

PHOTO LONDON

The Magic Art of French Calotype. Paper Negative Photography 1846 – 1860

An exhibition from Robert Hershkowitz

16 – 19 May 2024, Somerset House

Preview 15 May 2024

Photolondon.org



Charles Nègre, 'Street Vendor', salt print and its waxed paper negative. 1853.

"Photography has attained a magic feeling that neither painting nor drawing could have reached."

— Francis Wey, 1851

"A common conviction amongst the earliest practitioners was that photography teaches the mind to see."

— An observation, R.H.

"Photographs are more than tales, they are facts endowed with convincing brute force."
— Auguste Salzmann, 1855

When the pursuit and acquisition of fine photographs became the common passion of a very mixed group of art savvy individuals and American and Canadian museums in the late 1970s, early French paper negative photography was considered the most desirable, the prints the most delectable, reanimating 125 years later the love and fascination the Parisian art world felt for this new medium. It's easy to argue this body of work is the finest in the history of the medium. And with historical pedigree.



Humbert de Molard, 'Men under Trellis', 1848 (variant image in the Getty collection).

The British art-going public has had no experience of the most beautiful and intellectually challenging body of work in the history of photography. There are only a few dozen French calotypes in British public collections, which are buried under hundreds of thousands of British examples, and these never exhibited. Imagine if there was no awareness of Courbet, Manet, Millet, Corot and Ingres, and their work was brought to London for the first time in 2024. It would be a revelation. I'm hoping for a similar response on a more modest scale.

Calotype photography is most readily understood by looking at a paper negative and one of its prints. This exhibition has nine vintage positive and negative pairs. In comparison, the major exhibition of French calotypes at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris in 2012 had twelve pairs. Great beauty was ascribed to the negative itself. They were sometimes exhibited without the positives to showcase its dark luminous magic. Five independent negatives will be exhibited.

The photographs in this show are by known masters, the little known and the unknown, these brought to scholarly attention for the first time. Known only by his name — one print signed in the negative — of a total of ten photographs by V, Dijon, three are masterpieces, two here and the third is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The 'Farmyard Scene' is agrarian in content and constructivist in vision, the photographer delighting in the repeated sculptural motif seen in the fowl cage, three cart wheels, ladder and fencing.



V. Dijon, 'Farmyard Scene', albumen print from a waxed paper negative, c.1853

I've had a privileged career when the most rewarding moments, both financially and in an increase of aesthetic awareness, came from simply looking at and living with seductive, early photographs. I want to share the love, hoping some in a new audience will see/sense/feel the magic for the first time. My work done. In the spirit of my haiku:

"The art of lazy/ Sit. Think. Harvest finest fruit./ Now time to relax".

— Robert Hershkowitz.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Robert Hershkowitz has been internationally recognised, for more than forty years, as the leading British dealer in fine early European photographs. He curated 'The Essential Fenton' show at Photo London 2019, has written a number of articles on P.H.Emerson, and is the author of 'The British Photographer Abroad: The First Thirty Years'. His clients include The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC; The National Gallery, London; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Getty; the Chicago Art Institute; the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; and the National Gallery of Canada, amongst other major museums.

At Photo London 2024, Paula Hershkowitz (co director of RH Ltd), curates a booth celebrating British artists, including, Talbot, Fenton, Cameron, Carroll and Tripe.

'The Magic Art of French Calotype. Paper Negative Photography 1846 – 1860' is on show in the Embankment West Gallery at Somerset House. It is one of four Public Programme exhibitions for Photo London 2024, alongside: 'Silent Stories' by the 2024 Master of Photography Valérie Belin; 'See/Change: Art Collection Deutsche Börse @25'; and 'Belmond Legends' featuring the artists Coco Capitán, Rosie Marks and Letizia Le Fur.

For information about the Public Programme exhibitions, Awards and Talks programme visit:
<https://photolondon.org/public-programme/>

For further information about Photo London 2024 and to book tickets visit:
<https://photolondon.org/>.

PRESS INFORMATION

For information on the exhibitors at Photo London 2024 and to access press images, please visit the [media kit](#).

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