bury, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Robert Combas, Christian Boltanski, and many others who are loyal clients and friends. You have to keep a certain distance because you can discover some curious things, and even more. Every collector has their favourite theme: double exposures, nuns, women in mules, hand-coloured photographs, emptiness, photos kept in wallets, empty chairs, failed shots, blurred images, nudes, jumps, sleepers, silhouettes, women and cars, etc. The list is endless. The most surprising obsession: a collector who evaluated images by looking only at the back. In the end, he selected about a hundred. Normally, I never do this, but this time I asked him what his selection criteria were. His answer: traces of glue!

At the end of the 1990s, anonymous photography made its way into museums. The exhibition *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life 1888 to the Present* was shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1998, and two years later, the Metropolitan Museum of Art showed Thomas Walther's collection, *Other Pictures*. In France, Michel Frizot and Cédric de Veigy, published *Photo trouvée* in 2006. When La Compagnie des Snapshotters was founded, the ground had been prepared.

– Over the years, a community of passionate researchers and friends formed around my stand in Vanves. In 2005, with eight of them, Hervé Hulo, Chloé Abittan, André Robé, Yves Casagrande, Marianne Rosensthiel, Isabelle Chemin, Eric Dumage and Claire Khelfaoui, I founded La Compagnie des Snapshotters. At a certain point, we felt the need to show the richness and originality of our collections, and we created a series of small books, without text or captions, on recurring themes in family photography. Before that, I had produced



Unknown photographer. Antonin Artaud, poet, actor, dramatist, theoretician of the Surrealist movement, who conceptualised the Theatre of Cruelty.



Réapparitions. Instantanés photographiques amateurs (Reappearances: Amateur Photographic Snapshots), published by Éditions Sur la Banquise. Since then, for each publication, distributed exclusively by the Artazart bookshop in Paris, we have selected the best of our collections. The selected images date from the late 19th century to the 1970s. After that, everything changed: the chemistry, the formats and, above all, the intention behind the shot.

So what “reappears” in these images?

– I would answer with the words of Michel Frizot: what reappears is an enigma, a singularity, a beauty that has nothing to envy to the photography of the masters. In fact, photographs that resemble those of Lartigue, Cartier-Bresson, Brassai, Doisneau, Ronis, Frank, Klein and other great artists will be the subject of a forthcoming book: *Dans le goût de* (In the style of), in the manner of a long-lost literary genre.

Have you ever found anything interesting in your own family album?

– No. I wouldn't have selected a single image. And that says a lot about me and my family.

And the image you're looking for and haven't yet found among the thousands and thousands of images that have passed through your hands?

– I've always said that the day I find a photograph of a bride crying over her fate, I'll stop buying family albums. There's no one more deceitful and secretive than a collector!

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BY MICHAEL DIEMAR

CECIL BEATON'S Fashionable World

INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN MUIR

In November 1968, the National Portrait Gallery, London, opened *Beaton's Portraits 1928–1968*, an exhibition of Cecil Beaton's most celebrated portraits. It was curated by Roy Strong, later Sir Roy Strong, who in 1967 at the age of 32 had been appointed as the gallery's director. It was produced in collaboration with Beaton himself and Richard Buckle, ballet critic and set designer, known as "Dickie". For some, it must have seemed a more than bold move on Strong's part. This was not only the first time that the gallery had exhibited photography but also the first time that representations of living people were displayed on its walls. But Strong believed that the exhibition could be a blockbuster and he was proved to be right. The exhibition was enormously successful – 30 000 visitors saw it in its first month – and its run was extended twice.

It was also a success for photography as a medium. As Richard Buckle would later write, "The record-breaking show was regarded by members of the profession as the official acceptance of photography as an art." In 2004, there was a second

ROBIN MUIR



Beaton exhibition at the gallery, curated by Terence Pepper. In the catalogue, Strong reminisced about the 1968 exhibition, "Not long afterwards an enterprising young woman called Sue Davies came to see me, asking what I thought about the notion of her opening gallery devoted to photography. I said it was a great idea. The result was The Photographers' Gallery, still vibrant today."

In March 2020, the National Portrait Gallery opened its third Beaton show, entitled *Cecil Beaton's Bright Young Things* and curated by Robin Muir. Bright Young Things was the moniker dreamt up by the tabloid press to describe a group of Bohemian young aristocrats and socialites in the 20s and 30s, a deliriously eccentric, glamorous and creative era of British cultural life, combining High Society and

Cecil Beaton. Self-portrait, c. 1935, gelatin silver print.
The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.

the avant-garde. The show opened and was closed within a week because of COVID, Muir tells me.

– It was a bitter blow but the gallery kindly asked me to stage it again and to enlarge it. The new show, *Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World*, takes up the whole of the ground floor. It's the fourth Beaton show at the gallery and it reconfirms his standing as one of Britain's great cultural figures of the 20th century.

Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) was not just a photographer but also a painter, illustrator, and author of some three dozen books, as well as costume and set designer for stage and film, with credits including *Gigi* (1958) and *My Fair Lady* (1965). He was knighted in 1972. I asked Muir to give an overview of the exhibition.

– It builds and expands on the previous show and it focuses on his fashion work because that has never yet been the focus of a Beaton show. Calling it *Fashionable World* allowed me to include all sorts of

beautiful people wearing fabulous clothes. The show starts in 1922 when Beaton went to Cambridge to study and first began taking photographs of people who weren't immediate members of his family. It ends around 1956 when he was asked to do costumes for the stage production *My Fair Lady* on Broadway and then two years later on London's West End and finally turned into the 1964 film for which he also created the sets. It was also a turning point in his career as a photographer. He had quarrelled with American *Vogue* and British *Vogue*, his great patron since the 1920s, did not renew his contract. He increasingly focused on his stage-related work so *My Fair Lady*, both on stage and screen, seemed like a good moment to end the show.

Did you come across new material during the working process?

– Yes, lots, in fact. Having suffered a stroke in 1974, Beaton became worried about his finances. This led to an arrangement with Sotheby's, an idea brought forward by Philippe Garner, whereby the auction house would acquire Beaton's archive and hold a series of auctions to recoup the cost. There was, however, an issue with Condé Nast concerning copyright, as Beaton had been under contract as a staff photographer. The matter was finally resolved a few years ago. The archive went to Condé Nast and is now stored in a facility in Stockwell in South London. I was incredibly lucky to be able to have access to this extraordinary resource as well as the work that had been retained by British *Vogue* all along. I spent a long time going through absolutely everything within the time period I had given myself. I found some fantastic things, like his colour work from the 40s and 50s, which isn't at all as well known as the black and white work. Those prints are in great condition, not at all faded. Going through all the images also underlined that Beaton always aimed to make his prints as good as they could possibly be. I have only included vintage prints in the show. Not all are in pristine condition. Some have bends or tears but that just adds to their aura as historic artefacts.

Beaton was, in a sense, an escapee from the world that he was born into.

– He was the middle-class son of a fairly prosperous timber merchant whose career started to slide during his childhood, and he was slightly embarrassed about being middle-class. He wanted to go beyond the closeted, genteel world of his parents and never really forgave his mother for not being a great society hostess. He would insert small ads



Maurice Beck and Helen Macgregor. *The Riviera Wanderers* (Cecil Beaton and Stephen Tennant), 1927, toned gelatin silver print. National Portrait Gallery, London.

into the back of *The Times*, saying, “Mrs. Beaton will be at home at Hyde Park Terrace” on such and such a date, trying to fabricate a grand story for his family. With his camera, he promoted his sisters as society ornaments and luckily for him, they were very pretty, patient and pliable. He did succeed in turning them into society figures and in so doing, he reinvented himself. Beaton’s life is really all about reinvention, artifice and fantasy, that you can be whoever you want to be, and not be beholden to what you were born into.

And he worked hard at reinventing himself.

– Yes, and he had many patrons. He was picked up by the Sitwells, siblings Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell. They really understood him and what he was trying to do, and they promoted him in the avant-garde world. In return, he made the definitive portraits of them. He was also desperate to meet Stephen Tennant, the exciting, young, beautiful society figure whose flamboyant personal style was an early influence on Beaton. They did meet and became lifelong friends. Stephen Tennant set an example for Beaton, that you can be who you want to be, just go out and do it. And that’s what Beaton did. He was performing Cecil Beaton for most of his life.

Intriguingly enough, Beaton was taught photography by his nanny, Ninnie Collard.

– She was a fairly accomplished amateur photographer and showed him the rudiments of photography. He was given a Box Brownie camera on his 10th birthday, and two years later, in 1916, a new camera, a Kodak No. 3-A. Late in life, Beaton gave it to the Fox Talbot Museum in Lacock and we borrowed it for the exhibition. Remarkably enough, that was the camera he used from 1916 right up until he went to America for the first time in 1927. It’s such a primitive camera and yet he managed to make it work. He took all his early *Vogue* pictures with it. I suspect it was down to his extraordinary work ethic. It was trial and error until he got it right. He became very, very adept as a photographer. Still, all through his life he would say, “I don’t know how it works. I just point the thing and somehow the picture just appears.” But it required a lot of work on his part to be so nonchalant.

He also worked hard to promote himself as a photographer in those early years, even writing letters to magazines under assumed names, recommending “the photographer Cecil Beaton”.

– Indeed, and early on he recognised that he could mask any sort of technical deficiency in his work if he applied style, that style was always going to triumph over form. And eventually, it opened the doors at British *Vogue* for him. He was reinventing not only himself through photography but also reinventing magazine photography in Britain. Beaton was the first homespun photographer that British *Vogue*



could call its own discovery. He brought a sense of elegance to the magazine but very much on his own terms, such as his props and sets. He used balloons, cellophane, mirrors, vases of lilies, and all sorts of sleight of hand, and managed to turn quite ordinary people into paragons of fashion and beauty. Yes, he was looking at the work of Baron Adolph de Meyer, seeing how he manipulated lights, used props and so forth but he took those things and turned them into a curiously English version of what the Baron might have done. It’s a little bit clumsy and homemade but it was entirely successful and from 1927 and onwards, British *Vogue* completely bought into his inventions, so much, I think, that when we think of *Vogue* in London in the interwar years, we invariably think of Beaton’s pioneering photographs.

Cecil Beaton. *Princess Emeline De Broglie*, 1928, gelatin silver print. The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.



There's another thing that strikes me when I think of his early years at *British Vogue*. If we look at the history of fashion, there used to be a very strict line between designer fashion and youth fashion/street style. They were two separate worlds. In 1962, *British Vogue* started The Young Idea section in the magazine to capture the growing youth market but it was in the 80s and 90s that erosion of that line became much more significant, Jean Paul Gaultier for example, taking inspiration from the street styles of London. Even so, I'm wondering, didn't Beaton get there first?

– That's a very, very good point. If we look at the early pictures he took of fashionable people for *British Vogue*, they're not styled in the way that his later photographs would be. People came to the studio in whatever they were wearing. Clothes

Cecil Beaton. Jean Cocteau, 1935, gelatin silver print mounted on card. The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.

weren't brought out for them to wear as on other shoots. They came as they were and then Beaton started to work his magic on the surroundings.

But didn't Beaton go further than that, with the Bright Young Things, designing clothes and costumes for them? I'm reminded of punk, the New Romantics, Leigh Bowery even.

– Yes, the dressing-up box that came into play, absolutely true. When he was visiting Stephen Tennant at Wilford Manor, they went to the dressing-up box, pulled out all these clothes and created extraordinary, rather self-regarding tableaux. Stephen Tennant was always finding something new and exciting to wear, like his brother's leather flying jacket, which made him look incredibly modern. And there were an awful lot of society parties, galas and events and dressing up and fancy dress was the order of the day. Beaton was able to help dress his friends in the most extraordinary costumes. While he couldn't sew to save his life, he could design clothes and costumes that were simply spectacular.

He made many friends in Paris, including the Russian-born photographer George Hoyningen-Huene who shot for French *Vogue*, and the multi-talented Jean Cocteau who worked Les Ballets Russes, directed films, wrote novels and plays, designed jewellery for Elsa Schiaparelli and much else. How important were those friendships to Beaton?

– They were extremely important. When Beaton first went to the US, he was told by Condé Nast himself that he couldn't use his Kodak No. 3-A camera for the magazine, and that he would have to get a plate camera. Well, he did so and the resulting pictures were successful. After which Nast sent him to Paris, the home of couture, on seasonal assignments. He befriended Hoyningen-Huene who became a lifelong friend and he was much more engaged with the fine art side of fashion photography. Beaton approached fashion photography as an untutored amateur. Through Hoyningen-Huene, and to some extent Horst, though he and Beaton disliked each other intensely, he saw how fashion photography proper was made, making visible every cut and fold, how the dress should be beautifully lit and the models perfectly posed. From then on Beaton started making photographs in the accepted *Vogue* way, though not by imitating Hoyningen-Huene but finding his own way, becoming one of the leading 30s high fashion



photographers. Hoyningen-Huene also introduced him to the compact 6x6 Rolleiflex camera, which gave Beaton an awful lot more freedom, both inside and outside the studio. And through Hoyningen-Huene and his circle, Beaton also got to know a lot of the avant-garde figures in Paris, including Jean Cocteau, who called Beaton “Malice in Wonderland”, which Beaton absolutely loved. Or thought he did. He was never quite sure what Cocteau meant by it! He became friends with Christian Bérard, the

great Parisian set designer and fashion illustrator and the equally significant choreographer George Balanchine in Paris at the time. They all influenced him in various ways. Cocteau, for instance, suggested that rather than bring in a whole lot of disparate accoutrements to style his photographs,

Cecil Beaton. Princess Natalie Paley, 1935, toned gelatin silver print. The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.



he should style each photograph to be in tune with the sitter. It forced Beaton to do a lot more research and choose props with greater care. He started using fishnets and even bedsprings as props and there are several Cocteau-esque motifs that run through those 30s photographs. Beaton was nothing if not a magpie. He borrowed and stole things from other people but always succeeded in making them his own.

Beaton took numerous portraits of Cocteau and one of them caused an absolute scandal, of Cocteau smoking opium.

– I haven't included it in the show. People found it very shocking. I don't think Beaton ever wanted to try smoking opium but he was probably quite surprised by the reaction, which brings me to another thing. Beaton was quite naive in many ways, perhaps because of his sheltered life as a child. When you read his early diaries about him trying to come to terms with sexuality, it's very naively put, "Women fascinate me but I'm just not that interested in them." It's like a confessional but he wasn't embarrassed or ashamed of his sexuality. He just had difficulty working out what it was. There's the same rather naive sensibility when it comes to drugs and other sorts of bad behaviour. Beaton was never a partaker. He never got too drunk and had to be carried out at parties. He was always very much in control and always observing. He probably thought this whole opium thing with Cocteau was rather extraordinary but while it was shocking to everybody else, he himself wasn't that shocked. Beaton was a very odd figure, a mixture of innocent abroad and a man full of peasant guile.



While publisher Condé Nast liked Beaton's work a lot, Dr M F Agha, art director at American Vogue was much less keen. What was it about Beaton's work that Agha disliked so much?

– It could be down to something as mundane as the fact that Beaton was not an Agha discovery but had been foisted on Agha by Condé Nast. There might also have been an element of hubris, arrogance and entitlement that followed Beaton around at this time. In 1927, he showed his first exhibition at Cooling Gallery in London, accompanied by a small catalogue with an essay by Osbert Sitwell. The exhibition was a massive triumph. All the people who had sat for him came to it. Mayfair was thronged with people wanting to see the wunderkind photographer's work.

Cecil Beaton. *Disciples of Dalí* (Lyla Zelensky in "Bureau Drawer" suit by Schiaparelli), 1936, gelatin silver print. Collection of Andy and Paula Cowan.

Cecil Beaton. *Disciples of Dalí* (Ruth Ford and the Comtesse de la Falaise in "Bureau Drawer" suits by Schiaparelli), 1936, gelatin silver print. Collection of Andy and Paula Cowan.



Cecil Beaton. *Charles Henri Ford in Surrealist costume*, 1937, toned gelatin silver print.

The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.

Charles Henri Ford, brother of Ruth Ford, seen opposite, was an American poet, novelist, filmmaker and photographer. In 1933, he and his friend Parker Tyler published *The Young & Evil*, one of the first openly gay American novels. Between 1940 and 1947, they published the Surrealist magazine *View*.



As a result, he became the most famous photographer in Britain and he was only in his early 20s. He went to America the same year, thinking, "And now, I can conquer New York." And he sort of did but I think he behaved rather grandly, an attitude that rankled with Agha and many others and the more successful Beaton became, the more Agha disliked him.

Beaton achieved success in the US, not just with his fashion pictures but also with his portraits, including Hollywood stars and his illustrations. And then it all came to a screeching halt in 1938, because of a drawing he had made for the February issue of *American Vogue*.

– Beaton was carrying out a drawing assignment for Agha, a cartoon, and in it, he inserted an antisemitic slur. It was very small and you need a magnifying glass to see it but it is indisputably there. It was spotted by someone who then alerted the press in the form of Walter Winchell, who had a syndicated radio program and a syndicated column. It caused an absolute uproar. Condé Nast fired Beaton straight away, telling him, "This goes against everything that I've ever built my magazines upon. This sort of thing is so alien to me." Beaton thought British *Vogue* might not mind so much but they absolutely

did and shut down on him completely. The gates of Hollywood were now firmly closed to him. It has been suggested that it was Agha who spotted the antisemitic slur and that he was the one who alerted Walter Winchell but that's speculation. What Beaton did was absolutely inexcusable. He apologised and realised the enormity of the situation but he never really knew why he had done it and remained conflicted by his motives.

Beaton returned to London in 1938. The following year, WWII broke out. He took some remarkable images in London during the Blitz, and then he became a war photographer.

– Following the antisemitic debacle, Beaton needed some kind of redemption. How could he atone for what he had done? Two things happened. The first was that he was asked by the palace to take photographs of the Royal Family and they were the first in a long parallel career as a royal photographer. Beaton completely reinvented the iconography of the Queen, the king and the young princesses. He worked as a Royal photographer until 1968 when he took his last photographs of Queen Elizabeth II. The Royal photographs sort of saved him as a photographer and brought him back into the public eye. The second thing that redeemed him was his photographic work during the war years. He became an affiliate of the Ministry of Information, initially to document the rubble of London after the Luftwaffe bombings during the Blitz. He made extraordinary tableaux out of desolation and ruin and found a surrealist way of making extraordinary images out of disaster. After that, he was sent abroad. Beaton went absolutely everywhere during the war, to India, the Near East, the Far East, and to North Africa during the desert campaign. He never actually saw any combat himself. He was there for the aftermath, looking at destroyed tanks and buildings. But he was also photographing service men and women. The photographs are the opposite of absolutely everything he had stood for in the 1930s, dressing people up. They are ordinary people, army personnel or civilians and he gave them dignity and some Hollywood glamour, portraying them as shining beacons of fortitude, bravery and perseverance during the war.

What effect did the war have on him as a person? And as a photographer?

– It profoundly changed the way he saw the world and the people he met. The way his photography inevitably had to develop meant that he could never go back to what he was doing before the war. And for quite some time, he resisted going back to fashion photography. He did eventually because he knew he was very good at it but he treated fashion in a wholly new way, at least to begin with. For the Paris collections for French, American and British

Cecil Beaton. *The Men Who Fly Planes*, 1941, gelatin silver print. The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.

Vogue in 1945, he photographed the models against bullet-shattered walls or in desecrated gardens. It didn't last very long. When Dior launched the New Look in 1947, Beaton embraced it and got back into his stride, making very opulent, very striking fashion pictures.

The book *Unseen Vogue* (2002) includes letters that were exchanged between British *Vogue* and Beaton in 1955. He was charged with producing uninspired work.

– Beaton had lost interest. Sure, there were some wonderful moments of incredible elegance and great opulence, such as the famous picture of Charles James dresses. But following his experiences of the war, and having done fashion photography almost non-stop since 1927, he had tired of this facet of photography, of trying to reinvent it. A lot of the work he produced in the 40s and 50s is pretty pedestrian. British *Vogue* Editor Audrey Withers noticed it and it culminated in that rather sad exchange of letters. Beaton mounted a spirited defence but he knew it to be true and they cut their ties. Ever since the 30s and 40s, he had had a parallel career in the performing arts and around 1956, he decided to concentrate on that and slightly said goodbye to photography.



One chapter in the Beaton story concerns Greta Garbo. Their relationship is still shrouded in mystery. What has come to light since Hugo Vickers published his Beaton biography in 1985?

– There have been two books that focus on Beaton and Garbo. It's one of the 20th century's most curious love stories. I have absolutely no idea how this relationship worked, except that in many ways, it didn't work at all. I think he was in love with the

Cecil Beaton. *The Second Age of Beauty is Glamour* (suit by Hartnell), 1946, original colour transparency. The Condé Nast Archive, London.



Cecil Beaton. *Best Invitation of the Season* (Nina De Voe in ball gown by Balmain), 1951, original colour transparency. The Condé Nast Archive, New York.

idea of Greta Garbo, and that she was intrigued by this very famous photographer who was completely besotted by her. They were so incompatible that it shouldn't have worked but somehow it did. They became very, very close friends and there is every suggestion that their relationship was physical as well. Beaton was a predominantly homosexual man, but it was an extraordinary moment in his life, a friendship that seemed to endure. They fell out several times, there were recriminations and then they got back together again. It's all very odd.

In 1946, Beaton took some famous/infamous photographs of her.

– Beaton wanted to capture her beauty with his camera and finally succeeded in doing so in 1946 when she asked him if he would mind taking her passport photograph. It turned into a photographic session at the hotel they were staying at. Beaton then sold the photographs to Condé Nast which led to them being published in American *Vogue*, totally against the wishes of the very private Greta Garbo. No photographs of her had been published since she ended her film career, except paparazzi photographs. *Vogue* was therefore the recipient of this extraordinary set of pictures of the world's most elusive star. Beaton had broken the trust and the bonds of their friendship. Beaton would later claim, "Oh, she sort of gave me permission" but it's almost certain that she didn't. It was the end of the affair.

His work for the performing arts was astonishing, whether it was *Gigi* or *My Fair Lady*. It seems to me that Beaton was at his best when he was facing a challenge of some sort.

– I think that's true. Following the antisemitic incident, he had to do something not only to secure an income stream but to reinvent himself and put this terrible moment behind him. He did it with his war photography and his work for the performing arts.



In 1974, at the age of 70, he faced his biggest challenge when he suffered a stroke. He had to learn to write with his left hand, how to paint, and how to press the shutter of a camera. Beaton never gave up and that had been his work ethic since he started breaking free from his middle-class upbringing. He was always pushing ahead, fighting to make things work, and eliminating every obstacle in his way.

It's beyond the scope of the exhibition but how did he fare during the 60s? It was a tricky period for photographers of his generation. Suddenly, there was Swinging London and things were changing very, very quickly.

– Funnily enough, what I'd love to do next is a show on Beaton's later years, because he did still have a career as a photographer. His antenna was always very much attuned to what was new and happening, what was out there. Beaton had a very young sensibility. He discovered the Swinging 60s while being a sort of grandfather figure in the world of photography. David Bailey discovered him and Bailey was very astute. He really got that Beaton was a fashionable link to the 1920s, a very glamorous world and the 60s were becoming very glamorous, though in a different way. He saw Beaton as a father figure and Beaton responded to it. Through Bailey, Beaton met people like Nicky Haslam, and through him, he met the Rolling Stones, and through them and American *Vogue*, he met Andy Warhol and the Factory crowd.

—
Cecil Beaton. *Worldly Colour* (Charles James evening dresses), 1948, original colour transparency. The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.



His mind was always curious and open to new sensations, new people, young people, what they were doing, wearing and thinking. It culminated in a rather wonderful counter-cultural moment where Beaton, the grand old man of British photography, was chosen to photograph on the set of the film *Performance*, starring Mick Jagger, James Fox and Anita Pallenberg. He had reinvented himself yet again. Hugo Vickers quoted somebody saying, "He's not Rip Van Winkle. He's Rip Van with it."

What kind of legacy did Beaton leave?

– Beaton was one of the great cultural figures of the British 20th century. It's very difficult to think of anyone of great consequence in the arts between 1927 and 1969 who wasn't photographed by him. And in many cases, they are the defining photographs of those figures. Beaton had a huge influence on generations of photographers, including David Bailey, Mario Testino, Tim Walker to name just a few. And as Beaton once said to Tony Armstrong Jones, later Lord Snowdon, "I'm the man who ensured that photographers never had to go through the tradesman's entrance again." That a photographer would walk through the front door and be greeted as an artist, not as an annoying man coming to take the family photograph. But his legacy goes beyond that. It's difficult to overestimate the importance the 1968 exhibition at the National Gallery. It was a sensation and it profoundly changed how photography was perceived, not just by the public but also by the museums in Britain, that photography was an important medium, which had to be explored, researched and collected. All in all, he left a tremendous legacy.

Cecil Beaton's Fashionable World
National Portrait Gallery
 The exhibition runs until
 11 January 2026.

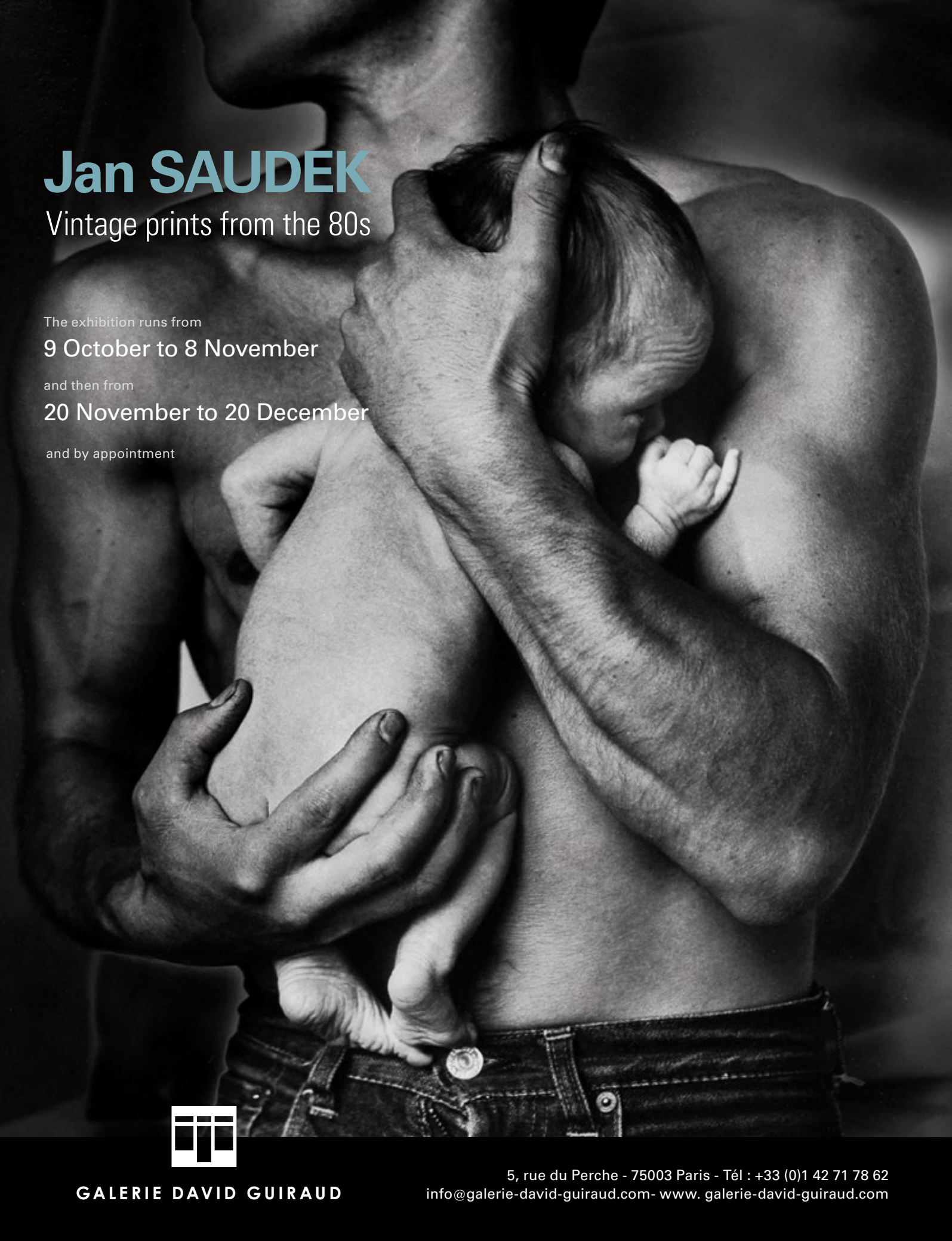


Cecil Beaton. Greta Garbo, 1946, gelatin silver print.
 The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.

Cecil Beaton. Elizabeth Taylor, 1955, gelatin silver print.
 The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive, London.



Cecil Beaton. *Audrey Hepburn in costume for My Fair Lady,* 1963. Original colour transparency. The Cecil Beaton Archive.



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BY MICHAEL DIEMAR

MUSÉE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE Charleroi

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR XAVIER CANONNE

Have you ever been alive? Curious sensation, isn't it?
Marcel Mariën (1920-1993)

Belgium has two national museums of photography, FOMU, the Photo Museum Antwerp, in the Flemish-speaking part of the country, and Musée de la Photographie in Charleroi in the French-speaking part. Unlike Antwerp, Charleroi is somewhat off the beaten track, but Musée de la Photographie has a strong profile in the international photography world, thanks to its innovative exhibition programme and the leadership of Xavier Canonne, one of the world's leading authorities on Surrealism. Last year, to mark the centenary of the publication of the first Surrealist manifesto, the museum showed *Surréalisme, pour ainsi dire* (Surrealism, so to speak), featuring a selection of works from the museum's collection as well as loans.

Sasha Stone. *S.K.F. ball bearings*, 1924-1929. Vintage gelatin silver print. Coll. Amsab-IHS fo028512. Studio Stone was the photographic partnership of Belgian Wilhelmine Camille Honorine Schammelhout, aka Cami Stone, and Russian Aleksander Serge Steinsapir, aka Sasha Stone. They met in Berlin, where they founded a studio in 1924.

XAVIER CANONNE



© Clémence Justet Termier, ENS Louis Lumière

Among the artists the museum has shown exhibitions with this year are Ruud van Empel, John Vink, Jean-Marc Chapa, Justine Dofal, Jean-Marc Wull, Lucie Pastureau and Studio Stone. The museum is currently showing *Histoires en séries – Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall's collection*. Xavier Canonne explains.

– The exhibition features 42 photographers of different nationalities. The Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall's collection, brought together within the A Foundation, comprises some 5500 photographs collected over the last thirty years. The foundation was created on the initiative of Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall and opened its doors in Brussels



in 2012. Alongside this exhibition, we are also showing *We knew how beautiful they were, these islands*, a 21-minute film by Younés Ben Slimane, a Tunisian artist and filmmaker, and an exhibition with Faïch Le Bos, a Paris-based artist of Breton origin, entitled *Self-storage*.

The latter exhibition is the result of a partnership between the newspaper *Le Soir* and the Musée de la Photographie, entitled *Galerie du Soir*.

– Alongside each new major exhibition at the Museum, *Galerie du Soir* presents a young artist to discover. It's a gamble on the future in four ways: a small but significant display at the Museum, a

Histoires en series – Astrid Ullens de Schooten Whettnall's collection, on show until 25 January 2026.

Left. **Mitch Epstein.** *Chalmette Battlefield, Louisiana, 1976.*
© Black River Productions, Ltd. / Mitch Epstein, courtesy Zander Galerie.

Top right. "The strange universe of Faïch Le Bos." Bodies wrapped in plastic and stored in aseptic storage cubicles.
Faïch Le Bos. From the series *Self-Storage* © Faïch Le Bos.

Bottom right. **Jacques Sonck.** Untitled, 1986. © Jacques Sonck.
Courtesy Gallery FIFTY ONE.

portfolio in the magazine *Photographie ouverte*, a presentation of the photographer in the pages of *Le Soir* and a selection of his or her work on the website www.lesoir.be.

The museum has an exhibition programme of great variety. Is that something you strive for?

– Yes, because the museum building offers the possibility to show different things. We are located in a former Carmelite convent from the 19th century, and we use the large chapel for the main exhibitions, but there are other rooms of different sizes, which means we can show a variety of work. There are different audiences for photography. Some come for the historical presentations. Others are looking for young, contemporary artists. We can offer a large choice to the public and have a mix of historical photography with well-known names, but also discoveries.

You have put your own personal stamp on the museum, so I'd like to take you back a bit. When did you first become interested in the arts?

– Since I was about 13 years old, I think. It was probably because my father was a public librarian. I had the opportunity to read a lot of books for free



because books came to our home first and then went to the public library. I should mention here that I was not a very good student. Reading books and visiting museums were a kind of refuge for me, but I never thought of it as a future job. I was painting and drawing a little bit, and that's probably what turned me on to painters, but I really couldn't imagine that it would lead me to art studies.

You're one of the world's leading authorities on Surrealism. When did that interest emerge?

– It came early! When I was 13 years old, my parents took me to a group exhibition of the purchases of art made by the Belgian state. Most of the works didn't interest me much, but among them were works by Marcel Mariën. I had never heard of him, and I was very shocked because the works were just so funny! He had repainted paintings by Mondrian but had put objects such as spoons, napkins and other items on them. They really made me laugh. I remember coming home at night, repeating his creative process. The thought that I would later become a friend of his never entered my mind. The second step came when I was a little bit older, 17 years old. I was reading some texts by Fernand Dumont, a young Belgian Surrealist poet who died at the age of 39 in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. At the time, nobody knew much about the books he had printed, even less about his unpublished texts. I decided to research him. I contacted his widow, who was living in the south of France, and she pointed me in the direction of some of the surrealists who



Last year, to mark the centenary of the publication of the first Surrealist manifesto, the museum showed *Surréalisme, pour ainsi dire* (Surrealism, so to speak). Xavier Canonne has written numerous books on Surrealism, including *Surrealism in Belgium: The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, the catalogue for an exhibition he curated for the Baker Museum in Naples, Florida, in 2015. The Belgian surrealists were initially known as the Brussels Group, and though they got started at the same time as the Parisian surrealists, they distinguished themselves by rejecting automatic writing, drawing and other methods to probe the unconscious. Still, like André Breton and his friends, they were firmly committed to transgression, revolution and surprise. Canonne writes, “the difference of attitude and form that distinguishes the Brussels group from its Parisian counterpart: acting in the shadows rather than under the chandeliers of salons... [relying] on their own cunning and anonymity.”



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1. Raoul Ubac. *Nébuleuse*, gelatin silver print, 1939.

Coll. Communauté française de Belgique, dépôt au Musée de la Photographie APC 22048.
© SABAM Belgium 2024.

2. Paul Nougé. *La naissance de l'objet*, gelatin silver print, from the series *Subversion des images*, 1929-1930.

Coll. privée, dépôt au Musée de la Photographie. © SABAM Belgium 2024.

3. Marcel Mariën. *Muette et aveugle, me voici habillée des pensées que tu me prêtes*, gelatin silver print, c. 1940-1945.

Coll. Communauté française de Belgique, dépôt au Musée de la Photographie 18414.
© Fondation Marcel Mariën / SABAM Belgium 2024.

4. Marcel Lefrancq. *La Dialectique*, gelatin silver print, 1945.

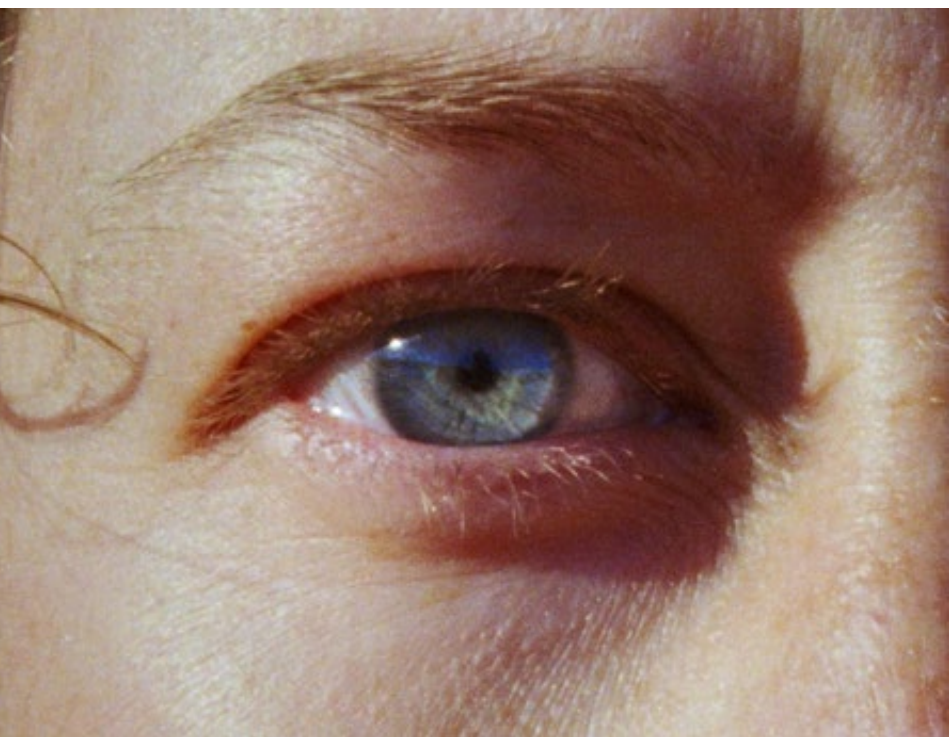
Coll. Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, dépôt au Musée de la Photographie 15498.
© M. Lefrancq, Mons.

5. Paul Nougé. *Le bras révélateur*, gelatin silver print, from the series *Subversion des images*, 1929-1930.

Coll. privée, dépôt au Musée de la Photographie. © SABAM Belgium 2024.

6. Albert Duverger. Image extracted from Luis Bunuel et Salvador Dali's film *L'Âge d'or*, gelatin silver print, 1930.

Coll. Musée de la Photographie MPC 2011/44. Droits réservés.



Eva Giolo. Image from the film *Becoming Landscape*,
a lyrical portrait of Fogo Island in Canada, 2024. © Eva Giolo.

had known him. That's how I met Armand Simon, Marcel Mariën and others in the group. They were very kind to me. At that time, in 77-78, there weren't many people who were interested in Surrealism. We became friends and I started collaborating with them. I made some drawings and collages for their publication, and I also made a book with Marcel Mariën. He wrote the text around some collages I had made. In 1986, I started a little publishing house with books printed in 200 or 300 copies. I was involved with this little group, surrealists who were old but still quite active.

Was it at that point that you decided to pursue a career in the arts?

– Quite frankly, I didn't know what I wanted to do. As I told you, I was a bad student. During the summer before secondary school, I decided I wanted to travel, to be a sailor, but I wasn't really ready for that. My father said, "Why don't you try studying the history of art?" If it didn't work, I could always leave and do something else. I was very surprised that the first year at the university in Brussels went so well for me. It was probably because I was on my own and could study in my own rhythm. I was pursuing my personal interests, with no specific career plans, certainly not to be a curator or to be in charge of a museum. Anyway, I continued my art studies and got my PhD at the Sorbonne in 2002.

Following your studies, how did your career evolve?

– I had the opportunity to work for a travel company for six or seven years alongside my studies. I was a tour leader and I worked in Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Syria, all those countries that are so rich in archaeology. I also led groups to the Soviet Union. It was a nice job, well paid and very interesting. Anyway, the father of a close friend of mine was director of a collection belonging to a province in Belgium. He wanted to retire and said to me, "Why don't you apply for my position? I will help you!" Well, I became director of the collection. We didn't



have a museum, but we organised various activities and exhibitions. It became a museum when I left in 2000, and that was when I took up my position as the director of Musée de la Photographie.

Let us turn to the museum. When and how was it founded? I believe there was some sort of private initiative to get it going.

– The museum opened in the spring of 1987, but the idea had emerged years earlier, among a group of photographers who wanted to create a kind of archive centre. The industrial landscape in Charleroi was disappearing. A lot of archives, photos, and documents appeared to be destined for the trash. They also wanted to document the changing landscape around the city. This group of photographers developed their idea, and the city of Charleroi lent them a little house in the heart of the city. That was the beginning of the museum, with Georges Vercheval, as founder and director. The government of the French Community of Belgium decided to help, and they found out that this old convent building was disused. It was in very bad shape, but gradually, it was refurbished and transformed into a museum.

Jean-Marc Wull. From the series *Portraits Retrouvés*.

© Arthuro Gaëtan © Jean-Marc Wull.

Jean-Marc Wull is a French photographer based in Brussels. His project *Portraits Retrouvés* was shown at the museum earlier this year. Canonne explains, "He found a box of negative films in a public dumpster in Guatemala. He decided to identify the people in the photographs. They came from a photo studio in a village close to the border with El Salvador. After enquiries, he found out the name of one of the people in the negatives, and through that he also found out the name of the village photographer. He went to the village and made friends with all the people. It's a magical story, a detective story."



There are two cultural departments in Belgium, divided according to language, Flemish in the North, and French in the South. In addition to your museum, there's FOMU, the Photo Museum Antwerp, in the Flemish-speaking part. Do they have the same remit in terms of preserving and exhibiting the country's heritage?

– We have pretty much the same goals, the preservation of photography, the study and the presentation of the medium, but there are differences, of course. Every museum director has his or her own mind as to what to exhibit. The museum in Antwerp has temporary exhibitions, as we have here, but in the last 10 years, they have decided to show less and less of their collection. We have another policy. Half of the space in the museum is dedicated to the permanent collection and the other half to temporary exhibitions.

What collections does the museum hold?

– The collection has around 100 000 prints and roughly 1.5 million negatives, glass and celluloid. A museum collection is never complete, but we can cover the story of photography from its earliest days

Ruud van Empel.

Top. *Brothers & Sisters #1*, Cibachrome, 2010.

Right. *Voyage pittoresque #11*, Cibachrome, 2021.

© Ruud van Empel.

to the present. We have mostly Belgian and French photographers, but we also have a lot of works by photographers from other countries, America, Italy, and so forth.

Does the division between languages in Belgium ever pose problems? Where it's not so clear-cut, which language part a certain photographer and his or her work belongs to?

– I must say that I never really feel this with the artists themselves. The separation is rather a political issue. I have shown a lot of exhibitions with Dutch-speaking photographers, and we have many of them in our collection as well. We have good relationships with institutions and archives all over Belgium. For example, the Studio Stone exhibition was coproduced with Amsab-ISG (Institute of

Social History) in Ghent, a Dutch-speaking city, and they have many, many interesting archives. I took the decision when I came here 25 years ago to have all the texts in the museum in French, Dutch and English so there is no separation here, unlike the political world.

How does the political world affect your museum?

– The budget that the Dutch-speaking government allocates to their cultural institutions is far bigger than the French-speaking government does, and it's probably because their language is a minority language, so they feel they have to defend their own culture, not only in art and photography but also in dance, film, literature, etc.

You took up your post at the museum in 2000. What changes did you make?

– I made an analysis as soon as I started, and it made clear that we had three good foundations: the collection, the permanent presentation, temporary exhibitions and the educational service, but there was a lack of space. There was no cafeteria, not enough toilets, no museum shop, and the public library wasn't very good. There was too little space for contemporary work because the sizes of photographs increased drastically by the end of the 90s. It was absolutely necessary to expand the museum. We

entered discussions with the EU and the government of the French-speaking community to get funds to build a new wing. Fortunately, we were successful. We doubled the size of the museum from 3 000 square metres to 6 000. Building works started in 2006, and in 2008 we had the grand opening. It also enabled us to open the large garden at the back of the museum to the public. In addition, we doubled the number of staff, from 18 people to 36. The expansion continues. We are currently refurbishing the old attic, adding insulation and creating new offices, enabling us to use the current office space for storage in the future.

How has the collection grown during your tenure as director?

– The previous director was luckier than I am because the prices for photography were much lower back then. He could buy 10 times more than I can. My budget is nowhere near enough. In earlier days, people would donate photographs because they were thought to be of little value. These days, the internet has made it easy to check prices, so sometimes people change their minds and want to sell instead. We can't buy what we feel we need, and there are some big holes in the collection. For example, we don't have a great Man Ray print. It would cost around 200 000 euros, money we don't have. Likewise, I would like a print from Sugimoto's series of movie theatres. That would cost around 60 000 euros. That's my entire yearly budget for buying photographs. It is not enough, so I have to find money from other sources, private or corporate donations.

What's the situation for you currently in terms of corporate and private sponsors? Are they still willing to give, or is it drying up?

– Last year, Delen Bank stepped in to help us. Others are providing services for free to help us. It can be difficult to convince people and companies that supporting a museum is a good thing when jobs are being lost and workers are demonstrating in the streets for better pay. Another thing that makes it difficult for us is that Charleroi is not one of the main cities in Belgium. It's a former industrial city, with not the best of reputations, and that can make it difficult to attract corporate sponsors.



Art institutions on both sides of the Atlantic have had their budgets slashed. Has your museum been affected?

– Right now, we don't really know. The last election resulted in a new government. It's not extremely right-wing but right-wing nonetheless. There have been big demonstrations because people are angry about the cuts in the culture and education sectors. This year, our budget stays the same, but we are still waiting to see what's going to happen next year, and I fear what it will bring.

When I talk to museum curators in other countries, they tell me that they get a fair number of offers of whole archives, not from the most famous photographers, but very good photographers. Most of the time, they turn them down, as they don't have the space or the resources to take care of those archives. What's the situation like in Belgium and for your museum?

– It's exactly the same. There is now a generation of photographers who worked in analogue photography, and if they have passed on, the widow, husband or children want their legacy preserved. The problem for us is that we have no more space. We created two additional storage spaces when we expanded



1.

Magritte. La Ligne de vie

The exhibition is curated by Xavier Cannone and is on show at KMSKA (Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp) from 15 November until 22 February 2026.



3.



2.



4.

René Magritte.

1. *The Revenge*, gouache on paper, 1956.

Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp – Collection Flemish Community.

2. *L'imprudent*, oil on canvas, 1927. Private collection, Switzerland.

3. *Hommage à Mac Sennett*, oil on canvas, 1936.

Collection Ville de La Louvière.

4. *Le modèle rouge*, oil on canvas, 1953.

Collection BNP Paribas Fortis. © Succession René Magritte – SABAM Belgium, 2025.

the museum and they are full now. Solutions must be found throughout the sector because I know that the Fine Art Museum in Antwerp has the same problem. The government has to give us the funding to preserve the heritage because I cannot keep saying to people who offer us archives, "Sorry, I have no space." Our mission is to protect the heritage. If they don't provide the funds, I will have to rent some space from an art transport company, which would cost around 20 000 euros a year and would not be ideal in any case.

You have presented some remarkable, often unexpected exhibitions over the years, like *Roman Photo*, a show on photo novels. I can think of quite a few museums that wouldn't contemplate something like that even for a second.

– *Roman Photo* was fun to put together because it was so far removed from classic photography and from the photographic canon. I used to say that I love the last exhibition or the current one the most. I thoroughly enjoyed the shows I did on René Magritte, Man Ray and the other surrealists. But there are some exhibitions that help you realise that there are so many things you don't know. Twenty years ago, I made an exhibition about photography in Argentina, and I went there to investigate further and learnt so very much when I was there. Doing a solo exhibition with a photographer is a kind of short love story. I say short because we will see each other a lot for a very short time. We have to be creative and find a way. An exhibition needs to be confident, and I will never show an exhibition of a photographer I don't believe in. They don't have to be photographs I would hang at home, but the work has to be strong and original.

The museum also has a permanent exhibition. How is it mapped out with periods, themes, material and so forth?

– The permanent collection is shown in two wings in different parts of the building, the new one and the oldest one. In the oldest part, we have a chronological presentation of the collection. It's not a classical presentation, with displays of French photography, German photography, American photography, and Belgian photography. Photography is a collective invention, involving many countries. We decided to show photography in the 19th century as a collective invention and to show the uses of photography. As soon as photography had been created, what happened? People wanted to have their own face photographed, their own identity, but they also wanted to travel and take photos of Egypt, of Greece, of Italy, everywhere, to be like the painters who made the Grand Tour. There was scientific photography. And in the 1850s and 60s, there was war photography, in the Crimea and then the civil war in the United States. We follow the

development of Pictorialism in the 19th century, which was the first aesthetic movement in photography. We then explore social documentary and the avant-garde movement in photography, where photography decided to have his own point of view. The presentation in the contemporary wing is more thematic. We mix older photography with new photography to show links between photographs across time. Starting in the 1980s, photography entered the field of the other arts, painting, sculpture, movies. We show photography in the widest sense possible, showing anonymous photographers, next to very famous photographers. It's a kind of confrontation.

You also curate exhibitions outside the museum.

– Yes, it's something I do at home, at night. I'm a kind of independent curator for Surrealism. Last year, I curated the big centenary exhibition about Surrealism in Brussels. It took me three years to put it together. It's actually getting more and more difficult to put those big shows together. The costs for transportation and insurance keep going up. Even so, on 15 November this year, KMSKA (Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp) opens an exhibition I have curated on René Magritte, entitled *Magritte. La Ligne de vie, (The Life Line)*. The exhibition takes its title from a lecture that Magritte held at KMSKA in 1938. He discussed the origins of and development of his art, as well as the history of the Surrealist movement in Belgium. It was the second lecture he gave after the one he gave at the *International Exhibition of Surrealism* in London in 1938, and the most important he ever gave on his work. The exhibition includes a selection of works that were highlighted during the lecture, and it also delves deeper into Magritte as a connecting figure between Surrealism in Antwerp and Brussels. In this Antwerp connection, we meet surrealists such as Marcel Mariën and Léo Dohmen. Another project I have planned is a book about the various places in Brussels where Magritte lived.

Finally, I would like to backtrack to Marcel Mariën. I don't know if it's true or not, but one story has it that he forged Magritte paintings at some stage.

– No, but he was selling fakes made by Magritte. During WWII and the Nazi occupation, it was difficult to get hold of paper, just like it was with food. There was paper on the black market, but it was extremely expensive. Magritte and his friends had to find a solution so that they could keep printing books. People used the black market to launder money. There wasn't that much expertise in art so Magritte decided to make fakes. He made fake Picassos, fake Braques, fake Max Ernsts and Marcel Mariën sold them. Years later, there was an exhibition near Gothenburg in Sweden. Max Ernst and Magritte were together at the opening. Magritte showed Ernst an Ernst painting he had forged and



Marcel Mariën

Le passager clandestin

Xavier Canonne

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said, “Let me tell you a funny story, Max. I’m the author of this fake!” Ernst looked at the painting, and said, “Not bad! Congratulations!” And then he signed it! But I should also say that Marcel Mariën sometimes handed out certificates for paintings and drawings by “Magritte”. Fakes that were probably made by one of his friends because he couldn’t make such forgeries himself. He wasn’t a painter.

What was Mariën like as a person?

– He was a very interesting man, but also a very closed and very strange man. He was quite happy to have me drive him to do his shopping, to help him to carry out things, but he was quick to get annoyed. I

never spent a whole day with him. It was like that all the time. But the collaboration with him, and at such an early age, was a great experience. Mariën was an artist, but at the same time, he wasn’t an artist. He had a point of view about art and about society, which was something different.

He did some photography in his early years, and then returned to it in the 1980s.

– Early on, he used a little camera to make some images, to photograph his ideas, making compositions.

He wasn’t really a photographer as such. He made images from 1943 until 1950, but he didn’t exhibit them at the time. He came back to photography in 1983 because he had just bought his little house, the only house he could afford to buy, because he was a poor man for many years. He was always struggling financially. In his little house, there was enough room for a studio, and he sent the negatives to be printed at a lab. He also reused some negatives from his early years. The chapter on Marcel Mariën is very important in the history of Surrealism. He died in 1993. I did a big show here at the museum to mark the 20th anniversary of his death, with a big monograph. I chose *Marcel Mariën: Le Passager Clandestin* (Marcel Mariën: The Stowaway) as the title. I think the title said a lot about him. I regard myself as incredibly lucky to have met, known and worked with him.

Cover of *Marcel Mariën – Le Passager Clandestin*, published in 2003.

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JULIA MARGARET CAMERON (1815–1879), Julia Jackson, 1867

A black and white photograph of a person's face and hands holding a flower. The person's face is partially visible at the top, looking down. Their hands are holding a light-colored, multi-petaled flower against a dark, textured background. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of the face and hands.

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BY LAURA LEONELLI

CURZIO MALAPARTE

The SENSIBILITIES of a CHAMELEON

All images are courtesy of Michele Bonuomo, except where noted.

“Nearly everything about Curzio Malaparte – who wrote *Kaputt* and *The Skin*, two of the most memorable books about WWII – was bogus, starting with his name.” Edmund White

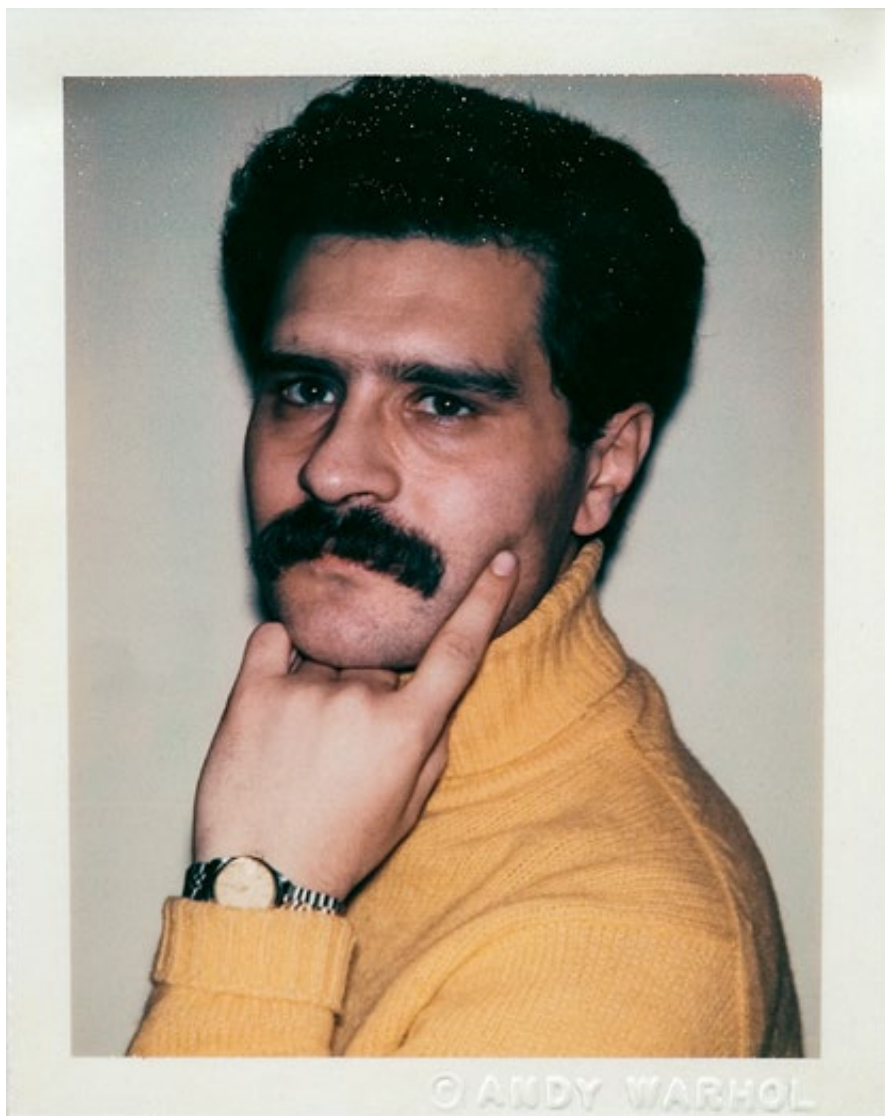
“It is strange, yes, but understandable: for this reportage is something other than reportage; it is a literary work whose aesthetic intention is so strong, so apparent, that the sensitive reader automatically excludes it from the context of accounts brought to bear by historians, journalists, political analysts, memoirists.” Milan Kundera on *Kaputt*

“Malaparte has done, God forgive him, one of those things that one really should not do. Silence and hypocrisy are almost better than this ambiguous cleverness. He has brought misery, shame and atrocities into play, and stripped them of all decency, in order to use them for literary purposes.” Emilio Cecchi

“Exiled on an island by Mussolini.” Unknown photographer. Curzio Malaparte in front of the Church of Annunziata on Lipari, spring 1934. The stairs would inspire the design of Casa Malaparte.

“The price of freedom is high – far higher than that of slavery. And it is not paid in gold, nor in blood, nor in the most noble sacrifices, but in cowardice, in prostitution, in treachery, and in everything that is rotten in the human soul.” Curzio Malaparte – *The Skin*

A century ago, in 1925, Kurt Erich Suckert (1898-1957) became Curzio Malaparte, the pen name of one of the most original and controversial writers of the 20th century. And he refuses to go away. In 2005, New York Review Books began publishing new translations of Malaparte’s books, followed this year by *Malaparte. A Biography*, a monumental work by Maurizio Serra, diplomat, writer and member of the Académie française, who in 2011 won the Prix Goncourt for the French edition of the book. And French publisher Gallimard is about to publish the entire oeuvre of Malaparte, “this liar who couldn’t help telling the truth”, as John Ganz described him in *The New York Times*, the complex, scandalous, perhaps even prophetic author of polyphonic reports on the tragedy of the Second World War. He was also a member of the Italian Fascist Party. Until 1931, when he was expelled from it. Still, as Serra points out, he would remain in its orbit.



Malaparte wasn't the only Italian cultural figure who was involved with fascism. There was Gabriele D'Annunzio, that weaponised aesthete, poet, playwright, orator and army officer, who, in 1919 with his private army, to the absolute fury of the Italian government, invaded the Adriatic city of Fiume, present-day Rijeka, creating the Italian Regency of Carnaro, a self-proclaimed state that lasted 15 months, with D'Annunzio declaring himself "Duce", and creating much of the framework for Italian fascism. At the time, D'Annunzio regarded Mussolini as little more than his PR man.

D'Annunzio has few readers today. Unlike Malaparte. His literary output was prodigious but his reputation rests on two books, *Kaputt* (1944) and *The Skin* (1949). They are unlike any other books on WWII, mixing realism with Surrealism, Magic Realism and the Baroque to often shocking effect. In *Kaputt*,

Andy Warhol. Michele Bonuomo, blind stamped Polaroid, 1979.

Malaparte recounts his meeting with the tinpot Führer of fascist Croatia. "The lid was raised and the basket seemed to be filled with mussels, or shelled oysters, as they are occasionally displayed in the windows of Fortnum and Mason in Piccadilly in London. My companion looked at me and winked, "Wouldn't you like a good oyster stew?" "Are they Dalmatian oysters?" I asked. Ante Pavelic removed the lid from the basket and revealed the mussels, that slimy and jelly-like mass, and he said smiling, with that tired good-natured smile of his, "It is a present from my loyal Ustashas. Forty pounds of human eyes."

Casa Malaparte, the house he built for himself on Capri, used by Jean-Luc Godard as one of the locations for his 1963 film *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*), would no doubt have been enough to keep his name alive. There were many sides to Malaparte. He was not only a journalist, soldier, war correspondent, diplomat, he also made a film, *Il Cristo Proibito*. And then in 1979, Michele Bonuomo, photography collector, editor of the magazine *Arte*, and author, made a sensational discovery, photographs taken by Malaparte, 1939-1941. I spoke to Michele

Bonuomo, who at the time of the discovery was twenty-eight years old, a journalist and politically involved in the extra-parliamentary left. Malaparte would have loved him.

It is among the paradoxes of Curzio Malaparte's life and legacy that his photographs were discovered by a young man who, a few years earlier, had been a militant in the extra-parliamentary left. What was it about Malaparte, fascist and then communist, Tuscan and cosmopolitan, turncoat and narcissist at every moment of his life that fascinated you so much?

– It was Malaparte's personality, his libertarian and irregular nature, that sparked my interest, and at the time, I was not alone. As a member of the extra-parliamentary left, and in the classrooms of the Faculty of Architecture in Naples, the city that had been the raw, visceral, putrid and irresistible material of Malaparte's novel *La pelle*, we felt that his political positions were somehow akin to ours. As a true fascist, Malaparte eroded the Fascist Party from within,

just as we extra-parliamentarians contested the ideological rigidity and bigotry of the Communist Party. Malaparte was one of those figures capable of interpreting the profound contradictions of the 20th century. Politically, he had been everything and its opposite, fascist and communist, atheist and Catholic on his deathbed. Culturally Malaparte had simply been “everything”, a giant of twentieth-century literature who had been a journalist, correspondent, columnist, editor, founder of extraordinary magazines, such as *Prospettive*, a writer of all five senses, with a powerful imagination, rich in imagery, as well as a playwright, essayist, coup theorist, architect, film director, and, I would later discover, an excellent photographer.

Before getting into Malaparte’s biography, I would like to stay in the 1970s when you were an architecture student. Italian modernist architecture, which had developed during fascism, was being studied again and for the first time after the end of WWII, a debate opened up about the relationship between intellectuals and the regime and on certain aspects of modernity in fascist culture itself. It should be pointed out that the situation in Italy was significantly different from Hitler’s Germany, where the regime favoured stripped Neoclassicism and the vernacular architecture of the countryside. The same simplistic, banal view would dominate the arts. Modernism was seen as degenerate, a Jewish invention. In Italy, many in the avant-garde were closely linked with the fascist regime, including the Futurists under Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who in 1909 published their first manifesto, proclaiming war as “the world’s only hygiene”, long before 1921 when the Fascist Party was founded. In the 1970s, the debate finally opened up. Modernity could be rediscovered and reassessed.

– There was a fundamental transition in Italian culture because in the 1970s, it was in the architecture faculties that people began to study the architects who, in the 1930s, had brought Italy out of the provincialism and the eclecticism of the “stile Umbertino” and, for the first time, had given our architectural and urbanist culture a character that was both national and international. I am thinking of masters such as Edoardo Persico and Giuseppe Pagano, whose writings were published in the 1970s, and then of a genius, such as Giuseppe Terragni, whom even the New York group of Five Architects

considered their forerunner. I think of Aldo Rossi’s debt to the rationalism of the 1930s. Without in any way diminishing the horror of dictatorship, racial laws and war, our professors, who had been young during fascism, managed to move beyond it and look with new eyes at the masterpieces that had been created. I spent my teenage years in Segezia, a “new town” ten kilometres from Foggia, in Puglia. Segezia was conceived as a new Fascist city in 1938 by Concezio Petrucci, one of the regime’s leading architects. Living in Segezia, between the church, the Casa del Fascio, the wooden slats of the housing units, and the school building with its double row of arches, almost a new Colosseum, for me as a boy obsessed with images and art history, was like living in a metaphysical painting by Giorgio de Chirico or Alberto Savinio. For me, it was a reference or perhaps a hallucination, but for the men of the 1930s, it was living in modernity.

You discovered Malaparte’s novel *La pelle* (*The Skin*) when you were young. Was it a clandestine reading, or did you read it within your family?

– Both because there was one of the first copies of the novel at home. It was kept hidden but I found it, and a world of immorality and sublime morality opened up to me, pulsating, visceral, authentic and honest in every lexical excrescence. A world between Caravaggio, Lautréamont, Céline, informal painting and the Rolling Stones’ *Sticky Fingers*. Later, I would discover the words that illuminate for me not only the meaning of *La pelle*, but much of Malaparte’s life. On 21 June 1956, he wrote in *Il Tempo Illustrato*, “Experience teaches us that the worst form of patriotism is to close one’s eyes to reality and open one’s mouth wide in hymns and hypocritical praise, which serve no purpose other than to hide from oneself and others the real evils that exist. There are two ways of loving one’s country: one is to speak openly about the evils, miseries and shame we suffer, and the other is to hide reality under the cloak of hypocrisy, denying wounds, miseries and shame. Of the two, I prefer the first.” I concur.

However, Naples reacted very badly to Curzio Malaparte’s “patriotism” in *La pelle*.

– Naples is the protagonist of the novel and in the aftermath of the Allies’ arrival in 1943, Malaparte describes the city mercilessly as “squalid, dirty, hungry, dressed in rags”, ready to sell every ounce of flesh, including children, to the “liberator”. When

the novel was published in 1949 by Aria d'Italia, the Neapolitan bourgeoisie and clergy cried scandal, but so did the left wing of the time, communists and socialists, who joined the general indignation. In his own way, Malaparte had united both political and sanctimonious Italy. And the numbers confirm it. *La pelle* was an unprecedented publishing success, with 30 000 copies in the first print run, sold out in a few days, including 8 000 copies in Naples alone. The cover of the first edition was simply blood red, like an open wound, as if the skin of the writing were really raw flesh.

Having arrived in Naples as a 19-year-old student, you paid homage to that extraordinary cult location, Casa Malaparte.

– The very first stop on my Malaparte pilgrimage was the Capodimonte Museum, to see Masaccio's *Crucifixion*. Masaccio, in all his wonder, was also fundamental in reaffirming Malaparte's Tuscan origins. I saw how much the "ultra-modern" Renaissance painting had inspired Malaparte in his 1951 film *Il Cristo Proibito*. I was standing in front of the Magdalene, that red cloak seen from behind, with no visible face, and there was only the emotion and the pain of the colour, "the red scream" as Roberto Longhi described it. When, a few years later, I discovered Malaparte's photographs, I found one of his most original self-portraits. He is seen from behind, wrapped in a Saharan jacket, immaculately clean even in Ethiopia. You could recognise Malaparte even without seeing his face because, in 1939, he was already a style icon. And for us, militant extremists, who conformed to a dress code of Eskimo coats and second-hand clothes, preferably American, that sartorial, brilliantined dandyism, impeccable in every occurrence of life, from confinement on an island to a war front, was a revelation. Even for Malaparte's contemporaries, looking gloomy in their black shirts and suits made of Sardinian wool, that elegance must have seemed a libertarian affront. And irresistible.

Feminism was on the rise in the 1970s. Did a "Superman" like Malaparte enable men to go back in time?

– It wasn't Malaparte's machismo that seduced us. I agree with Maurizio Serra that Malaparte was actually asexual, almost ahead of the "neutral identity" of our times. He was certainly not a passionate lover, despite the beautiful, wealthy, and possibly noble women who fell in love with him and followed him even into exile. No, what fascinated us was Malaparte's narcissism, he who was so icy, detached, superior to everything, yet at the heart of history and within himself, a privileged witness to every event and every mood. In a sense, it was like being back in the Renaissance, where man, in this case "the man-Malaparte", was the measure of the world. Just think of the chapters in his book, *Donna Come Me (Woman Like Me)*, published in 1940; "City Like Me", "House Like Me", "Day Like Me", and "Dog Like Me".

What were your impressions when you first visited Casa Malaparte?

– To reach Capo Massullo, the rock on Capri that Malaparte bought for 12 000 lire from a fisherman, Antonio Vuotto, to build his house, you had to walk for over an hour along increasingly narrow paths and trails, almost non-existent, until suddenly there it was, overlooking the sea, Casa Malaparte. It made a

very strong impression on me, as if I were facing an immense prehistoric lizard lying in the sun to warm itself. It was a living architecture, powerful, rational and carnal at the same time. This too was a descent into Malaparte's world, not into the hell of Naples, but into the paganism of southern Italian nature, which had so seduced foreign travellers. In this sense, Malaparte was also a "foreigner"; he felt the plastic forces that created that nature, and he lay down on it. Let us not forget that Malaparte "discovered" Capri in 1937, when he went to visit his friend Axel Munthe, owner of Villa San Michele, and fell madly in love with the island. As an aside, during the war, Munthe wrote to British officers not to trust Malaparte, who had offered to collaborate with the Allies, "because he is one of the most notorious scoundrels around, even for an Italian".

There is a big difference between Villa San Michele, the Swedish doctor Axel Munthe's classic residence at the top of the island, and Casa Malaparte.

– Casa Malaparte was truly a portrait of its creator, and in fact, in a page of his diary, he noted: "The day I started building a house, I didn't think I would be drawing a portrait of myself." Malaparte's relationship with Adalberto Libera, the highly talented architect to whom he had entrusted the project, was therefore very troubled, and in the end, Malaparte created the final design of the house. And it is a house-biography, starting with the staircase, which is directly inspired by the staircase of the church in Lipari, the island where Malaparte was exiled in 1933 for accusing Italo Balbo, an early member of the fascist militia, who participated in the march on Rome and later became Minister of Aeronautics, of plotting a coup against Mussolini. Malaparte's intention was clearly to show off to the Duce. It backfired. Balbo went to Mussolini and obtained Malaparte's arrest, who was sent to Lipari. After the war, Malaparte claimed to have been tried and sent into exile for anti-fascist activities. This was, of course, completely false.

In any case, the regime was very clement towards him.

– The sentence was supposed to be five years of confinement on the island, but Malaparte only spent one year there. He spent the rest of his sentence in Ischia and then sumptuously in Forte dei Marmi, where he bought the magnificent villa of the German sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand. Meanwhile, he continued to write columns for the *Corriere della Sera* under the pseudonym Candido. All this was thanks to the intervention of Galeazzo Ciano, then Minister of Press and Propaganda, and Mussolini's son-in-law. Ciano wasn't Malaparte's only protector. There was also Giuseppe Bottai, then Minister of Education and author of the first law on the protection of environmental heritage. Coincidentally, it was he who gave Malaparte permission to build his villa in one of the most beautiful corners of Capri, considered inviolable by others. To shed some light on the situation, Bottai was considered a "left-wing fascist", which explains his sympathy for Malaparte.

Malaparte died in 1957. In his will, he left Casa Malaparte to the People's Republic of China. It was then reclaimed by his family, but remained closed for decades.

– It was almost in ruins when I first saw it. Malaparte had bequeathed his house to the People's Republic of China as a



1.



2.



4.



3.

sign of gratitude for the medical care he had received during his trip in 1957. He was taken ill, returned to Italy and died the same year. He did not trust his family, saying that they would fill the “sad, harsh, severe” monastic-military space with lace doilies. However, due to a technicality that Italy had not yet recognised the People’s Republic of China, the bequest was declared null and void and the property passed to Curzio’s sisters. Everything remained closed, in a state of near abandonment, until 1963, when Jean-Luc Godard shot part of *Le Mépris*, based on Alberto Moravia’s novel *Il disprezzo*, at Casa Malaparte. It was because of the film that the alarm was raised when the roof terrace was damaged by a helicopter landing during filming.

1. Unknown photographer. Curzio Malaparte, at the time still Kurt Suckert, in Garibaldi uniform, posing with a friend in 1915.

2. Unknown photographer. In 1916, Suckert was promoted to Section Commander. He fought at the bloody battle of Bligny, near Rheims and was injured in a mustard gas attack.

3. “The young fascist”. Kurt Suckert in 1924, portrait by unknown photographer.

4. Curzio Malaparte, Lipari, 1934.



You were one of the organisers of that first conference and exhibition about Curzio Malaparte, held in Casa Malaparte in 1979.

– Those were still years of fervent research and debate about Malaparte. Discussing the matter with Graziella Lonardi Buontempo, patron and collector, founder of the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte di Roma, and Lucio Amelio, one of the great gallery owners of those years, who brought Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys together in Naples, we came up with the idea of organising a conference and exhibition about Malaparte. Among the participants were Alberto Moravia, Malaparte's frenemy, who gave a fiery speech, Liliana Cavani, who was about to start shooting the film based on *La pelle* and had chosen Marcello Mastroianni to play the role of the writer, and then Enzo Siciliano and Nello Ajello. The problem arose about what material to exhibit. There were books and manuscripts, the film *Il Cristo Proibito*, and then the few photographs of Malaparte that were known at that point. However, I suddenly remembered a passage in *Kaputt*, where Malaparte, sent to Ukraine during the Second World War, recounts that he left the izba "with my trusty Leica". Now, either this Leica was a little dog or it was the legendary

camera. A few weeks later, I went to Florence and discovered that Malaparte, as a war correspondent, had indeed taken photographs.

Before recounting your treasure hunt, let's go back to the first photograph of Curzio, captured at the age of one next to his brother. He was still called Kurt Erich Suckert, Curtino to his family. Could you have imagined his future from that first portrait?

– Malaparte hated childhood. As Giordano Bruno Guerri recounts in his magnificent biography *Il Malaparte Illustrato*, in 1937, Curzio confessed: "I am afraid and disgusted by myself as a child, by the impurity that occasionally surfaces in our gestures, thoughts and feelings, which comes from that troubled and unhappy age." His disgust perhaps stemmed from the fact that the first part of his life was decided by others, and was therefore the least "authentic", the least personal, even from a photographic point of view. Throughout his life, Malaparte exercised maniacal control over his image. In front of the camera, he was always composed, photogenic and severe. Smiling was out of the question.

To understand Malaparte's transformations, we must start with his family.

– Curzio Malaparte was born Kurt Erich Suckert on 9 June 1898, in Prato, Tuscany, but he had nothing of the Tuscan character. In 1956, he published a book, *Maledetti Toscani* (*Those Cursed Tuscans*). His mother was Edda Perelli, from Lombardy, daughter of Carlo Perelli, a friend of Verdi, Boito and Fogazzaro, and Curzio had such strong admiration for his grandfather that he wrote: "My grandfather was very handsome, and when he was young, he was a madman, proud, violent, intrepid and bizarre. A bit like me. Perhaps I owe it to him if I am what I am." Curzio's father, on the other hand, was German, Erwin Suckert, a textile-manufacturing executive, quick-tempered, quarrelsome and restless, just like his son would one day be. Father and son did not like each other, so much so that as a child, Curzio said he was the son of a lawyer from Prato. Yet the future writer owed his lack of religious education and perhaps even a certain romanticism to his father. In any case, it was Erwin who, in 1911, enrolled his son in the most prestigious college in Italy, the Cicognini in Prato, where Gabriele D'Annunzio had studied. It was an elite start that changed his cultural and social horizons.

His attitude towards Gabriele D'Annunzio was twofold; love and hate.

– He shared D'Annunzio's decadence, superhumanism, cult of elegance, chaotic political interventionism, literary eclecticism and even his love of dogs. But Curzio himself claimed that his generation's merit was that they were anti-D'Annunzio.

"On the stairs of Casa Malaparte."
Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli in Jean-Luc Godard's
film *Le Mépris*. Courtesy Momentum Pictures.



D'Annunzio was not taken by surprise, and he counterattacked, as if a father could not accept being forgotten. He wrote to Malaparte: "I know that you love me, and that your rebellion exacerbates your love. With your frankness and your prowess, with your fury and your discontent, what other man do you claim to love in the world today?" Malaparte was not moved and in 1938, on the poet's death, he described D'Annunzio as a "little Abruzzian boor", and ironically referred to his "little arms", "little feet" and "chicken bones".

In any case, D'Annunzio's interventionism, his love of action, and therefore of war, infected the young Suckert, who in 1914, at the age of sixteen, ran away from home and joined the Garibaldi Legion of the Argonne, which Peppino Garibaldi, Giuseppe Garibaldi's grandson, had formed in Avignon.

– There is an unforgettable photo: Kurt looking handsome and pale in his Garibaldi uniform with red trousers, blue jacket, gold buttons and sky-blue belt. He was already a dandy and deeply in love with France, its culture and its openness to modernity. Five years earlier, in 1909, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti had published the Manifesto of Futurism in the pages of *Le Figaro*. And let us not forget that *La pelle* was supposed to be called *La peste*, but Albert Camus had anticipated the title Malaparte wanted for his novel by two years, in 1947.

In 1917, Kurt went to war, fighting as a second lieutenant at Col di Lana, where his lungs were permanently damaged by mustard gas. At this point, the real war entered Malaparte's heart and body. It was both nourishment and poison, and became writing material for him.

– The experience of war was fundamental for Malaparte's generation. He wrote: "For a man who has been to war, his whole life is nothing but a dark, deep, unconscious memory of war, and its horrors, and its wonderful friendships, its wonderful, enchanted happy hours." In 1919, Kurt started his diplomatic career in Warsaw. He then embraced fascism, seeing it as a possible world revolution. He did not participate in the March on Rome in 1922, although he boasted about it in the years of the regime and then denied it after the war. Malaparte was totally into fascism, participating in the Tuscan militias. He personally knew the men who in 1924 killed Giacomo Matteotti, Secretary of the Unitary Socialist Party, and he was one of the signatories of the *Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals*. At that point, his Teutonic name became embarrassing, and in 1925, on the instruction of Mussolini, Kurt Erich Suckert abandoned his family's German origins and became Curzio Malaparte.

How did he come up with this nom de guerre, which so nonchalantly conveys his vocation for evil, "male" in Italian?

– At first, he had thought of something like Curzio Borgia, just to stay on the theme of poison. But then he discovered a pamphlet, *I Malaparte ed i Bonaparte. Nel primo centenario di un Bonaparte – Malaparte* (The Malapartes and the Bonapartes). In the first centenary of a Bonaparte-Malaparte, printed in Turin in 1869, a century after Napoleon's birth. The booklet recounts how the Bonapartes were

Casa Malaparte as it appeared in *Le Mépris*. The house, damaged by humidity and salt, was renovated in the 1990s. Courtesy Momentum Pictures.



1931 was a tumultuous year for Malaparte. Due to the virulence of *Technique du coup d'État* and the individualistic nature of his writings, he was dismissed from the daily newspaper *La Stampa*, which he had edited since 1929. As mentioned, he then attacked Italo Balbo, ended up in Regina Coeli prison, then to confinement in Lipari, resumed writing for *Corriere della Sera*, and then he founded one of the most innovative magazines of the time, *Prospettive*, which was published in two series, from 1937 to 1939 and from October 1939 to March 1943, ending with a final issue in December 1951. Once again, Malaparte was both inside and outside the system.

– *Prospettive* was an extraordinary publication, unique for the richness of its themes, from artistic prose that touched on Surrealism and hermeticism, to painting and cinema. Malaparte drew inspiration from *Minotaure*, the surrealist-inspired magazine published in Paris from 1933 to 1939. The contributors were extraordinary, including poets such as Eugenio Montale, Alfonso Gatto, Umberto Saba and Leonardo Sinisgalli, writers such as Corrado Alvaro, Riccardo Bacchelli, Massimo Bontempelli and Alberto Moravia, lit-

once called Malaparte. Only thanks to favours rendered to the Pope were they allowed to change their surname to the good. With this new identity, both Italian and French, which proudly rejected the papal blessing, Curzio Malaparte had his first international success, published in France in 1931, *Technique du coup d'État*. The book was not translated into Italian until 1948. Its thesis was that revolutions do not require the masses, just a handful of selected and trained men who take control. The book infuriated everyone, from Trotsky to Hitler to Mussolini. On the other hand, twenty-five years later, in the jungle, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro carefully read the pages of this book, and it seems it was also one of the Vietcong's favourite reads. As Franco Baldasso, director of Italian Studies at Bard College, reminds us, a copy of *Technique du coup d'État* was also in Hannah Arendt's personal library, now preserved at the university.

erary critics such as Carlo Bo, and artists such as Alberto Savinio and Giorgio de Chirico. He even got André Breton and Paul Éluard to write for *Prospettive*. Although he did not openly oppose the racial laws of 1937, Malaparte invited contributions from Moravia and Saba, who were Jewish. An additional curiosity: a passage from *Finnegans Wake* was published for the first time in *Prospettive*, and Joyce himself edited the Italian translation.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the magazine is its focus on writing that becomes image, painting, cinema. Is this a preview of Malaparte's polyphonic vision?

– The proof is the issue dedicated to cinema, published in August 1937, where Malaparte announced his desire to combine the evocative power of reality in literature with that of representation-reproduction in cinema. The union of these two languages, one literary and symbolic, the other technically visual, leads us to understand the mannerist, multifaceted richness of Malaparte's prose and the beauty of his only cinematic work, *Il Cristo Proibito*. It is no coincidence that the last

issue of *Prospettive* announced that the following issue, which unfortunately never came out due to the war, would be dedicated to photography.

Regarding photography, let's return to 1979 when you remembered Malaparte mentioning his Leica.

– First, a little background. Malaparte edited newspapers and sensational monthly cultural magazines. He was at the centre of international cultural debate, but remained a man of action and adventure. Aldo Borelli, editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, understood this and in 1938 asked Mussolini for permission to send Malaparte to Africa Orientale Italiana, Italian East Africa. Borelli explained to Mussolini that “there was only one way for Malaparte to completely redeem himself, by realising the extraordinary power of fascism and the organisational miracles that had been accomplished... in short, he has to be allowed to visit the Empire and write freely about his impressions”. But Mussolini replied: “That man is capable of leading a band of rebels and wanting to conquer Italy.” In the end, however, Borelli managed to convince Mussolini.

And you convinced Roberto Ciuni, editor of *Il Mattino*, where you had started working, that Malaparte's photographs must have existed.

– I contacted Maria Suckert, Malaparte's sister, and went to see her in Florence. She was very kind and showed me some material she had recovered from Malaparte's office in Rome. Among the papers were many photographs of Malaparte, splendid portraits, and let's not forget that in 1923 Anton Giulio Bragaglia, director and author of *Fotodinamismo Futurista*, had placed Malaparte at the top of “belli di terza pagina”, his list of handsome men. At one point, she brought out a portrait of Malaparte holding a Rolleiflex. I said, “Madam, so Malaparte took photographs?” “No, no, there are no other photographs,” she replied. I suspected otherwise, so I returned the following month, and Maria told me she had found “some snapshots by Curtino”. She showed them to me, test shots, small frames of hundreds of images. “But where are the negatives of these photos?” I asked. She went silent. I explained to her about film, development, negatives and positives, and then she told me that there was a large box, filled with “some strange things”, in the cellar, and that she was waiting for a refuse collector to come and take it away. “If you don't mind, Madam, I'd like to take a look!” I went down to the basement, found the box and inside was a Medusa-like head made up of rolled-up, dirty, oxidised negatives. Excited, I obtained her permission to take the box and its contents away. I left for Naples, entered the newsroom, went straight to Ciuni's office, and boldly announced, “I have Malaparte's negatives!” His response was: “Come on!” I retorted, “If they're not Malaparte's negatives, you may fire me!” We rushed to the newspaper's



photo lab, washed the negatives, restored them and printed them. Out came extraordinary images, taken by Malaparte in Africa and the Balkans, from 1939 to 1941, images that had been published with his articles in *Il Corriere della Sera* and the weekly *Tempo*, sent off by him without claiming credit as the photographer.

Let's start with the images he took in Italian East Africa.

– Malaparte used a camera alongside his typewriter for the first time between January and April 1939. *Il Corriere della Sera* sent him to Ethiopia to report on the Italianisation of the Empire and the expectations of those seeking “a place in the sun”. Malaparte wrote a total of thirteen articles for the newspaper and took about four hundred photographs. A brief note on the formats. He evidently brought a number of cameras. Most of the negatives are 4.5x6 cm, and a few are 6x6 cm and 6x9 cm. In a letter dated 19 April 1939 to Aldo Borelli, Malaparte wrote: “I have completed a very interesting journey, mostly on mule back, through the whole country of Asmara, from Tacazzè to Goggiam and Addis Ababa, then Mens-Marabetiè-Uorana, then Galla and Sidama almost as far as Magi. I took part in several battles and earned a medal for military valour. What I saw and experienced was extremely interesting and, for the most part, unknown. I have with me a photographic document of the highest order (the photos are all mine) on the fighting, the regions, the peoples, etc. In two other letters, he makes even more explicit references to photography: in the report he sent from Adwa, “Il Cristo di Axum” (The Christ of Axum), published in *Il Corriere della Sera* on 6 June, he recounts going to buy film in the shop of an Italian photographer working in Tigray. Then, in the report “Allegria a Ghembevà” (Joy in Ghembevà) of 14 September, describing a clash between Ascari and Sciftà, he regrets not having had time to load his camera to photograph a herd of oxen being driven forward by Ethiopian guerrillas.

Malaparte launched the magazine *Prospettive* in 1937. Among the contributors in the years that followed were Alberto Moravia, James Joyce, André Breton and Giorgio de Chirico.

Italian East Africa

Photographs by
Curzio Malaparte



Mussolini initially refused to let the troublesome Malaparte go to Italian East Africa. "That man is capable of leading a band of rebels and wanting to conquer Italy" but the dictator was finally persuaded by Malaparte's editor. Malaparte not only reported but also fought in battles. He sometimes staged photographs, instructing others to press the shutter.

Self-portrait, 1939. Michele Bonuomo comments, "When, a few years later, I discovered Malaparte's photographs, I found one of his most original self-portraits, with him seen from behind, wrapped in a Saharan jacket, immaculately clean even in Ethiopia. You could recognise Malaparte even without seeing his face because, in 1939, he was already a style icon."





While Malaparte's reports from Italian East Africa were staunchly pro-regime, his photographs show an admiration for the local Ascari troops. The Italian officers often seem ridiculous, out of place. Michele Bonuomo comments, "We can analyse Malaparte's portraits of the *sciarmutte*, the prostitutes assigned to the army, against the backdrop of a wall lined with pages from *La Domenica del Corriere*, which was then the weekly magazine of the good and respectable Italian bourgeoisie. I don't know if Malaparte wanted to emphasise the contrast, or rather the symbiosis, between the respectability of the Italian bourgeoisie and the misery of prostitution. But something that anticipates the horror of *La pelle* (The Skin) is already there in my opinion."



The Balkans

Photographs by
Curzio Malaparte



“Yes, they are sick people,” said Munthe, tapping the floor with his cane, and after a long silence he asked whether it was true that the Germans were thirsting for blood and destruction. “They are afraid” I replied. “They are afraid of everything and everybody, they kill and destroy out of fear. Not that they fear death; no German, man or woman, young or old, fears death. They are not even afraid of suffering. In a way one may say that they like pain. But they are afraid of all that is living, of all that is living outside themselves and of all that is different from them.” From *Kaputt*, Curzio Malaparte in conversation with Axel Munthe.

Top. German officer's car.

Right. Poster instructing all Jews to report to the Städtischen Schutzpolizei. “Jews who do not comply with this registration requirement will be deported.”





Michele Bonuomo comments, "Malaparte followed the defeat of the Serbian army and the advance of the German armoured troops. From 10 April to 9 May 1941, he wrote twelve articles and took about twenty rolls of film. These shots are the clearest and most concise notes of that hellish circle that three years later would become one of the most powerful and desperate novels of the era. Malaparte's Europe is a "mamma marcia", a "rotten mother" that "breeds corpses".



Curzio Malaparte as filmmaker. Stills from *Il Cristo Proibito*, his only film. Partly inspired by Renaissance painting, including Masaccio's *Crucifixion*, the film defied categorisation, adding realism and Surrealism to the mix. Private collection.

Malaparte's African images are less rhetorical than his writing, which is still staunchly pro-regime. They tell us much more about the reality of the situation, from the misery of the landscape to the pride of the Ascari, than his articles do.

–There's a photograph of a fascist officer strutting along at the head of a troop of Ascari. It is clear that Malaparte sides with the latter and admires their pride, nobility and bearing. The officer is ridiculous, out of place. We can analyse Malaparte's portraits of the sciarmutte, the prostitutes assigned to the army, against the backdrop of a wall lined with pages from *La Domenica del Corriere*, which was then the weekly magazine of the good and respectable Italian bourgeoisie. I don't know if Malaparte wanted to

emphasise the contrast, or rather the symbiosis, between the respectability of the Italian bourgeoisie and the misery of prostitution. But something that anticipates the horror of *La Pelle* (Skin) is already there, in my opinion.

Two years later, following the German army as it advanced into Serbia, photography, suggestion and writing became even more closely intertwined.

– Yes, the photographs Malaparte took in the Balkans can really be compared to some of the darkest and most hopeless pages of *Kaputt*. It should also be noted that most of his correspondence for the *Corriere della Sera* was written in Capri. When Aldo Borelli discovered this, he begged Malaparte not to leave the house.

To take photographs, you have to be there.

– Malaparte followed the defeat of the Serbian army and the advance of the German armoured troops. From 10 April to 9 May 1941, he wrote twelve articles and took about twenty rolls of film. Even in these images, some of which would illustrate Malaparte's reports for the weekly magazine *Tempo*, there is no trace of rhetoric, but rather a strong focus on the suffering and dignity of humanity in the face of the disasters of a war that was already perceived as tragic for everyone, both the victors and the vanquished. The destruction caused by the bombings, the gutted buildings, the destroyed bridges, the piles of rubble, the people's bewilderment, the wounded nature, the executed animals abandoned on the banks of rivers foreshadow in images the incandescence of his novel *Kaputt*. These shots are the clearest and most concise notes of that hellish circle that three years later would become one of the most powerful and desperate novels of the era. Malaparte's Europe is a "mamma marcia", a "rotten mother" that "breeds corpses".

***La pelle* is dedicated to "the fond memory of Colonel Henry H. Cumming, of the University of Virginia, and of all the brave, good, honest American soldiers, my comrades in arms from 1943 to 1945, who died needlessly for the freedom of Europe".**

– Malaparte was arrested in 1943 by the Americans as a dangerous fascist, taken to prison and released thanks to Benedetto Croce, an anti-fascist, and then freed by Colonel Henry H. Cumming, who "enlisted" the writer as a counter-intelligence agent. Together with Cumming, who was not a military man but a professor of political science at the University of Virginia, Malaparte witnessed the display of Mussolini's body in Piazzale Loreto, Milan. Faced with that scene, Curzio wrote a very harsh page condemning the crowd, not the Duce, saying, "that filthy crowd got what it deserved". And about Mussolini, whom he called "The Great Chameleon, the Great Beast of Italy, the Great Imbecile", he wrote that he loved him "because I love fallen and humiliated men".

It is no coincidence that betrayal became the theme of the only film Malaparte made, *Il Cristo Proibito*, in 1951.

– Malaparte directed the film, wrote the screenplay and even the soundtrack, which he composed by whistling to a young boy who played the clarinet in the band in Montepulciano, where the film was shot. The film tells the story of a veteran of the Russian campaign who returns home and discovers that his partisan brother has been killed by the Germans after being betrayed by a fellow villager. *Il Cristo Proibito* won the City of Berlin Prize at the Berlin Film Festival, an award that Malaparte considered a consolation prize and, therefore, did not go to collect. In Italy, the film followed the fortunes of its director and was soon forgotten, or hidden, so much so that when we were organising the exhibition in 1979, film critic Patrizia Pistagnesi had to track down a copy at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris.



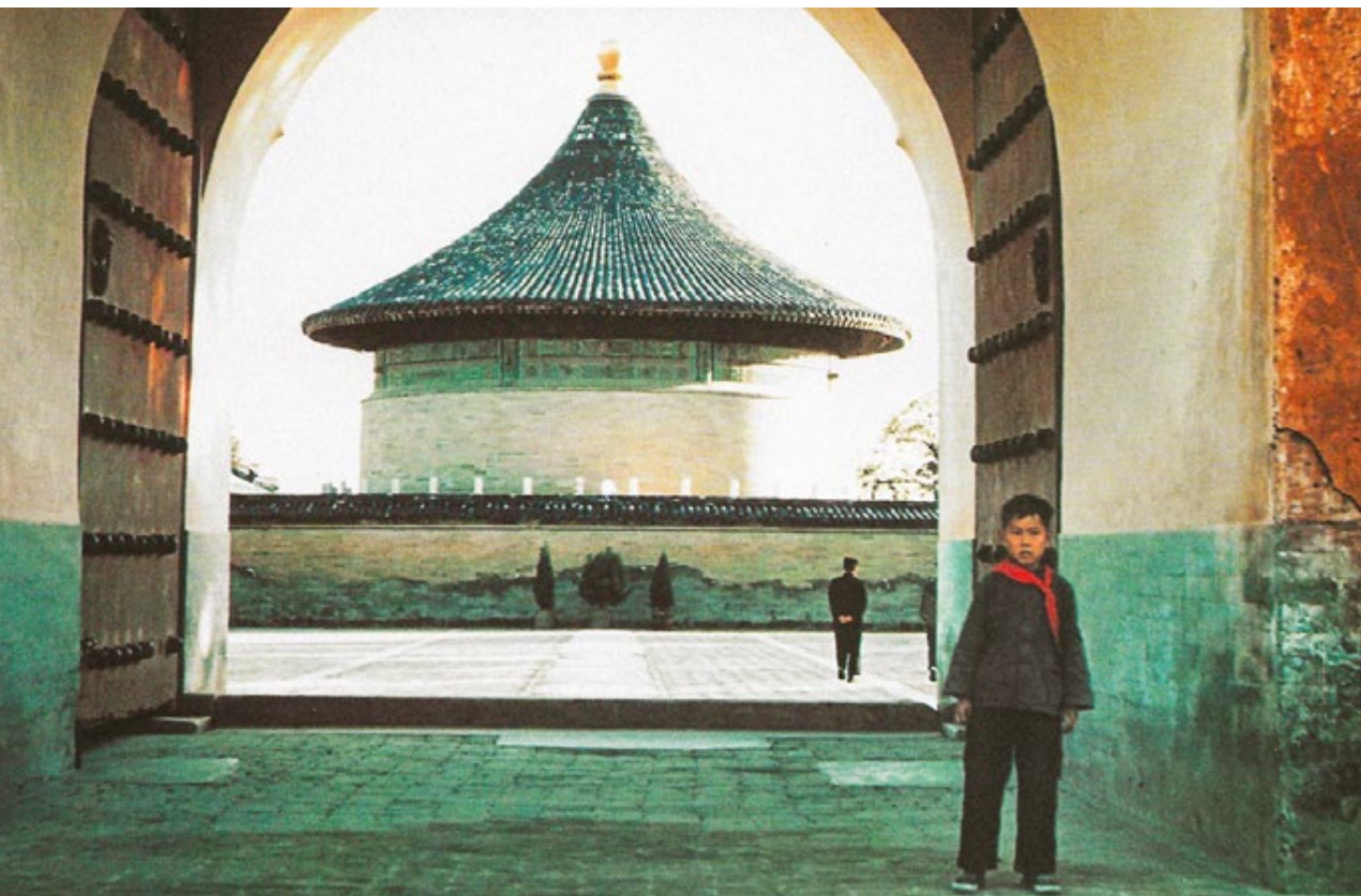
In 1957, there was another twist in the story of Malaparte. He was sent to the USSR and China by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, editor of *Vie Nuove*, the weekly magazine of the Italian Communist Party.

– Malaparte had already been approached by the Communist Party and by Palmiro Togliatti himself, so much so that on 9 April 1944, the secretary general of the PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano) went to visit him at his home in Capri. However, Malaparte only received his PCI membership card on his deathbed, delivered to him personally by Togliatti and hidden under his mattress for fear that the nuns would tear it up. To complicate matters further, it seems that Malaparte, in his last days, converted to Catholicism, despite being a staunch atheist. The truth, at least as far as the history of journalism is concerned, is that the articles, and therefore the photographs taken in China by Malaparte, were never published in *Vie nuove* due to opposition from Italo Calvino, Alberto Moravia, Ada Gobetti and others; "the fascist Malaparte" could not publish in a communist magazine.

In fact, Malaparte never publicly recanted his past.

– True, but although I'm far removed from those positions, I think it is right to remember what Malaparte said of that era of Italian history, namely "all writers were fascists, which is no harm in itself. But why do they now claim to be anti-fascists and pass themselves off as martyrs of freedom, as victims of tyranny? They all bent their backs with infinite hypocrisy. And their novels were mere rhetorical exercises, without a shred of courage or moral and intellectual independence. Today they write anti-fascist novels as yesterday they wrote fascist novels; all of them, including Alberto Moravia, whom the communists themselves called a bourgeois writer, and therefore a fascist."

Unknown photographer. Curzio Malaparte by the Great Wall.



So, given the mutual exchange of compliments, what did Alberto Moravia say at the 1979 conference?

– It was a settling of scores. Moravia described Malaparte as “a man who is of no use to literature, journalism or poetry, but who used everything and everyone. He had amazing social skills, he had an awareness of the powerful, he was always on the side of the eventual powers.” Moreover, four days after Malaparte’s death, on 19 July 1957, Leo Longanesi, an unrepentant fascist, wrote the following about his former friend: “Malaparte got what he deserved, now we risk seeing him end up a saint... sick with narcissism, he lived without affection, without passion, always in front of the mirror... if you read his books carefully, you find yourself faced not with a Voltairean, as he liked to portray himself, but with a crepuscular figure: he loved his mother and the grands hôtels.”

Colour photograph by Curzio Malaparte. In 1957, Malaparte was sent to the USSR and China by *Vie Nuove*, the weekly magazine of the Italian Communist Party. He would take his last photographs in China, where he was taken ill, diagnosed with lung cancer. He returned to Italy and died in a hospital in Rome on 19 July the same year.

Yet, despite the embarrassment and hatred of other contributions to the conference – for example, Nello Ajello recalled Antonio Gramsci’s harsh judgement of Malaparte, “he is capable of any wickedness to achieve success” – something was stirring in the re-reading of the writer. And the photographs you discovered certainly had the merit of focusing the discussion back to the level of reality and indisputable facts.

– On 22 September 1979, *Il Mattino* published a lengthy article on Malaparte’s photographs in its illustrated supplement, with the title “A photojournalist named Malaparte”. The event got enormous attention, and even in Naples, the city that had banned Malaparte, people were talking about him again. On the afternoon of 22 September, a few hours after the newspaper hit the newsstands, Roberto Ciuni received an agitated phone call from Massimo Caprara, editor of *Illustrazione Italiana*, because he also wanted to do an issue on Malaparte as a photographer. Massimo Caprara was a highly cultured man, and for twenty years, from 1944, he had been Palmiro Togliatti’s personal secretary. He had founded the daily newspaper *Il Manifesto* and in 1969 had been expelled from the Italian Communist Party. He said of himself: “I am no longer a communist, but I will never become an anti-communist.” In the name of the chameleon-like Curzio Malaparte, everything makes sense.

Photographs



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AUCTION :
14 November 2025 - 2pm

Exhibition at Drouot - 9 rue Drouot - Room 4
Wednesday 12 November 11am-6pm
Thursday 13 November 11am-8pm
Friday 14 November 11am-12pm

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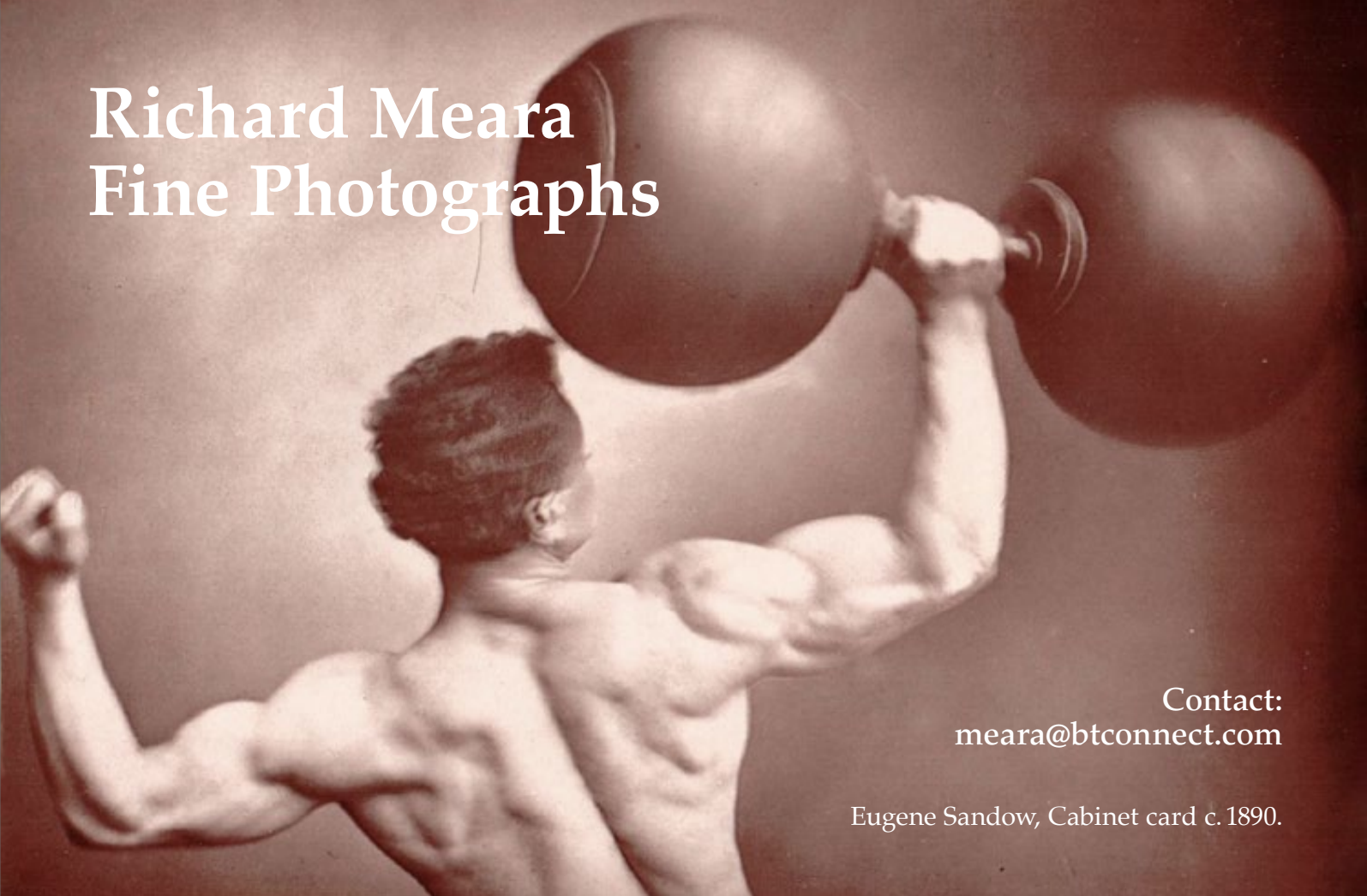


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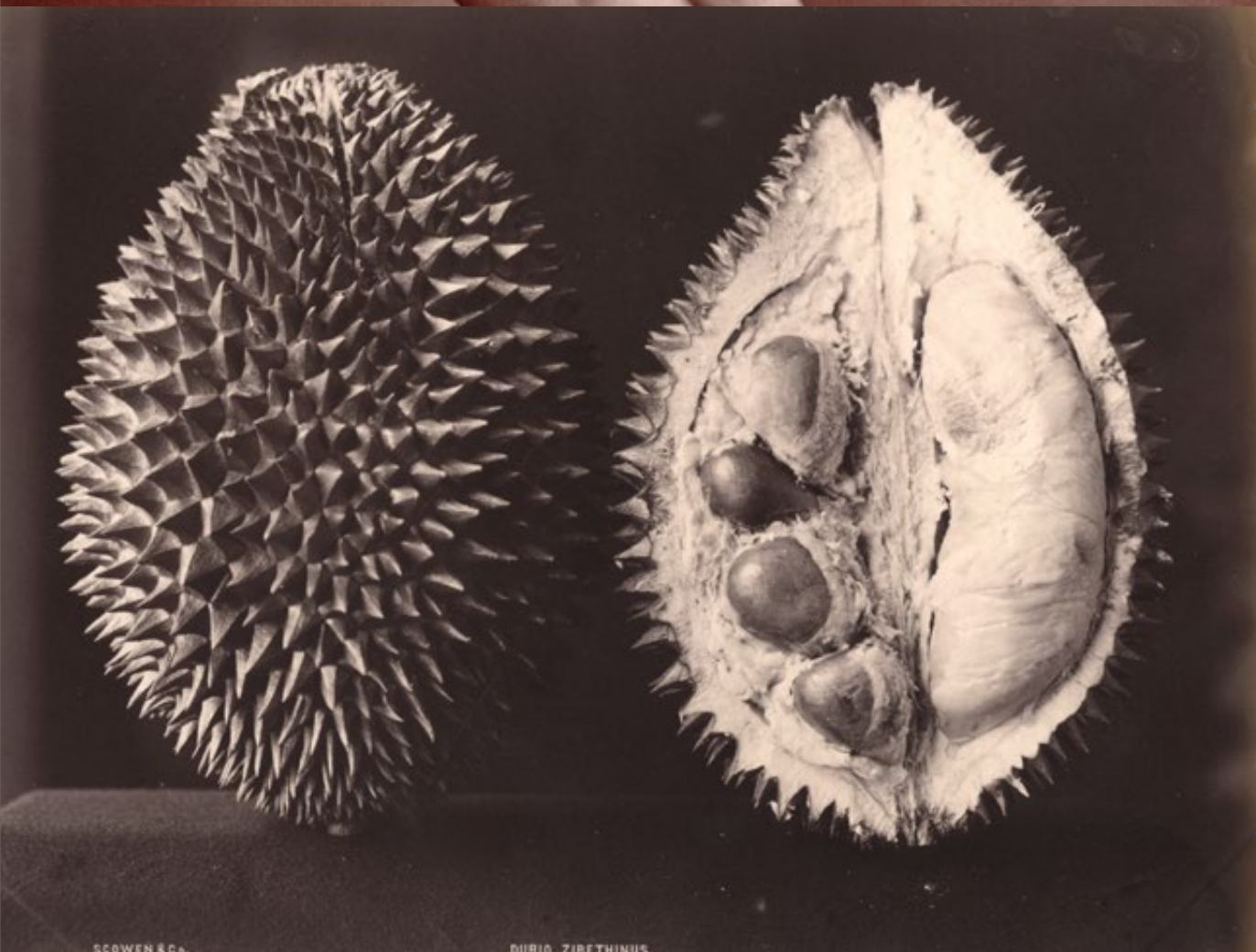
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Eugene Sandow, Cabinet card c. 1890.



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“BY WHO EXACTLY?”

Questions of Attribution & Identification

There are many treasures in American dealer Alex Novak's private collection. The image opposite is one of them. A salt print from collodion negative, measuring 34 × 24.8 cm, executed in the 1850s. During the period, Orientalism, a romantic vision of the Middle East as depicted by Eugène Delacroix, David Roberts and others, exerted a powerful hold over the imagination of a well-to-do British and French public, and was later the subject of Edward Said's famous study. Photographers were drawn to the farthest shores of the Mediterranean to view and record the evocative sights of ancient civilisations and to discover aspects of contemporary Islamic culture. But some didn't travel that far. A number of photographers, notably Roger Fenton in collaboration with Frank Dillon and William Grundy, attempted to recreate in their studios the exotic figurative subjects proposed by

the Orientalist painters. This salt print of unusually large format is an exceptional posing of a woman in exotic and potentially erotic costume and setting. But who is it by? Novak explains.

– I bought it from New York-based dealer Hans P. Kraus, Jr. back in 1997. Hans thought it was by Roger Fenton but he couldn't say with certainty. Later on, Roger Fenton expert and former Getty 19th-century photo expert Gordon Baldwin, who sadly passed away in 2020, told me that he didn't think it was by Fenton. We are now leaning to American photographer Jeremiah Gurney, although it still reminds me a bit more of Fenton's work. It remains a mystery.

The photographer might be identified one day, through the furniture and textiles in the image, a project Novak is working on.

– I have started making notes of studio furniture and props, backdrops, carpets and unique objects in 19th century photographs in order to help identify photographers. I may post the research on my

Unknown photographer. Model posed as an odalisque, salt print collodion negative, 1850s. Courtesy of Alex Novak.



Circle of Henri Secq. Salt print from paper negative on original mount, 1850s.
 Courtesy of Alex Novak.

website IPhotocentral.com or even make a book of them, that is, if I am granted enough time in my life. It's detective work but it does produce results. Using this method, I have identified photographs by Félix-Jacques Moulin, Southworth & Hawes, and several other photographers.

There are other mysteries in Novak's collection, including two salt prints, described by him as "Circle of Henri Le Secq".

– I bought them from my good friend, the French photography expert Serge Kakou and that's how he described them. There are many indications that they are by Le Secq himself. The large and specific

paper negative size, the subject matter, style, period, and the quality of the prints. There aren't many photographers who have all these elements matching Le Secq. Personally, I therefore favour Le Secq. He did know the Aguado brothers, who took similar photos of trees using paper negatives. But the style and sizes match Le Secq more closely and remind me of the fabulous ruined tree by Le Secq that collector Thomas Walther bought from Marc Pagnuex a few decades ago. One other possibility might be Adalbert Cuvelier who also took wonderful tree images. If I spent a few weeks at the BnF and Société française de photographie, I might get closer to an answer. We'll see.



A True Master of Photography



Moors of Algiers is one of the favourite photographs of UK-based dealer Robert Hershkowitz. He acquired it at auction in 1981.

– It came in a lot with two other related calotypes, catalogued as an unidentified maker. I sold one of them to Sam Wagstaff and in 1984, it was acquired by the Getty as part of his collection. It's reproduced in Gordon Baldwin's book *Roger Fenton – Pasha and Bayadère*, a study on Orientalism in painting and photography, published by Getty Museum Studies of Art in 1996, with the caption "Unknown French maker, active 1850s. Reclining smoker, Ca. 1855, salt print." The three prints were obviously by the same photographer. There's an inscription on the back of the print, in English, "Moors of Algiers". It could, of course, have been added by a British owner at a later stage but my instincts told me that the maker was indeed British, though I had no idea as to who the maker might be.

In 2007, the exhibition *Impressed by Light – British Photographs from Paper Negatives, 1840-1860* opened at The Metropolitan Museum of Art before travelling to the National Gallery, Washington, and Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

– I was deeply disappointed and thoroughly bewildered that *Moors of Algiers* wasn't included in the exhibition. It's such a strong image. Still, the





catalogue gave me a lead that helped me identify the maker of the three prints. It included a *Biographical Dictionary of British Calotypes*, researched by Larry Schaff in collaboration with Roger Taylor. There was an entry on a Thomas Elmore, with a brief biography, stating that he was born in Ireland in 1823, appointed vice-consul in Algeria, “when he mastered not only the technique of calotype but also the spirit of photography.”

The entry in the dictionary also included quotes from two glowing reviews of Elmore’s photographs. – One was published in December 1850 in the *Literary Gazette*, a review of print seller Joseph Grundy’s annual exhibition, describing Elmore as an expert amateur, whose calotypes “represent Moors, Arabs and Algerians in their various costumes, and with the accessories of dwelling places, furniture, arms, pipes and other things convey the peculiar and accuracy of the picture, which would only be obtained by visiting the spot, and even then but seldom, if ever, by any ordinary methods of sketching.”

The other review, of “glass negatives recently brought from Paris by John Mayall”, was published in 1851 in the *Athenaeum*.

– It states, “Some calotypes from the hands of Mr. Thomas Elmore that we have examined privately

made the nearest approach to excellence here reached.” The dictionary entry on Thomas Elmore ends with stating that he retired to Brighton in the 1870s and it concludes, “sadly, none of his calotypes are known to have survived.” Well, three of them did. The Orientalist subject matter, the location of Algiers and the emphasis on the quality of the photographs in the reviews convinced me that these three images were indeed by Thomas Elmore. In 2010, I sold the second print, *Two Algerian Musicians* to the Getty but I’m hanging on to *Moors of Algeria*. Hopefully, more images by Elmore will emerge. On the evidence of the three prints, he was clearly a true master of photography.

Top left. **Thomas Elmore.** *Two Algerian Musicians*, salt print, circa 1850. Getty Research Institute, Special Collections.

Bottom left. **Thomas Elmore.** *Reclining Algerian Man with Pipe*, salt print, circa 1850. J. Paul Getty Museum.

Top right. **Thomas Elmore.** *Moors of Algiers*, salt print, circa 1850. Robert Hershkowitz Ltd.

The Unknown Pictorialist

Julien Faure-Conorton is a French photography historian, specialising in international Pictorialism. His PhD dealt with the life and work of French Pictorialist Robert Demachy. He's in charge of research at the Albert-Kahn Museum in Boulogne-Billancourt, France, and teaches at the École du Louvre in Paris. He is the author of *Paris-Métro-Photo, Robert Demachy. Impressions de Normandie, Visions d'Artistes : photographies pictorialistes, 1890-1960* and his latest book, *La Photographie Pictorialiste* was published this spring. In 2010, he made an intriguing discovery.

– I came across three prints, unsigned, most likely pigment prints, that were offered for sale online. One showed a model in open air and I recognized the background, as both Robert Demachy and Constant Puyo had photographed models there. I knew that it was certainly by someone in their circle, because the prints were Pictorialist in style. One of the other prints showed a young girl who also modelled for Demachy. I was gripped by the images and purchased two prints online. I met up with the dealer. He had a few more prints that interested me and I bought altogether nine prints by this photographer from him. One showed a woman by the Seine. It was very close to what Puyo did and there was also one of a nude model that Demachy had photographed. I deduced that these prints were by a French Pictorialist, working in open air alongside Puyo and Demachy. But I didn't know who the photographer was.



How did you go about identifying him?

– I had a few leads. I knew that he was French, working alongside Puyo and Demachy. There was also something about one of the prints that rang a bell, a beautiful photograph of a field with smoke. I realised that I had seen the image before, when I was researching Demachy for my PhD. I went back, checked my research material and found it. The image was published in *La Revue de la Photographie*, the monthly journal of the Photo-Club de Paris, and was credited to an R. Michau. Some further research revealed that his first name was René. The other prints were of similar aesthetic and came from the same dealer so I was convinced that they were by the same photographer.

What was the next step in your research?

– I went through all my PhD research material. Initially, I focused on French magazines, and I discovered that René Michau had been published quite a lot, not only in *La Revue de la Photographie* but also in other French magazines, such as *Photo Magazine* and *Photo Gazette* so I was able to gather reproductions of his works. At the same time, other prints appeared on the market, with Alex Novak, Photo Verdeau and Bruno Tartarin. They were sold as anonymous photographs because Michau almost never signed his prints. I also came across several of his prints at the Paris flea market. I went through hundreds and hundreds of prints there but his prints always stood out. They had a particular quality, as they were pigment prints, mostly oil prints and this and the beauty of the images made them stand out. I did actually come across one print that bore his signature but if you didn't know his name you wouldn't have been able to make it out. I also looked through catalogues of Pictorialist exhibitions and this provided more information, including titles for the images. Then I came across more images being offered for sale, of Constantinople. The subject was so different from his other prints that I had my doubts but going through a catalogue, I found that he had indeed exhibited images of Constantinople. Little by little, I found out more about him.

Did you also research his biography?

– From the exhibition catalogues, I found out that he had been a member of the Photo Club de Paris. I went through the club's membership list, which gave me his address in Paris. I dug deeper and found out that he had been born in 1872. I researched the area where he had lived, found the name of his

René Michau. *In the garden*, oil transfer print, circa 1908-1910. Courtesy of Julien Faure-Conorton.

"One was of a model in open air and I recognized the background. Both Robert Demachy and Constant Puyo had photographed models there."



wife, that he had been an architect, and an amateur photographer wanting to explore the artistic side of photography. I tried to find out as much as possible about the social side of his life, as I did with Demachy, to put the work in context. Sadly, Michau passed away in 1917. Pictorialism in France pretty much collapsed with the outbreak of the First World War. It reemerged after the war but Michau would never witness that.

Michau was younger than Demachy, who was born in 1859, Puyo in 1857.

– Yes, he was part of a new generation of French talents in the movement, like Céline Laguarde, whose work was shown in an exhibition at Musée d’Orsay recently. The fact that he died prematurely in 1917 explains why he completely disappeared. Many of the practitioners of Pictorialism were amateurs and that’s a real problem when it comes to researching the movement. The label would lead their descendants to regard their work as less important despite it being highly regarded at the time. I suspect that Michau’s prints were dispersed following a house clearance, probably around 2010 when they began to appear on the market.

As you said, he was close to Demachy and Puyo.

– Apart from the quality of the prints, that was what I found so interesting. I could see from the locations and the models that many of the images had been made at the same time as Demachy’s and Puyo’s images, and that they had gone on photographic

excursions together. And there were other photographers as well. I found one print depicting a girl sitting next to a well. Exactly the same image was taken by Charles Lhermitte, son of famous painter Léon Lhermitte, and who also studied under Demachy. Comparing the two images proved that Lhermitte and Michau had been standing next to each other, producing the same image from just a slightly different angle. This and other images gave me further insight into how the French Pictorialists worked, especially when they worked in open air, whether in Paris or in the countryside outside the city.

Without your research, Michau would have remained another anonymous photographer.

– Yes, and it would have been sad, as he was well known at the time. When I went through the press in search of images by him, I also read what had been written about him. I discovered that he was regarded as one of the brightest young stars of French Pictorialism, highly talented, especially with pigment processes. I also found out that he made autochromes. They may or may not have been sold at the same time as his prints but it’s even more difficult to identify autochromes because they are very often unlabelled. But who knows, maybe they will reappear one day.

René Michau. *Men Burning Grass*, oil transfer print, 1907.
 Courtesy of Julien Faure-Conorton.



1.



2.



3.

1. **René Michau.** *Annecy*, oil transfer print, circa 1911-1914. Courtesy of Julien Faure-Conorton.

2. **René Michau.** *The Golden Horn, Constantinople*, oil transfer print, circa 1913. Courtesy of Julien Faure-Conorton.

3. **René Michau.** *On the Edge of the Well*, oil transfer print, circa 1911-1914. Courtesy of Julien Faure-Conorton.

"I found one print depicting a girl sitting next to a well. Exactly the same image was taken by Charles Lhermitte, son of famous painter Léon Lhermitte, and who also studied under Demachy."

A Mystery on Silk

Nicholas Burnett, collector and photography conservator, well known in the UK and abroad for his Cambridge-based studio, Museum Conservation Ltd, has examples of some very rare photographic processes in his collection.

– In June 2012, I attended the photography fair in Bièvres, just South-West of Paris. One of the dealers had a small table with a whole pile of stuff. On top of it all, I spotted a portrait of a man, printed in purple on silk, and with it came with a labelled sample of the purple dye. It looked extremely interesting. I was told that it came from an album from the early 1870s. I paid 200 euros for the portrait and sample. At the time, I thought it might be an Anthotype, one of the six photographic processes invented by Sir John Herschel, which uses coloured vegetable and flower juices to create monochromatic colour images. It was a pretty good guess but I had no idea who the photographer might be.

Burnett stored the portrait and sample with the rest of his collection and didn't give it further thought.

– In 2020, the pandemic hit and I got COVID right at the start. During my recovery, I didn't have much energy so I spent my time looking at early photographs on the web. Unexpectedly, I came across a purple image printed on silk, then another, both in the Royal Society Collection. Could they be by the same photographer as the one I had bought at the fair in Bièvres? This was exciting! The Royal Society images were by the French biologist, anatomist and zoologist Henri de Lacaze-Duthiers. A search on his name revealed an academic paper that had the same portrait as I had though slightly damaged. It was described as a self-portrait and belonged to the Sorbonne. As if this wasn't enough, it was dated and put the date of his works on silk back to the late 1850s.

It turned out that the prints were Mucographs, a process invented by Henri de Lacaze-Duthiers himself.

– Lacaze-Duthiers was researching Tyrian purple, a dye produced in very small quantities by the Phoenicians. It was extracted from marine gastropods. During the Roman empire, Tyrian purple was reserved exclusively for the Imperial family. Lacaze-Duthiers was determined to find out exactly which creatures and which part of them had been used. He worked out that it came from the hypobranchial glands from many marine molluscs, and realised, that by tweaking the dyeing process, he could

produce photographic images. The Phoenicians allowed the dye to form and then dyed the textile. Instead, Lacaze-Duthiers soaked the textile in the precursor, placed a negative on top and exposed it to light while wet. The dye formed in response to light and oxygen and washing fixed the image by removing the uncoloured precursor. To put the production of the dye into perspective, in the 1890s, it took 14 000 molluscs to obtain just 1.4 grams of pigment when determining the molecular formula. Freshly made Mucographe photographs had a fetid, penetrating smell. Two good reasons why the process was a commercial flop and why examples are incredibly rare.

Burnett investigated Mucographs further.

– I found out that his only known extant works were kept at the Sorbonne and the Royal Society in London, where he had given a lecture and presented the Society with some samples and lecture notes. The self-portrait I had bought, therefore turned out to be extremely rare and a real bargain; but for me it's not about the money. It's about the satisfaction of pinning something down and acquiring knowledge.



Henri de Lacaze-Duthiers. Self-portrait printed on silk using his Mucographe process, 1859. Courtesy of Nicholas Burnett.



Main... is short for Mainbocher

New York-based gallerist Keith de Lellis has an auction tale of his own to tell.

– Many years ago, I bought an unidentified fashion photograph at Sotheby's, London. Philippe Garner was the expert there at that time and the sale included a fascinating group of fashion pictures, some unattributed. The group came from a well-known model in the 1930s who was famously photographed by Horst, Blumenfeld among others. Besides the Condé Nast stamp on the back, it also had "Main" written in pencil, which I assumed was short for "Mainbocher", the famous designer, but there was no other information.

The print sat unresearched in a box until recently when de Lellis did a Google search.

– Suddenly, up popped a variant image reproduced from a page from *Vogue* featuring the designer Mainbocher, with no issue date except the year 1937. My photograph was evidently from the same shoot. Years ago, I would have had to spend days at the New York Public Library or the Metropolitan Museum of Art Library thumbing through bound copies of *Vogue*. Nowadays *Vogue* Magazine is online with an archive that goes way back.



Left. **Horst**. Paris collections 1937, unpublished, gelatin silver print.

Right. **Horst**. Paris collections 1937, tear sheets *American Vogue*, 15 September 1937. Courtesy of Keith de Lellis Gallery.

I was able to find the photographer's credit and discovered that Horst had taken the picture for an article on the Paris collections published on 15 September 1937. Mystery solved! There is so much information on the internet nowadays, researching is so much simpler and I bet, in the future additional databases will be available to quickly answer questions about images and their makers.

The Investigation That Went Viral

While some photographers are identified through the dogged work of a single researcher, there are cases that rely on groups, even strangers, to come together to solve mysteries, as Luce Lebart relates in the following story. At the time, she was Director of the collection at Société française de Photographie (SFP). She is now a curator and an artistic director working as a French correspondent for The Archive of Modern Conflict.

“The trail of the unknown photographer has been found.” On 19 April 2013, the headline of the French newspaper *Le Parisien* announced that the conclusion of its springtime serial had been reached, following the participatory and spontaneous identification of an anonymous, previously unknown photographer. Anonymous because none of his images were signed; unknown because his amateur practice had remained entirely private.

Like many beautiful stories, this one began with an encounter: at a party where I met a photographer. I was a history student, carrying out a civic service placement at the Société française de photographie (SFP) in Paris, the world’s oldest photographic society, still active today, with a collection listed as a national monument. I spoke of my work cataloguing images, preparing them for digitisation, and assisting with exhibition projects. The photographer, himself involved in heritage inventory work, casually mentioned a collection of glass plates, produced circa 1900, that had been “sleeping” in his attic for years. I pointed out that the SFP’s holdings had been built up primarily through donations since its founding in 1854. The photographer immediately grasped the value of entrusting the plates to the society: “The plates are small, but they’re beautiful, both technically and aesthetically. The problem is, we don’t know who the photographer was.”

Monday, March 4, 2013. 9:00 a.m. 71 rue de Richelieu, Paris. At the (then) headquarters of the SFP, volunteers began opening the boxes with the plates that had just been delivered. The photographer recounted their origins, his testimony recorded: They were found in 1999 on the Saclay plateau, in the Essonne department, formerly Seine-et-Oise, next to a dumpster near the village of Villiers-le-Bâcle. “Some passersby who were interested in bric-a-brac came across these boxes of glass-plate photographs. The small glass negatives had been stored in cardboard Lumière boxes, themselves tucked inside old metal biscuit tins. It was these vintage tins, gleaming white and charming in their way, that first caught



the eye of the passersby.” They entrusted the photographic contents to the photographer, who decided to donate all 1120 glass plates to the SFP.

The fact that these images had been cast aside, escaping the garbage heap by mere chance, lent enormous weight to the media coverage of the identification project that was to follow. The case of the “1900 plates” was immediately framed as a “rescue”. To identify the photographer was to grant him the recognition and visibility he had nearly lost, to save him from oblivion, just as the plates themselves had been saved from destruction, stirring a flood of emotions. After all, the common fate of amateur family photographs is everyone’s fate: to be scattered, forgotten, and to turn to dust. Restoring value to these images and their story meant restoring our ties to the past, to those we have loved, who came before us, and who inevitably fade from memory after a few generations.

The process of identifying the photographer started with a post on the SFP’s Facebook page and that launched a spontaneous, crowdsourced investigation. The Facebook post announced the arrival of 1000 “1900 plates” salvaged from a dumpster, depicting scenes in the Essonne. And then the whole thing went viral on social media. The very next morning,

Eugène Biver. *Couvreur de meule, Moisson, Villiers-le-Bâcle* 1897-1898, positive from glass plate negative. Collection Société française de photographie, (coll. SFP).



Julien Heyligen, a journalist from *Le Parisien's* Essonne pages, visited the SFP and published a call for information: "He was a château owner in Essonne at the start of the 20th century, a great traveller, and completely doting on his daughter.

Eugène Biver. *Sur la Route, Saclay*, circa 1901-1903, positive from glass plate negative.
Collection Société française de photographie, (coll. SFP).

That's all we know. His name remains a mystery." The article spread quickly online, shared by the vast genealogical community of Geneanet, then circulating via "Les Archiveilleurs" and other mailing lists. Replies from genealogists poured in, while *Le Parisien's* reporter pursued leads in Villiers-le-Bâcle, the township where many of the photos had been taken, and ultimately discarded.

Identification was aided by period metadata. Each small Lumière cardboard box, named after the manufacturer of the instant gelatin-silver dry plates, bore handwritten notes, almost certainly by the photographer himself. Most often, they listed the first names

of two children who frequently appeared: "Marie Louise" and "Paul." Dates were given, as well as country names, and one recurring word: Biver. Since "Biver" did not match any local place name, it could well have been the children's surname, and thus the photographer's own. Genealogists confirmed it. A follow-up article in *Le Parisien* stated: "The little Marie-Louise Biver has been identified online via the Geneanet website." The photographer, it turned out, was her father: Count Eugène Théophile Biver.

Born in 1861, Biver came from high society. An engineer by training, he worked in a range of fields, from mining to maritime transport to locomotive construction. He produced these 1120 photographs between 1895 and 1905. He and his wife had three children: Marie-Louise (b. 1896), Paul (b. 1886), and finally Marie-Hélène (b. 1909) who lived in the family château at Villiers-le-Bâcle until her death in 1985. Count Biver served as the town's mayor, travelled widely, and died in 1929.

Genealogists fleshed out the Biver family tree and searched for surviving descendants. Meanwhile, *Le Parisien*'s reporter confirmed that the château most often depicted in the plates was indeed Villiers-le-Bâcle's château, since 1995 owned and restored by the impressionist Yves Lecoq, who opens it to visitors in summer. Local testimonies revealed that "almost the whole village once belonged to the Biver family", as recalled by Gilbert Lannois, born there in 1934. An obituary in the *Revue de la métallurgie* described Biver as a mayor of "profound affability and extreme kindness" who "did much good".

As the story spread across digital magazines, the press, and eventually television, it became clear that the value of these 1120 glass plates far surpassed the history of one family. The photographs not only documented the château around which Villiers-le-Bâcle grew, but also the wider Essonne region around 1900. They showed harvests, haymaking, potato gathering, beet hoeing, village parades, and fêtes. They revealed the everyday life of an affluent family; hunts, picnics, interior views, while also preserving rare documentation of a rural department, then known as Seine-et-Oise, once among the poorest in France and poorly represented in photographic archives.

For historians, the Biver collection is above all a striking example of early amateur use of instant photographic processes. The Count experimented widely: capturing objects in flight, in motion, in

mid-fall; producing short-interval image sequences; recording local agricultural labour on the Saclay plateau. He looked with care and consideration at itinerant communities, photographing travellers along village paths.

One remarkable image shows a Romani family walking joyfully toward the camera, smiling, breathing freedom. Taken twelve years before nomadic groups were subjected to systematic police photographing and stigmatisation, and sixty-eight years before Chagall's famous painting *Les gens du voyage*, it shares their imagery of dignity and lightness. Decades later, Josef Koudelka would cast a similar empathetic gaze on these communities. Biver clearly delighted in photography. That pleasure is shared today, barely in time.

The SFP organised a first exhibition of the Count Eugène Biver's images during the *European Heritage Days*, displayed outdoors beside the dumpsters where the plates had once been found. The photograph of the Romani family became the poster image, later featured on the catalogue of *Mondes Tziganes* at the Musée de l'histoire de l'Immigration in 2018. The Essonne departmental archives and the Domaine de Chamarande also honoured the collection through exhibitions. Biver's images of agricultural practices have since been used for documentation, contributing to the classification of sites and raising awareness of local history. Through a remarkable chain of chance encounters, these century-old images, rescued from a trash heap, journeyed from château life to the climate-controlled reserves of France's national photographic heritage. And their author, Count Eugène Biver, finally stepped out of the shadows.

Eugène Biver. *Marie-Louise (Biver)*, circa 1901-1903, positive from glass plate negative.

Collection Société française de photographie, (coll. SFP).





Plate 1: Attributed to Humbert de Molard, *Louis Dodier and friend*, circa 1845.

in daguerreotype jumped out at me. Here, surely, was the unmistakable presence of Louis Dodier, Humbert de Molard's favourite subject. At first glance I assumed that he was holding a bottle, a prop familiar from other pictures of Dodier. It was a jolt to realise that he wasn't! Since then, I have wondered how best to research such an extraordinary object. The invitation of Michael Diemar, the greater availability of online images of works by Humbert de Molard and the advances in digital tools for forensic recognition have, at last, provided me with an opportunity to return to this great image. With new resources, I present below the evidence to support my intuition.

Introduction

This study uses tools, old and new, to analyse an unrecorded daguerreotype attributed to Humbert de Molard and depicting his steward or estate manager Louis Dodier. Whilst a definitive assessment may be impossible, I aim to suggest the probability of the attribution.

Building on prior analysis, the essay expands to include technical evaluation of the plate itself, forensic anatomical comparison, and costume analysis. I also contextualise the subject's relationship with other genre scenes by Humbert de Molard, assess the rare erotic subject matter and consider Dodier's biography. The resulting synthesis integrates photographic, anatomical, and historical evidence to evaluate the identity of both the photographer and the portrait subject.

Louis Dodier, Humbert de Molard, and an Unknown Erotic Daguerreotype.

James Hyman is an art historian, gallerist, curator and with his wife Clare, co-founder of the Centre of British Photography.

Preface

Many years ago, in Paris, I acquired an incredible, anonymous daguerreotype. At the time I was infatuated with the genre scenes of Humbert de Molard and Charles Nègre who remain amongst my favourite 19th-century photographers. The face

Technical Analysis of the Daguerreotype Plate

The physical characteristics of the erotic daguerreotype plate (Plates 1, 2, 3) were examined in 2012 by Angels Arribas at Lumen Photo Conservation. The irregular hand-trimmed edges, absence of Christofle



stamps, and faint concentric polishing swirls confirm manual preparation, consistent with provincial French practice of the 1840s. Specifically these features correspond closely to the plates associated with Humbert de Molard, strengthening attribution by material analysis.

The erotic daguerreotype measuring approximately 11.9×9.1cm belongs to a subset of plates in Humbert de Molard's production that deviate from the standard quarter-plate dimensions of c.10.5-10.8×8.0-8.3cm. Surviving census data shows that the majority of Molard's rustic portraits and bust-length studies were made on quarter-plates. However, a small number of plates, such as *Portrait de Louis Dodier, de face avec des outils*, Musée d'Orsay (plate 7) (with a plate size of 12×9 cm and an image area of 11.6×8.5 cm) fall into the same "large quarter-plate" range as the erotic daguerreotype. The limited recurrence of this slightly oversized format, specifically for two pictures that depict Louis Dodier, may also be significant.

Genre Scenes, Composition, and Tropes

Humbert de Molard's oeuvre was dominated by rustic genre tableaux staged with local peasants, including Dodier, at his estate at Argentelle in Normandy. Subjects range from agricultural labour to leisure scenes such as hunters (Plate 4), shelling beans (Plate 9) and playing cards (Plate 11). Meanwhile, repeated views of Dodier seated



or reclining epitomise (Plates 1,10) Humbert de Molard's fascination with languid male repose. Compositional tropes include strong lateral light, rustic props (straw, bottles, timber, guns, a spade), and careful orchestration of gesture and gaze. As well as the repeated setting of the steps of his manor and the walls of the building on his estate, there is a recurrence of images of peasant dwellings with assorted rustic props, such as simple wooden chairs, wicker baskets and a birdcage, with people, including couples, often posed in front of a doorway. The props held by Dodier include a gun, a bottle and a spade, are often suggestively phallic in their form and position. (Plates 4,5) Perhaps clandestine allusions to the earlier erotic daguerreotype.

The setting: Analysis of the chair and the skirting board

The chair in the daguerreotype shows prominent turned, bulbous legs and what appears to be a lattice-patterned back, typical of provincial French Louis XIII-style chairs that remained common in the 19th century. This makes it more refined than a peasant's rush chair but not as ornate as manor

Left: Plate 2. Recto – Right: Plate 3. Verso



furnishings. The presence of a skirting board, visible extreme left, rules out a peasant cottage, where walls typically met the floor without trim but does align well with the room of a steward or estate manager, which were more finished than cottages but less ornate than manor salons.

The daguerreotype shows light entering from the left, consistent with a sitter placed close to a window to maximise the available natural light. The soft, directional illumination matches the window-light technique used by French daguerreotypists in the 1840s, when artificial light was not an option.

The chair and skirting are therefore historically appropriate and are most consistent with the house of a steward. This suggests that, unlike other images in which figures tend to be arranged in doorways outside buildings around Humbert de Molard's estate, for the clandestine subject of the erotic daguerreotype, he entered Louis Dodier's home.

Left. Plate 4 **Humbert de Molard**. *Deux Chasseurs* (Dodier with a bottle), c. 1848. Private Collection.

Right. Plate 5 **Humbert de Molard**, *Scène paysanne* (Dodier with a spade), c. 1848–1850. Private Collection.



Erotic Subject Matter: The Aroused Male

The subject of the erotic daguerreotype, a man in a state of visible arousal while accompanied by a clothed woman (Plate 1), may be unique in photography of this period. It is hard to be sure. Most extant daguerreotype erotica survives in restricted institutional collections, such as the *Enfer* at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, which was founded between 1836 and 1844 just prior to the creation of this daguerreotype. Such works are rarely catalogued publicly and often remain inaccessible. Surviving references do, however, suggest that while in early photography female nudes dominated, there are rare examples that include mixed-gender or arousal-focused tableaux. However, the peculiarity of this daguerreotype in which a clothed, uneroticized woman stands beside an aroused man subverts expectations about the male gaze by directing our attention away from the woman, who, like us and the photographer, is there as an observer. The extreme rarity of such imagery, combined with its illegality, underscores the significance of the present plate.

While nude subjects, often in classical poses, were tolerated as “artistic studies”, the explicit display of male arousal crossed legal and moral boundaries. The prosecution of the photographer Félix-Jacques Moulin in 1851 for obscenity demonstrates how perilous such work was. The survival of this daguerreotype thus represents an almost unique glimpse into clandestine erotic practices.

The erotic daguerreotype suggests a calculated risk

in staging a subject that challenged the boundaries of photographic respectability but in contrast to Moulin's oeuvre would have been emphatically private. The choice of subsequent poses and props in the depiction of Dodier appear to echo this earlier daguerreotype, perhaps a hidden content, suggestive of a forbidden relationship, readable just by the two men. As such the image is significant evidence of Dodier's role as performer of transgressive subjects and of the intimacy of his relationship with Humbert de Molard and sheds new light on the bodiliness of this extended series of collaborative portraits.

Dodier: Biography and Relationship with Humbert de Molard

Born in Normandy in 1823, Louis Dodier was employed as Humbert de Molard's "steward" or estate manager and became his most frequent model. Dodier's collaboration extended beyond Argentelle: in 1856 he accompanied Humbert de Molard to Brussels for the Exposition Universelle and festivities of King Leopold I. This would have been highly unusual. Contemporary reports note that Humbert de Molard undertook reportage photography there, accompanied unusually by Dodier. Repeated portraits of Dodier in daguerreotypes as well as salt prints from paper negatives, including one in which he is dressed in formal wear and another in which he is posed beside a camera and tripod (Metropolitan Museum, NY), testify not just to Humbert de Molard's preoccupation with him but also the status that he was accorded.

Facial and Anatomical Comparison

An extended anatomical analysis of the man in the erotic daguerreotype and comparative portraits of Louis Dodier by Humbert de Molard yields consistent identifiers. The sitter displays a leptoprosopic facial index, high malar projection, and a straight nasal dorsum terminating in a rounded tip. The mandible shows a sharp gonial angle and elongated mental protuberance. Soft-tissue indicators include an elongated philtrum, thin upper lip, and a slightly fuller lower lip. The intercanthal distance and slight downward cant of the palpebral fissures are consistent across images. Body morphology shows a narrow waist, sloping clavicles, and long arms with slender hands. These traits are idiosyncratic and recur across all Dodier portraits, including the erotic daguerreotype (Plate 1) and the reclining portrait, *Louis Dodier as a Prisoner* (Musée d'Orsay) (Plate 10). Loss of fleshiness in the face, over the span of a few years in which the photographs were taken, is also consistent with the speed of ageing in the mid-nineteenth century.

Image-by-Image Analysis. Then and Now



When I first acquired the daguerreotype, I literally cut and pasted reproductions of Dodier from the erotic daguerreotype and other known pictures of him to compare them side by side. (Plate 6). Now, in 2025, facial recognition software has allowed me to go a stage further in attempting to establish the anatomical congruence of known pictures of Dodier with the erotic daguerreotype. Individual assessments are below.

Plate 6 Cut and pasted details of the face of Louis Dodier, including from the erotic daguerreotype.



1.



2.



3.

1. Plate 7 **Humbert de Molard.**

Portrait de Louis Dodier, de face avec des outils, c.1845. Musée d'Orsay.
Cheekbone height, nasal bridge, and mandible congruence – 95% likelihood.

2. Plate 8 **Humbert de Molard.**

Portrait de Louis Dodier, la joue appuyée sur la main, c.1845. Musée d'Orsay.
Forehead slope and philtrum length – 94% likelihood.

3. Plate 9 **Humbert de Molard.**

Shelling Beans, Argentelle, c.1851. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Hollowed cheeks and sharpened gonial angle – 96% likelihood.

4.



6.



5.

4. Plate 10 **Humbert de Molard.**

Louis Dodier en prisonnier, c.1847. Musée d'Orsay.
Overlay reveals near-exact chin-to-nasion ratio – 96% likelihood.

5. Plate 11 **Humbert de Molard.**

Les joueurs de cartes, c.1847. Musée Gatién Bonnet.
Orbital sockets, nasal dorsum congruent – 92% likelihood.

6. Plate 12 **Humbert de Molard.**

Deux chasseurs (dont Louis Dodier), c.1850. Musée d'Orsay.
Sharper mandible consistent with ageing – 94% likelihood.

Weighted across all images, the combined probability that the man in the daguerreotype is the same as in the other photographs is $\approx 95\%$. This exceeds the threshold generally accepted in forensic anthropological comparison for high-probability matches.

Daguerreotype Crop



Reclining Portrait (Full)



Overlay (Red = Dag, Cyan = Reclining)



Overlay Analysis and Conclusions

Digital overlay alignment between the erotic daguerreotype and the reclining portrait was undertaken at landmarks including nasion, subnasale, gnathion, orbital rims, and mandibular angle. (Plate 13)

Results confirmed forehead slope, nasal projection, and chin position within narrow tolerance. Coloured-edge discrepancies arose only from plate scratches. Overlay analysis thus corroborates morphological consistency and raises the sitter identity probability to the 85-95% range when combined with independent visual analysis.

The Woman's Costume and Regional Attribution

The woman's attire in the erotic tableau (Plate 1) provides critical contextual dating. The ensemble – plain bodice, full sleeves, and wide-brimmed Pamela hat – fits Normandy rural attire between 1845 and 1856. The introduction of the cage crinoline in 1856 transformed the silhouette, producing skirts of much greater volume and bell-shaped fullness. Even in rural contexts, adaptations of this style filtered through, replacing the earlier moderately full but unsupported skirts visible here. Simultaneously, the Pamela or gypsy straw hat declined in popularity by the mid-1850s, giving way to narrower-brimmed bonnets and caps. Urban fashions also emphasised flounces, fringe, and patterned textiles, none of which appear in this garment. Thus, the simplicity of the plain weave, the absence of ornament, and the retention of the Pamela hat reinforce a likely date of circa 1845-1853. This tightens the attribution window for the daguerreotype and aligns it with the active years of Humbert de Molard's rustic genre staging at Argenteuil.

Conclusion

The erotic daguerreotype presents an extraordinary convergence of anatomical, material, and contextual evidence. Technical plate analysis confirms its mid-1840s French provenance. Forensic anatomical comparison and overlay studies establish with $\approx 95\%$ probability that the sitter is Louis Dodier. Costume analysis situates the female attire squarely in Normandy in the 1840s or early 1850s also reinforces this

provenance. The erotic subject matter, rare in the daguerreotype medium, reveals the experimental theatricality of Molard's practice. Dodier's documented biography, including his unusual presence at the Brussels exposition alongside Molard, further anchors this identification.

On balance, the following likelihoods are concluded:

- Sitter identity as Louis Dodier: $\approx 95\%$ probability.
- Authorship by Humbert de Molard: $\approx 90\%$ probability.

The erotic component of the daguerreotype adds considerable weight to its interpretation. Unlike rustic tableaux of peasants at leisure, the depiction of a visibly aroused male constituted an illegal act in 1840s-1850s France. Its production thus required both secrecy and deliberate intent. For Dodier, the sitter, this underscores his role, not simply as servant-model but as participant in experimental, transgressive photography. For Humbert de Molard, it aligns with his penchant for theatrical staging and his willingness to push the medium beyond conventional boundaries. The reclining figure's relationship to *Louis Dodier as a Prisoner*, also suggests a new reading of the sexually charged image in the Musée d'Orsay.

The rarity of such an explicit plate, places this work in a unique category: not only a rustic genre study but also an illicit erotic performance. This context amplifies the significance of the sitter's identification, for it links Dodier not just with Humbert de Molard's rustic studies but with the hidden history of erotic daguerreotype practice.

Whatever the attribution, this image is a radical, unprecedented, transgressive survivor from the earliest days of photography and can be recognized as an early, unrecorded moment in the history of queer photography. The legal peril of its creation underscores both the photographer and sitter's complicity in a clandestine act of defiance, an illicit challenge to the moral codes of mid-nineteenth-century France.

Plate 13 Overlay comparison

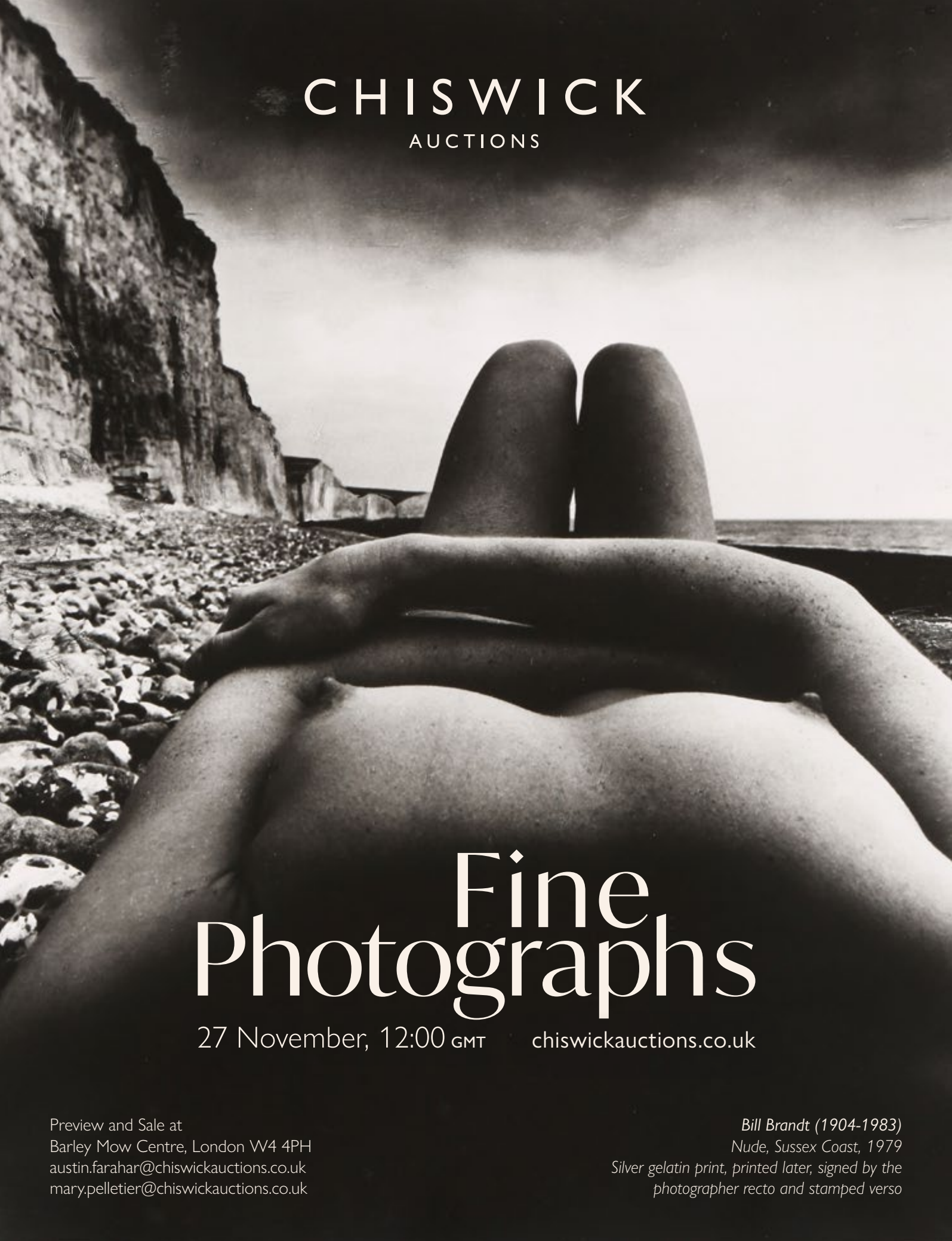
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Gabriel Loppé. Tour Eiffel foudroyée, 1902.

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Bill Brandt (1904-1983)
Nude, Sussex Coast, 1979
Silver gelatin print, printed later, signed by the
photographer recto and stamped verso