

Evolution of photography over the centuries



Presentation: To my view photography it s a way to describe things, a way to express yourself and to show to the people how you feel and also to show things that you can see with your eyes at a certain moment.

It s so interesting to grasp an idea in an image.

This work was initially meant to tackle on the photography of the 20th century, but this approach would be too limited and even unfair. Therefore, i ve decided to go back to the roots of photography and highlight the evolution it has gone through over the centuries.

The first part of this paper is dedicated to the 19th century and it s focused on the evolution of photography from a technical point of view. It was an intensive period characterized by revolutionary inventions and techniques. To my point of view it s necessary or at least advisable to know the technical processes of how a phtography comes into being because this way you can get a better understanding of your camera and of what it could do for you.

Definitely photography is more than pressing a botton and the efforts people put in developing techniques and in getting every time better pictures reflect their struggle to fight against the cruel passing of time and the transitory nature of things.

Taking a photograph is like an attempt to touch eternity, to make time stand still for a moment. But this is only one point of view out of many philosophical thoughts that shaped the concept of photography.

The second part of the work deals with photography in the 20th century, a period where photography reached new levels of technical developments

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and new missions. The 20th century was marked by tragic events, such as the two world wars and photography played an important part in building our historical legacy and in shaping our conscience as human beings.

The word photography comes from the Greek 'phos' which means 'light' and 'grapho' which means 'to write'. The word was coined by Sir John Herschel who made revolutionary contributions and set up the basis to the way photography was being processed in the 19th century.

Photography has come into being through a long series of discoveries which have taken place along the centuries. The first idea of photography was embodied by the camera obscura box which was one of the first steps that led to photography. But while the camera obscura was more a device of exploring physical laws, the first permanent photograph, close to the modern concept we have today about photography, was taken in 1826 by Nicéphore Niépce. The photo was called 'View from the Window at Le Gras' and it was the result of 8 hour-exposure while the sun illuminated the buildings on both sides.

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View from the Window at Le Gras by Nicéphore Niépce.

19th Century

To understand the modern photography of 20th century, it's important to explain the different photographic process of 19th century .

The first one it s called daguerreotype (1839). Its a process which was invented by Daguerre using silver on a copper plate.

The French government bought the patent and immediately made it public domain.

Although this process results to be the predecessor of the actual photography called Polaroid.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Camera of daguerreotype.

Your browser may not support display of this image. ' Boulevard du Temple' by Daguerre.

The second one is the calotype process which was invented by William Fox Talbot in 1840. He coated paper smeets with silver chloride* to create and intermediate negative image. But the calotype gabe an image which was not very precise (it hasn t the sharpness of the daguerreotype).

Your browser may not support display of this image. Camera of calotype.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Paris by William Fox Talbot.

The third one it s called wet plate and it was invented by Frederick Scott Archer* and Gustave Le Gray in 1850.

Despite its disadvantage, wet plate collodion became enormously popular. It was used for portraiture, landscape work, architectural photography and art photography.

This new process is called like this because the plaque had to stay wet during all the process of making and revealed of images.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Process of wet plate.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Camera wet plate.

Your browser may not support display of this image. 'Sea' by Frederick Scott Archer.

The last one is gelatine bromide, this is a new process invented by R. L. Maddox in 1871 and improved in 1878 thanks to the researches of Charles E. Bennett*.

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* Relater to coating photographic plates or paper with gelatine emulsion.

The emulsion is run into a trough A containing a metal roller B, which revolves in the emulsion. One end of a scraper C rests against this roller and takes off the emulsion, which it delivers on to the plates P.

The plates are carried forward by an endless band F, and delivered to a second endless band L which passes through a chamber M cooled by ice.

This second hand travels at a greater speed than the first so as to separate

the plates. Below the plates is another endless hand J which washes the plates.'

Your browser may not support display of this image. Kodak.

20th Century

At the beginnings of the 20th century photography is no longer a mere subject of technical improvements. It turned to be one of the most flourishing and richest periods in which photography became a powerful and unconventional expression of the modern consciousness.

It was at the early 20th century when photography gained the recognized status of an art form with a well-defined aesthetic roles and trends.

Lively debates as whether the photographer s imagination was chiefly at work before or after the shutter was pressed envisioned and actualized a completely new understanding of photography's strengths.

One of the trends of the time, the straight photography, it was defined as a medium as capable of artistic expression as painting or sculpture.

Avant-garde artists, commercial illustrators, and journalists turned to photography as if seeking to discover through its mechanisms and materials a new artistic vehicle that captured best the soul of those times.

The artist and theorist L szl Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) gave a new aesthetic role to photography, described as a " new vision" rooted in the technological culture of the twentieth century. It seems that the philosophical ideas the governed at that time – the fragmented sense of self, the rapid pace of
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modern life, the burst of subconsciousness – had a powerful influence on the way photography was perceived and produced. Abstract photograms, photomontages composed of fragmented images, the combination of photographs with modern typography and graphic design in posters and magazine pages were unconventional techniques that modernized photography.

In France, Surrealism was the gravitational center for avant-garde photography between the wars. Launched in 1924 by the poet Andr Breton, the Surrealist movement aimed at the psychic and social transformation of the individual through the replacing of bourgeois conventions with new values of spiritual adventure, poetry, and eroticism. Essentially a philosophical and literary movement, Surrealism was greatly indebted to the techniques of psychoanalysis, and Freud's research into free association and dream imagery. Surrealist photographers made use of such techniques as double exposure, combination printing, and reversed tonality to evoke the union of dream and reality.

During the 1920s, the mass media grew particularly in Germany, which had more illustrated periodicals, with greater circulation, than any other country in the world. In addition, hundreds of newspapers and magazines catered to special interests. There were fashion journals, various magazines promoting health and sport. As the number of new illustrated magazines increased, competition among publications grew keener and editors began to experiment with more dynamic designs and page layouts.

To close this period I would like to tell two artists of this 20s because i think that their works are very interesting:

Hans Bellmer: (March 13, 1902 February 23, 1975) was a German artist, best known for the life-sized pubescent female dolls he produced in the mid-1930s.

Your browser may not support display of this image. In this work, Bellmer explicitly sexualized the doll as a young girl. On the other hand, the doll incorporated the principle of “ ball joint” , which was inspired by a pair of sixteenth-century articulated wooden dolls in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.

Man Ray: (August 27, 1890 - November 18, 1976), was an American artist who spent most of his career in Paris, France. Your browser may not support display of this image. He was a significant contributor to both the Dada and Surrealist movements, although his ties to each were informal. Best known in the art world for his avant-garde photography.

From the 30s the word ‘ documentary’ takes on a moral and politician connotations , highly positive, associated with the conquest of truth.

For the frist time in history appears the photojournalism. It is a kind of photography that delivers events through a photo, that spreads facts of reality throughout the world but it also carries a message.

The posibility of print photographs next to the text in the newspaper and magazines was invetigate durint the 19th century through different poribilities like the lithograph or woodcut.

But the photojournalism face technical problems (in the photographic capture), as the emulsions still had very low sensitivities then to take a night photograph or to take it in an interior force you to use a flash which was of magnesium in that time. This must be added that large format cameras and the constant need of a tripod made the journalist was very limited to work in the 'documentary photographic discourse'.

In 1929 in USA took place the 'Wall Street Crash' that triggered the Great Depression.

With this crash the peasants were in a huge poorness while drought was putting things more difficult, then the goverment establish a department about photography-press (which was called Farm Security Administration) to document this.

To end with this project and continuing with the structure of the work in the 20s I m going to explain some important artists of th is period:

Your browser may not support display of this image. Eug ne Atget:(February 12, 1857 - August 4, 1927) was a French photographer noted for his photographs documenting the architecture and street scenes of Paris.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Bernice Abbott: (July 17, 1898 - December 9, 1991), was an American photographer.

She wanted to make the same as Atget in Paris, but she in New York. She introduced some changes because she didn t want only to photographed buildings that they were going to disappeared. She wanted to explained also the continuing changes of a city like NY.

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Abott asked for scholarships to take the project to end, and finally the state gave her and put to her disposition documentary filmmakers and a team of historians to complete her photos.

Your browser may not support display of this image. August Sander: (November 17, 1876 – April 20, 1964) was a German portrait and documentary photographer.

He was one of the most important photographers of the 20th century. Is above its principle of neutrality which will take a lot of importance to the end of the decade of the 20s.

This effect of impersonality is given by: sharpness, frontal, simple frames and the rigid pose of the models.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Jacob Riis: (May 3, 1849 – May 26, 1914), was a Danish American social reformer, and a great photographer. He got his photos with flash, because for him the flash was a way to come to places that normally the camera without the help of it couldn't do it. He wanted his photos to aware people of the poorness.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Lewis Hine: (September 26, 1874 – November 3, 1940) was an American sociologist and photographer.

Between 1904 and 1905 he photographed the arrival of many immigrants at Ellis Island from southern and eastern Europe. There were a lot of xenophobia towards these immigrants.

And in 1906 he made a new project about the problem of child labor.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Dorothea Lange: (May 26, 1895 – October 11, 1965) was an influential American documentary photographer and photojournalist, best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Lange's photographs humanized the tragic consequences of the Great Depression and profoundly influenced the development of documentary photography.

Your browser may not support display of this image. Walker Evans: (November 3, 1903 – April 10, 1975) was an American photographer best known for his work for the Farm Security Administration documenting the effects of the Great Depression. Much of Evans's work from the FSA period uses the large-format, 8×10-inch camera. He said that his goal as a photographer was to make pictures that are “literate, authoritative, transcendent”.