

After Nature

Swiss Photography in the 19th Century

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“At that time, people were definitely not yet willing to comprehend that such images genuinely reproduced nature, and nothing but nature; that here, the artist was not in a position to flatter or to embellish at will.”

Illustrierter Volks-Novellist, September 1865

After photography was proclaimed a French invention in 1839 in Paris, the new medium quickly conquered all of Europe. Although the race for technical improvements started in the cultural centres, the heavy cameras were soon also taken to the villages and the countryside, into remote valleys and up the mountains. In Switzerland, the emerging tourism industry played a key role in the new photography trade. Not only the interest in spectacular landscapes, but also the growing demand for portraits, early industrialisation and major technical projects all contributed to the medium's boom.

This first overview of 19th-century Swiss photography sheds light on the pioneers' outstanding achievements, as well as on special aspects called for by society, such as early mugshot photography. It also examines interactions between visual techniques that existed at the same time, including painting and printmaking. Thanks to research in countless archives and collections all over the country, hitherto little-known visual material has been unearthed. The selection shown here takes into account not only photography's aesthetic qualities, but also its specific uses. Over 60 public and private lenders have contributed works from their collections to enable an overview of the first 50 years of photography in Switzerland. Many originals that were stored in scattered locations have been brought together for the first time, producing a clearer picture of individual protagonists and important interrelated themes.

The exhibition is divided into seven sections: The first two deal with the emergence of a completely new medium: How was photography able to establish itself in relation to conventional visual techniques? In what period were images fixed on coated sheets of copper? When and where were prints made on paper? The other five sections are about the influence of tourism, the importance of portrait photography, commercial aspects, artistic approaches and the representation of progress. Many of the exhibits are extremely fragile objects that can only be displayed in dim light, for preservation reasons.

A co-production realised by Fotostiftung Schweiz, MASI - Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, and Photo Elysée, Lausanne.

The desire for replication

In the first years after its arrival had been publicly announced in Paris in 1839 and shortly thereafter in England, photography was by no means the mass medium that it evidently was at the end of the century. On the contrary, despite its rapid spread throughout the world, it long remained reserved for a select audience. A rivalry developed between the daguerreotype on metal, invented by Louis Daguerre in France, and the negative/positive process on paper, developed at the same time by England's Henry Fox Talbot. The photograph immediately started to compete with the pre-existing image-printing media, but could not yet be printed in large numbers. For that reason, photographs were used as templates for wood engravings and lithographs, which in turn could be printed in books and illustrated journals; they were sometimes pasted directly into publications as paper prints.

The Swiss photographers seeking to disseminate photography via prints included copperplate engraver Johann Baptist Isenring, who already produced a series of Zurich cityscapes using his customary aquatint technique in 1840, and the first woman involved, Franziska Möllinger, who started converting her daguerreotypes into lithographs in 1844 and published them as a portfolio. Certainly, *Excursions daguerriennes*, published shortly beforehand in Paris, in which Swiss views also appeared, were an inspiration for Möllinger's *Daguerrotypirte Ansichten der Hauptstädte und der schönsten Gegenden der Schweiz* (Daguerreotyped Views of Switzerland's Main Cities and Most Beautiful Regions). Unfortunately, her ambitious project remained unfinished and was commercially unsuccessful. Daguerreotypes also served as templates for many printed portraits. Isenring's extraordinary aquatint of his stepdaughter on her deathbed is an exception, probably based on a paper photograph.

Photography on paper, which quickly found a loyal following among artists in France, was mainly practised by photographers from Western Switzerland, like Auguste Reymond, who in 1858 captured the consequences of a catastrophic fire in Le Lieu (VD) with large-format images. At that time though, the woodcut was still superior to photography when it came to recording an event. The outstanding photographers in French-speaking Switzerland who preferred the negative/positive process on paper included the experimental Adrien Constant-Delessert from Lausanne, who created a unique body of prints in albums, and Jean Walther in Vevey, as well as Geneva's Jean-Louis Populus and Sébastien Straub, who primarily devoted themselves to documenting their transforming city. They all appreciated the soft detail and slightly blurred look of paper photography, which suited their artistic aspirations.

Daguerreotype – 'mirror with a memory'

In contrast to paper photography, which allows several prints to be made from one negative, daguerreotyping is a process that can only produce one image at a time. Whenever a picture is taken, the image forms on a sheet of silver-plated copper and cannot be replicated. It can only be seen as a positive on the reflective sheet from a certain angle, but with unique sharpness, clarity and three-dimensionality: qualities that on one hand earned the daguerreotype the name 'mirror with a memory' and, on the other hand, the reproach that it only represents a cold mechanical copy of reality.

When itinerant photographers brought the daguerreotype to Switzerland from abroad, it was mainly people from mechanical, optical or pharmaceutical professions who showed interest in the new, technically delicate process. Many such photographers were unsuccessful, but for those who were able to establish themselves, the portrait quickly became the daguerreotype's

most popular application. With this new technique, photographic portraits became an attractive alternative to painted ones.

The actual masters of the process were the Genevan banker, diplomat and amateur Jean Gabriel Eynard, who began to produce a unique and now internationally recognised oeuvre of portraits in the early 1840s, the former optician Emil Wick in Basel, who claimed to have realised over 30,000 daguerreotypes in about 15 years and apparently earned so much from them that he was able to retire at the age of 45, and Johann Baptist Isenring, who already presented his pictures to a paying audience in 1840 at an 'art exhibition' in St. Gallen. However, despite his (sometimes even 'life-sized') daguerreotypes being supremely lauded at the time, none seem to have survived – except perhaps the close-up of his son Karl Johann's head, a large-format aquatint. Moreover, out of Franziska Möllinger's many daguerreotypes, images that she must have captured all over Switzerland, just a single view of Thun Castle remains.

While a large number of mostly anonymous portraits still exist today, there are only a few architectural photographs, such as the two views of Geneva by Mario Artaria and Louis Bonijol, which were taken almost simultaneously and can here be seen side by side for the first time, as well as the group of four recently discovered anonymous images of Zurich buildings built by architect Gustav Wegmann from the late 1830s onwards. The latter allow a unique view of, among other things, Zurich's first railway station and the cantonal school, and thus of that era's modern urban development and the evolution of transport.

Waterfall and glacier – touristic leitmotifs

As soon as the Swiss transport infrastructure, long considered backward throughout Europe, began to develop towards the middle of the century and the photographic process had also been improved via the use of glass negatives, photography's suitability for tourism advertising was discovered: primarily by foreign photographers like Francis Frith from England and Adolphe Braun from Dornach in France, who offered large quantities of their pictures at Swiss tourist destinations or distributed them internationally through booksellers and publishers. The first package tour to Switzerland organised by tourism pioneer Thomas Cook in 1863, with young Jemima Morrell among its participants, marked the start of real mass tourism – aided to no small extent by photographs that were soon circulating worldwide.

Alongside quasi-obligatory sights like the Mer de Glace near Mont Blanc, the Alps in the Bernese Oberland, the Rigi and Lucerne, waterfalls had also held an incredible fascination ever since publication of Albrecht von Haller's 1729 poem *The Alps*, especially Staubbach Falls in Lauterbrunnen Valley. Miss Morrell was overwhelmed by this 'queen of waterfalls' and described it using the words of English poet William Wordsworth: "this bold, this bright, this sky-born waterfall".

From the very beginning, pictures played an important role in popularising Staubbach Falls and other waterfalls, such as the Rhine Falls near Schaffhausen, Giessbach Falls and Reichenbach Falls in the Bernese Oberland, or Pissevache in Lower Valais. The views of Staubbach Falls painted by Johann Ludwig Aberli around 1760 were later imitated or varied by countless members of the Little Masters group, as well as by photographers. They were appearing in popular publications like the *Saturday Magazine* long before the motif was discovered by Swiss photographers.

The latter only slowly entered the market, taking some of the Swiss tourist business from foreign competitors. First among them were photographers from Geneva, where a large number of professionals, such as Auguste Garcin, John Jullien and Florentin Charnaux, were already active. They were later joined by Adam Gabler and Jean Moeglé in the Bernese Oberland, and the enterprising Romedo Guler from the canton Graubünden, all of whom focused less on

spectacular individual images and more on series about certain landscapes, such as the Engadine, or on collections of landscape views and cityscapes from all over Switzerland, which they offered in mostly small-format albums.

Identity and control

In 1854, Parisian photographer André Eugène Disdéri patented a process that initially enabled eight pictures, and later as many as twelve, to be taken on a single glass plate and enlarged. This allowed productivity to be increased enormously and the price to be reduced. From the 1860s onwards, a veritable 'cartomania' arose throughout Europe: The small-format pictures became affordable for the general public as 'cartes de visite'. Portraits, always with the same props, were produced and distributed en masse. The individual photographic portrait also led to a new self-awareness. General Henri Dufour, for example, hated being photographed; never satisfied with the resulting picture, he complained that photography disfigured his appearance and made him look years older.

In some portraits, photographers most notably tried to bring out their own fantasies – in staged shots of peasants or of girls in traditional costume, for instance, which did not match reality but constructed a vague ideal image of 'Swissness' that was meant to set itself apart from 'foreign'. Traugott Richard was a master of this genre. He sold vast quantities of his series *Costumes Suisses* in a wide variety of versions. This also brought him considerable success at international exhibitions. In Switzerland itself, photographs of men dressed up as lake dwellers or battle participants helped to form the new state's identity, long before the Rütli myth took over this role.

Earlier than elsewhere, photography was also used in Switzerland to identify the foreign within the country's borders, and to integrate the marginalised into society, so to speak, by means of photographs oriented towards bourgeois portrait photography. The photograph thus became an instrument of state control. In 1852 and 1853, this was the case with Carl Durheim's portraits of over 200 homeless and vagrant people who, after the founding of the state in 1848, had been shunted from canton to canton. This unique group of portraits, produced on behalf of the Department of Justice and Police under Federal Councillor Jonas Furrer of Winterthur, marks the start of so-called mugshot photography: These photographs were reproduced as lithographs and compiled as a mugshot sheet that was issued to the cantonal police stations. Later, 'cartes de visite', which could be collected, classified and distributed in albums, were also used in this field.

Portrait photography – a lucrative business?

With the emergence of local portrait studios in the 1850s and the introduction of the glass negative process, portraits could be produced and reproduced relatively cheaply. This commercialisation led to standardisation of images, which were generously retouched as required. The Taeschler brothers in St. Gallen also profited from this trend. At the same time, they had artistic aspirations, producing portrait studies of women, for example, which were carefully arranged, lavishly lit and realised as large-format carbon pigment. The drawing of backgrounds directly on the negative, which they practised in the 1870s in particular, was also criticised, but nevertheless earned them international recognition. However, the Taeschler brothers proved their mastery with a counterpart to this 'glamour' photography: They were the only ones to create highly empathic portraits of the *Bourbaki Army* soldiers interned in St. Gallen. In these pictures, there is no longer any trace of the desolate state in which the soldiers had arrived in

the city in February 1871; they show simple men who do appear foreign, but give off a sense of great dignity.

In Zurich, Johannes Ganz opened a studio in 1867, which soon became a meeting place for the bourgeoisie and celebrities. Alongside his portraits, he made a name for himself with group shots, realised as photomontages on carefully painted backgrounds. Atelier Gysi in Aarau was not only active as a portrait studio for several generations, but also attended to art reproduction and practised almost modern-looking 'still-life photography'. In French-speaking Switzerland, André Schmid's studio is worthy of note: Alongside exterior shots, it produced portraits of criminals. In turn, the large studios run by Émile Pricam and Henri Boissonnas in Geneva acquired an excellent reputation.

Boissonnas wrote the official report on the 'photography' group at the first Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich in 1883: For the first time, the full breadth of the new photography profession was presented. According to Boissonnas, there were already around 200 companies working in the field of photography at the time. Together, they achieved an annual turnover of about 3 million francs, which was not insignificant.

The fact that Romedo Guler of Graubünden was officially and exclusively commissioned to document this exhibition in photographs, and to distribute them in cooperation with Winterthur-based photographer and colotype printer Jacques Brunner, reflects social acceptance of photography. Although there was a separate photo pavilion, no interior photographs of it exist. Only the outside of the pavilion and Guler's own small sales pavilion can be made out in pictures.

Art and artistic ambitions

Ever since it was invented, photography kept drawing closer to art – also in Switzerland. Some artists, for example, worked as photographic portrait colourists, making the monochrome images look like watercolours. Other artists produced their own photographic templates to save themselves the trouble of sketching from a model. Karl Stauffer-Bern is one of the few who are documented as carrying out this practice. Others, such as Barthélemy Menn and Robert Zünd, may also have used photography for study purposes.

Photographers specialising in academies produced templates en masse for artists, one example being Gaudenzio Marconi of Ticino who, as 'Photographe de l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Paris', mainly had images of nude models on offer. Amateur photographer Alexandre de Dardel, who came from a noble Neuchâtel family and kept company with Albert Anker, Auguste Bachelin and Jules Jacot-Guillarmod, was quite different. With his artist friends, he playfully staged templates for their paintings of battles and historical scenes in front of his veranda. Female Swiss artists also made use of photography, such as the Fribourg noblewoman and sculptor Adèle d'Affry, who worked under the pseudonym Marcello: On one hand, it served her as a way to explore her position between aristocrat and artist via staged portraits, and on the other hand, it aided dissemination of her art. She used photography for documentation.

For example, she had one of her sculptures photographed from all sides, which brings to mind the three-dimensional 'photosculpture' technique practised by her mentor Auguste Clésinger in Paris.

The extent to which photography contributed to the popularisation of art, with reproductions rich in detail, is not to be underestimated. Initially though, the brightness of the colours could not yet be replicated correctly. One interesting example is Samuel Heer's reproduction of Charles Gleyre's 1858 history painting *Romans Under the Yoke*, which was intended for the Lausanne Art Museum. When reproducing this huge painting, Heer was still using a single large-format daguerreotype plate, whereas Friedrich Martens was already applying the

negative/positive process and distributed the prints on pre-printed cards.

One special case is that of painters like Otto Frölicher of Solothurn, who reduced their paintings' colour palette to a few shades of grey, creating so-called 'grisailles' so they could be reproduced photographically and published as prints that were pasted into books and albums, usually with explanatory texts. The reproductions were still only black and white, but at least they now correctly replicated the brightness of the tones.

Science and progress pictured

It was not until the end of the 1860s that photography began to play a role in the documentation of science and medicine, in technical developments, urban planning, transport, and the correction of waterways. It thus accompanied the progress that started to fundamentally change Switzerland with the onset of steamboat traffic and the opening of the 'Swiss Northern Railway' (nicknamed the 'Spanish Bun Railway') in 1847. While the Alps were being made accessible, interest in the landscape, its history and alpine fauna also grew.

In the context of research into glaciers and how they form, Paul Vionnet was already photographing menhirs, dolmens, boulders in 1868. He published the large-format book *Les monuments préhistoriques de la Suisse occidentale et de la Savoie* in 1872, with original prints, drawings and extensive texts – a modern-looking inventory, concentrating on photographs of mysterious stones in the landscape. Where necessary, a person, or at least a hat, would appear in frame to indicate scale. From 1876 to 1878, a scientific directory of alpine birds was produced, photographically illustrated by the Taeschler brothers, and a book on animal groups, *Thiergruppen in Stauffer's Museum in Luzern*, was released in 1883; both featured artificial environments, recreated using stuffed animals.

Johannes Ganz and Emil Nicola-Karlen took photographs for physicians at university clinics, as did Émile Pricam in Geneva. The growth of industry was also documented: Jacques Brunner photographed the Neu-Pfungen textile factory in 1885 for instance, and Johann Linck captured the Sulzer brothers' machines in Winterthur. A real apotheosis of industry is seen in a photograph from around 1890 that shows Scherer & Nabholz's inauguration of a pump station in Moscow, which was celebrated with an Orthodox mass. In Bern, Emil Nicola-Karlen made a name for himself, particularly with documentation of extraordinary projects, such as the scientific survey of the Rhone Glacier in 1874. He captured the glacier, which was then still mighty and threatening, in grandiose photographs that mostly show the scientists only as small inconspicuous figures. Already in the 1850s, Pierre Lackerbauer, who had emigrated to Paris, served science in a completely different way: In the context of Louis Pasteur, he supplemented the micrographic scientific drawing with highly aesthetic photographic images.

The Gotthard Railway, a prime example of Switzerland's century-defining construction projects, was built between 1872 and 1882, as documented mainly by Adolphe Braun of Dornach, France. However, Swiss photographers like Johann Linck, Adam Gabler and Florentin Charnaux, as well as Antonio Nessi from Northern Italy, were also involved in comprehensive visual representation of this huge construction project that was to permanently change Switzerland's position in the heart of Europe.

This exhibition was curated by Martin Gasser and Sylvie Henguely.

A comprehensive publication, with both a German and a French version, is being released by Steidl Verlag (Göttingen).

The exhibition features loans from: Archives de la Confrérie des Vignerons, Vevey • Archive Deriaz, Baulmes • Archives de l'Etat de Neuchâtel • Archivio storico della Città di Lugano, Collezione iconografica comunale • Archivio di Stato del Cantone Ticino, Bellinzona • Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv, Bern • Burgerbibliothek Bern • Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, Fribourg • Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, Lausanne / Iconopôle • Centre d'Iconographie de la Bibliothèque de Genève • Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern • Mission 21 / Basler Mission, Basel • Collection Nicolas Crispini, Genève • Daniel Aubert, Le Brassus • Dutoit + Hayoz Fotografie • ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv • Fondation Auer Ory, Hermance • Fondation Marcello • Fotosammlung Ruth und Peter Herzog, Jacques Herzog und Pierre de Meuron Kabinett, Basel • Historisches Museum Olten • H. R. Gabathuler, Photobibliothek.ch, Diessenhofen • Historisches und Völkerkundemuseum St. Gallen • Collection Jean-Jacques de Dardel, Fribourg • Klosterarchiv Einsiedeln • Kantonsbibliothek Vadana, St. Gallen • Kunstmuseum Solothurn • Kunstmuseum St. Gallen • Landesarchiv des Kantons Glarus • Museum Appenzell • Museum für Kommunikation • Musée gruérien, Bulle • Musée historique Lausanne • Musée historique de Vevey • Musée jurassien d'art et d'histoire, Delémont • Museum Ludwig, Köln • Musée suisse de l'appareil photographique, Vevey • Museo Vincenzo Vela, Ligornetto • Médiathèque valais, Martigny • Photo Elysée • Privatsammlung Liestal • Privatsammlung Mendrisio • Privatsammlung Weinfeldern • Privatsammlung Winterthur • Privatsammlung Zürich • Stiftung Albert Anker-Haus, Ins • Stiftung Familie Fehlmann • Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Volkskunde, Basel • Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek, Graphische Sammlung, Bern • Staatsarchiv des Kantons St. Gallen • Staatsarchiv des Kantons Thurgau • Staatsarchiv des Kantons Zürich • Stiftung Schloss Thun • Stadtmuseum Aarau • Stadtarchiv der Ortsbürgergemeinde St. Gallen • Sammlung W. + T. Bosshard • Winterthurer Bibliotheken / Sammlung Winterthur • Zentralbibliothek Zürich • Stiftung für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Winterthur.

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