

“B.”, “Daguerreotypes at the Fair,” October 1852

(keywords: Marcus Aurelius Root, Samuel Root, Jeremiah Gurney, Meade Brothers, Charles R. Meade, Henry W. M. Meade, Silas A. Holmes, Henry E. Insley, Brinkerhoff & Co., John DeWitt Brinkerhoff (Brinckerhoff), George W. A. Holt, William H. Butler, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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—As we have not had time to visit the fair of the American institute, we engaged a gentleman well calculated to judge of the daguerreotypes there exhibited, to inspect and give us his impressions in regard to them. He has sent us the following:—

DAGUERREOTYPES AT THE FAIR.

Mr. SNELLING—DEAR SIR,—Having paid several visits to the Fair at Castle Garden, I am induced to note down for the *Photographic Art-Journal* a few remarks concerning the various specimens on exhibition by the Daguerrean Artists.

There are not as many competitors for the prize this year as in former years, still the specimens exhibited evince much taste and skill, and plainly show that our art is constantly progressing.

The pictures by Mr. Root who received the highest premium last year, are not any improvement on those which were exhibited at that time; indeed many of them are the same, which should not necessarily be the case, for the Art is certainly capable of great variety—we see the same beautiful conception of the old Arm Chair, which of itself is well worthy of credit—we should have been pleased to have seen also with this another, or more than one of this same class of pictures.

Mr. Gurney has some specimens which reflect great credit on his skill and are such as will command the mede of praise from all the brethren of the Art, especially those of the largest size or double whole plate portraits; and if we mistake not, he will bear the palm of superiority this year at the final decision.

The Brothers Meade, have greatly improved their style of pictures during the past year, and have placed themselves in the front rank of the profession; not only by their skill displayed in their arrangement of position, &c., but in their exquisite finish attained in the preparation of the plate, which is by far the most important feature of a good daguerreotype.

They have also some new styles of shading, which they seem pleased to call “Rembrandt style.” They are, of themselves worthy of favorable notice; and, although their customers may not be inclined to purchase such pictures, still they are varieties of the art, and tend to show the versatility of a true daguerrean artist. There will be a close competition, as indeed their should be, between such artists as the Messrs. Meades and Mr. Gurney. Each show their own peculiar style, and those that may be pleased with one may not be so with the other—thereby awarding to both the merit of pleasing all.

In close proximity to Mr. Root's pictures, we observe some excellent specimens by Mr. Holmes of views taken at Greenwood. They are of themselves works of art, depicting the double art of sculpture and the art of Daguerre; appealing also the finer emotions of the heart—which is indeed true of all art—and bringing to our view the last resting-place of our near and dear friends. How appropriate then for us to possess copies of monuments which are so well executed by Mr. Holmes.

Mr. Insley has also a frame containing some peculiar specimens of the art. They are mostly executed with light backgrounds having the shadings very heavy—and show much skill in manipulating to produce such results. They are, consequently, pleasing specimens of the art.

Passing along the upper gallery we observe some well executed daguerreotypes of Messrs. Brinkerhoff & Co., who, although they have not long been engaged in the business, nevertheless evince much skill, and show themselves masters of the art by the exhibition of some on the double whole size plate. Their style, however, is quite different from others—and that is a peculiar feature of this art; that each artist can display his pictures, and there will be such a marked difference, that to the eye of one acquainted with the various styles they each may be designated at a glance.

We observe also some specimens of photography by Mr. Holt, which are, perhaps, equal to any before of this style, known as Talbotypes or paper pictures. Still they are not such as please the public taste.

The fact that all these pictures taken on paper, require so much retouching by the hand of the painter will never recommend them to those who value the faithfulness of a daguerreotype. These specimens of Mr. Holt are not any improvement on those exhibited by Messrs. Langenheim a few years ago, if indeed, they are so well executed, and we all know, that he was unable with all his facilities to enlist the energies of the daguerrean fraternity in the prosecution of that peculiar style of pictures. And such we fear will be the result of those who are striving to excel in this branch of the art.

There is a field sufficiently wide in the daguerreotype itself to enlist all our energies, and there are many untrodden paths yet where those who persevere may excel, for the highest excellence is not yet attained in many of the beautiful processes known to our art.

In connexion with this peculiar art we may mention the style known as "*daguerreotypes in oil*," on exhibition by Mr. Butler. They are indeed very fair specimens of small cabinet portraits in oil. But as far as being daguerreotypes with all the faithfulness so peculiar to them they are no more to be compared to them, than a rushlight is to the noon-day sun, from which our beautiful productions emanate. Their whole beauty and truthfulness is destroyed by entirely covering the expression, as indeed the whole plate is painted over by the hands of the artist.

There are a few others who have specimens, and such as would recommend themselves only to those who may want a very cheap daguerreotype. Of these, we have no word of praise nor indeed of censure. Their style is also peculiar as well as their price—and, graduated according to it, they are not indeed worth much more. There are some other artists who should not withhold their specimens from the Fair who have in former years been foremost in the field, and we trust that such names as Brady and Lawrence and Beckers may figure more conspicuously in the Fair to be held next May at Reservoir Square.—Yours,
B.

Since the above was written we have learned that Mr. Gurney has taken the gold medal prize of the American Institute.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

Commentary of the Root brothers daguerreotype series, "The Old Arm Chair" (which was also exhibited the year prior) is found in "Daguerreotypes at the Fair," *New-York Daily Tribune* 11:3269 (9 October 1851): 5.¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8510035_DAGS-FAIR_NYD-TRIB_1851-10-09.pdf

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