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Earliest Photographs of Eastern American Landscapes Featured in Exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington



Henry Peter Bosse, *Construction of Rock and Brush Dam, L.W.*, 1891
cyanotype
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mary and Dan Solomon

Washington, DC—Before venturing west to capture America's frontier in paintings and photographs, 19th-century artists explored the eastern landscape, which served as a powerful source of mythmaking for a nation finding its identity in the nineteenth century. However, with the exception of images from the Civil War, photography of the East during the period has never before been the exclusive focus of an exhibition or catalog. As the first of its kind, ***East of the Mississippi: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography*** will explore this fundamental chapter in America's photographic history through 175 photographs, including daguerreotypes, salted paper prints, albumen prints, stereo cards, and albums. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, West Building from March 12 through July 16, 2017, the exhibition showcases photographers who documented the nation's transition over the course of the century, exploring the untouched wilderness, the devastation of the Civil War, and the dramatic transformations of industrialization.

"We are delighted to present the first exhibition devoted to this foundational period in both the history of photography and of our nation," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "The assembling of such an extraordinary selection of photographs, many of which are rarely displayed, could not have been undertaken without the generous support of the Trellis Fund and Kate and Wes Mitchell."

Exhibition Organization and Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art in association with the New Orleans Museum of Art, where it will be on view from October 5, 2017 through January 7, 2018.

The exhibition is made possible through the generous support of the Trellis Fund. Additional funding is kindly provided by Kate and Wes Mitchell.

Exhibition Highlights

Organized chronologically and thematically, ***East of the Mississippi*** begins with some of the earliest American photographs, created shortly after news of the Frenchman Jacques-Louis-Mandé Daguerre's invention reached eastern cities in late 1839. While Niagara Falls was already a favorite subject for paintings and prints, the first extant daguerreotypes of the natural wonder were made by British scientist Hugh Lee Pattinson in April of 1840. Soon after, dentist Samuel Bemis captured New England's White Mountains in an extraordinary series of daguerreotypes.

As areas of the East Coast's picturesque terrain became a popular destination for urban dwellers of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, photography became a means of marketing sites to tourists. In July of 1845 the Langenheim Brothers adopted the panorama format popular in the nineteenth century by making five daguerreotypes of Niagara Falls and mounting them side-by-side in a single frame. Photographers James Wallace Black and Franklin White journeyed to the White Mountains, making some of the earliest series of salted paper prints of the area, while others such as James

McClees, Frederick DeBourg Richards, and Jay Dearborn Edwards trained their cameras on the built environment as urban centers experienced growth and transformation. George Kendall Warren, a pioneer of the college yearbook, photographed landscapes around college campuses including West Point.

The exhibition continues with photographs and paintings from the late 1850s and early 1860s, demonstrating the close ties between the two media as photographers sought to make landscapes more deeply attuned to contemporary aesthetic concern. Influenced by the ideas of painter Thomas Cole, art critic John Ruskin, and transcendentalist philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, these photographers worked in close collaboration with painters or were even painters themselves. Photographer John Moran and his brother, the painter Thomas Moran, worked side by side in the environs of Philadelphia and the mountains of Pennsylvania. Samuel Masury photographed the Loring Estate on the coast of Beverly, Massachusetts as John Frederick Kensett painted the same landscape for *Coastal Scene* (c. 1860-1870). Further north, Charles and Edward Bierstadt collaborated with their brother Albert on a series of albumen prints of the White Mountains before Albert painted a similar scene in 1863, *Mountain Brook*.

The following section presents a range of photographs that document the impact of the Civil War on the eastern American landscape, showing selections from two of the most significant photographic publications of the 19th century—Alexander Gardner's *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War* (1866) and George Barnard's *Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign* (1866), both of which revealed the modification and devastation of the land from the war. Also featured are Andrew J. Russell's photographs of the building of military infrastructure in northern Virginia.

Two sections focus on the many ways in which photographers approached landscapes altered by industrialization. Thomas H. Johnson captured the coal mines expanding across northeastern Pennsylvania, while James F. Ryder and William H. Rau were hired by railroad companies, in 1862 and the 1890s respectively, to record newly laid train routes and showcase the scenic views made possible by the new infrastructure. Included are seven of Henry Peter Bosse's cyanotypes created while on a mapmaking survey of the upper Mississippi River. Undertaken to plan improvements to the river aimed at facilitating commerce and industry, the series illustrate photography's role in shaping development.

Finally, the exhibition presents photographers in the last decades of the century who made a living marketing the East's natural beauty while also advocating for its preservation. George Barker produced striking mammoth-plate albumen prints of Niagara Falls and Florida resorts. After finding success selling scenes of the Adirondacks to tourists and industrialists, Seneca Ray Stoddard made photographs such as *Drowned Lands* (c. 1888) which captured the forest ravaged by the timber industry. Stoddard used his photographs to advocate for the passing of a law to create Adirondack Park. In Wisconsin, Henry Hamilton Bennett began by selling stereographic prints of the Dells to the growing number of the river's steamboat tourists. He later protested plans for a dam that would submerge the sandstone formations he had so beautifully photographed. Finally, works by Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen conclude the exhibition, hinting at the future of American landscape photography in the 20th century.

Curator, Catalog, and Related Activities

The exhibition is organized by Diane Waggoner, curator of nineteenth-century photographs, National Gallery of Art.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog copublished by Yale University Press and written by Diane Waggoner; with additional essays by Russell Lord, Freeman Family Curator of Photographs, New Orleans Museum of Art and Jennifer Raab, assistant professor in the history of art, Yale University. Featuring 220 color illustrations, the 288-page hardcover catalog will be available at shop.nga.gov/, or by calling (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; faxing (202) 789-3047; or e-mailing mailorder@nga.gov.

Lectures

Introduction to East of the Mississippi: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography

March 12, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Diane Waggoner, curator of nineteenth-century photographs, National Gallery of Art. A signing of the exhibition catalog *East of the Mississippi: Nineteenth-Century American Landscape Photography* follows.

John Moran and Art Photography in America: 1855-1875

May 14, 2017 at 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Mary Panzer, historian of photography and American culture, curator, and writer

Concerts

Kruger Brothers and Kontras Quartet

Appalachian Concerto

Sunday, March 19, 3:30 p.m.

East Garden Court

Apollo's Fire

Sugarloaf Mountain: An Appalachian Gathering

Sunday, April 2, 4:00 pm
East Garden Court

Press Contact:

Isabella Bulkeley, (202) 842-6864 or i-bulkeley@nga.gov

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Department of Communications
National Gallery of Art
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785
phone: (202) 842-6353
e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Anabeth Guthrie
Chief of Communications
(202) 842-6804
a-guthrie@nga.gov

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Exhibition Press Release

[Exhibition Checklist](#) (PDF 468 kb)

[Department of Photographs](#)

CURATOR BIOGRAPHY

[Diane Waggoner](#)

Curator of Nineteenth-Century Photographs, Department of Photographs
National Gallery of Art, Washington

PRESS CONTACT

Isabella Bulkeley
(202) 842-6864
i-bulkeley@nga.gov

Questions from members of the media may be directed to the Department of Communications at (202) 842-6353 or pressinfo@nga.gov

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