

Gaucheraud, "Fine Arts—The Daguerotype," 6 January 1839

(keywords: Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, Nicephore Niépce, Hippolyte Gaucheraud, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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FINE ARTS.
THE DAGUEROTYPE.

Paris, 6th January, 1839.

WE have much pleasure in announcing an important discovery made by M. Daguerre, the celebrated painter of the Diorama. This discovery seems like a prodigy. It disconcerts all the theories of science in light and optics, and, if borne out, promises to make a revolution in the arts of design.

M. Daguerre has discovered a method to fix the images which are represented at the back of a camera obscura; so that these images are not the temporary reflection of the object, but their fixed and durable impress, which may be removed from the presence of those objects like a picture or an engraving.

Let our readers fancy the fidelity of the image of nature figured by the camera obscura, and add to it an action of the solar rays which fixes this image, with all its gradations of lights, shadows, and middle tints, and they will have an idea of the beautiful designs, with a sight of which M. Daguerre has gratified our curiosity. M. Daguerre cannot act on paper; he requires a plate of polished metal. It was on copper that we saw several points of the Boulevards, Pont Marie, and the environs, and many other spots, given with a truth which Nature alone can give to her works. M. Daguerre shews you the plain plate of copper: he places it, in your presence, in his apparatus, and, in three minutes, if there is a bright summer sun, and a few more, if autumn or winter weaken the power of its beams, he takes out the metal and shews it to you, covered with a charming design representing the object towards which the apparatus was turned. Nothing remains but a short mechanical operation—of washing, I believe—and the design, which has been obtained in so few moments, remains unalterably fixed, so that the hottest sun cannot destroy it.

Messrs. Arago, Biot, and Von Humboldt, have ascertained the reality of this discovery, which excited their admiration; and M. Arago will, in a few days, make it known to the Academy of Sciences.

I add some further particulars. Nature in motion cannot be represented, or at least not without great difficulty, by the process in question. In one of the views of the Boulevards, of which I have spoken, all that was walking or moving does not appear in the design; of two horses in a hackney coach on the stand, one unluckily moved its head during the short operation; the animal is without a head in the design. Trees are very well represented; but their colour, as it seems, hinders the solar rays from producing their

image as quickly as that of houses, and other objects of a different colour. This causes a difficulty for landscape, because there is a certain fixed point of perfection for trees, and another for all objects the colours of which are not green. The consequence is, that when the houses are finished, the trees are not, and when the trees are finished, the houses are too much so.

Inanimate nature, architecture, are the triumph of the apparatus which M. Daguerre means to call after his own name—*Daguerotype*. A dead spider, seen in the solar microscope, is finished with such detail in the design, that you may study its anatomy, with or without a magnifying glass, as if it were nature itself; not a fibre, not a nerve, but you may trace and examine. For a few hundred francs travellers may, perhaps, be soon able to procure M. Daguerre's apparatus, and bring back views of the finest monuments, and of the most delightful scenery of the whole world. They will see how far their pencils and brushes are from the truth of the *Daguerotype*. Let not the draughtsman and the painter, however, despair—the results obtained by M. Daguerre are very different from their works, and, in many cases, cannot be a substitute for them. The effects of this new process have some resemblance to line engraving and mezzotinto, but are much nearer to the latter: as for truth, they surpass everything.

I have spoken of the discovery only as it regards art. If what I have heard is correct, M. Daguerre's discovery tends to nothing less than a new theory on an important branch of science. M. D. generously owns that the first idea of his process was given him, fifteen years ago, by M. Nieps [Niépce—Ed.], of Chalons-sur-Saone; but in so imperfect a state, that it has cost him long and persevering labour to attain the object.

H. GAUCHERAUD.

[From the "Gazette de France," of January 6, 1839.]

Previously to receiving the above, we had written the following paragraph.—*Ed. L. G. Nature Painted by Herself*.—A French journal contains a remarkable account of experiments with the *Camera Lucida*, the result of which is the exact and actual preservation of the impressions reflected by natural images upon copper plates. What the process is we are not told, but, as far as we understand it, by exposing the copper to these reflections, and immediately rubbing it over with a certain material, the likeness of whatever is so impressed is retained with perfect accuracy. Some difficulties occur where there is motion in the objects, whether animals, or leaves of trees stirred by the wind, &c.; but, if really true, this is a very extraordinary discovery for the fine arts. Some of our readers may be aware that, some fourteen or fifteen years ago, Sir H. Davy and other scientific men amongst us, strenuously endeavoured to attain this desideratum; and by means of *nitrate of silver*, upon which light and shade produced certain effects, seemed to have all but accomplished their end. It was not however complete; for the changes in colour were too evanescent to admit of permanent fixture. We shall be glad to find the French experimenters more successful.

[End of text. Variant spelling of "daguerotype" (daguerreotype) is per original text. Bracketed text, "From the 'Gazette de France,' of January 6, 1839" is as per original text presentation.—ed.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The writer of the main portion of this text is the author and "*correspondent de l'Institut [de France]*," Hippolyte Gaucheraud. (See *Mémoires et Dissertations sur les Antiquités Nationales*, Paris: Dumoulin, 1846, p. xxx. See also WorldCat for several titles by

Gaucheraud.) Gaucheraud implies that he saw Daguerre's images first-hand; this author has yet to locate confirming information.

To this editor's knowledge, this text is the earliest English-language announcement concerning the daguerreotype. The final paragraph is curious in that it seems to imply the existence of another article published prior to the 6 January 1839 *Gazette de France* text. This editor is unaware of the implied article and would welcome any information regarding the matter. This text is mentioned in a subsequent issue (No. 1154 [2 March 1839]: 137–39) wherein Francis Bauer disputes (in favor of Nicephore Niépce) the priority of invention being given to Daguerre.

This text (less the final paragraph) is cited in: Aaron Scharf, *Pioneers of Photography: an Album of Pictures and Words* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1976): 41. Scharf notes that this announcement pre-empted the official announcement made by Francois Arago at a meeting of the Academie des Sciences on 7 January 1839.

Further citation information for the original *Gazette de France* text is provided as "La GAZETTE DE FRANCE. Edition des Provinces et de l'Extérieur. – Dimanche, 6 Janvier 1839. – 2°. [4] S."¹

1. See: <http://photobibliothek.ch/seite003b1.html>

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