



The Photogram

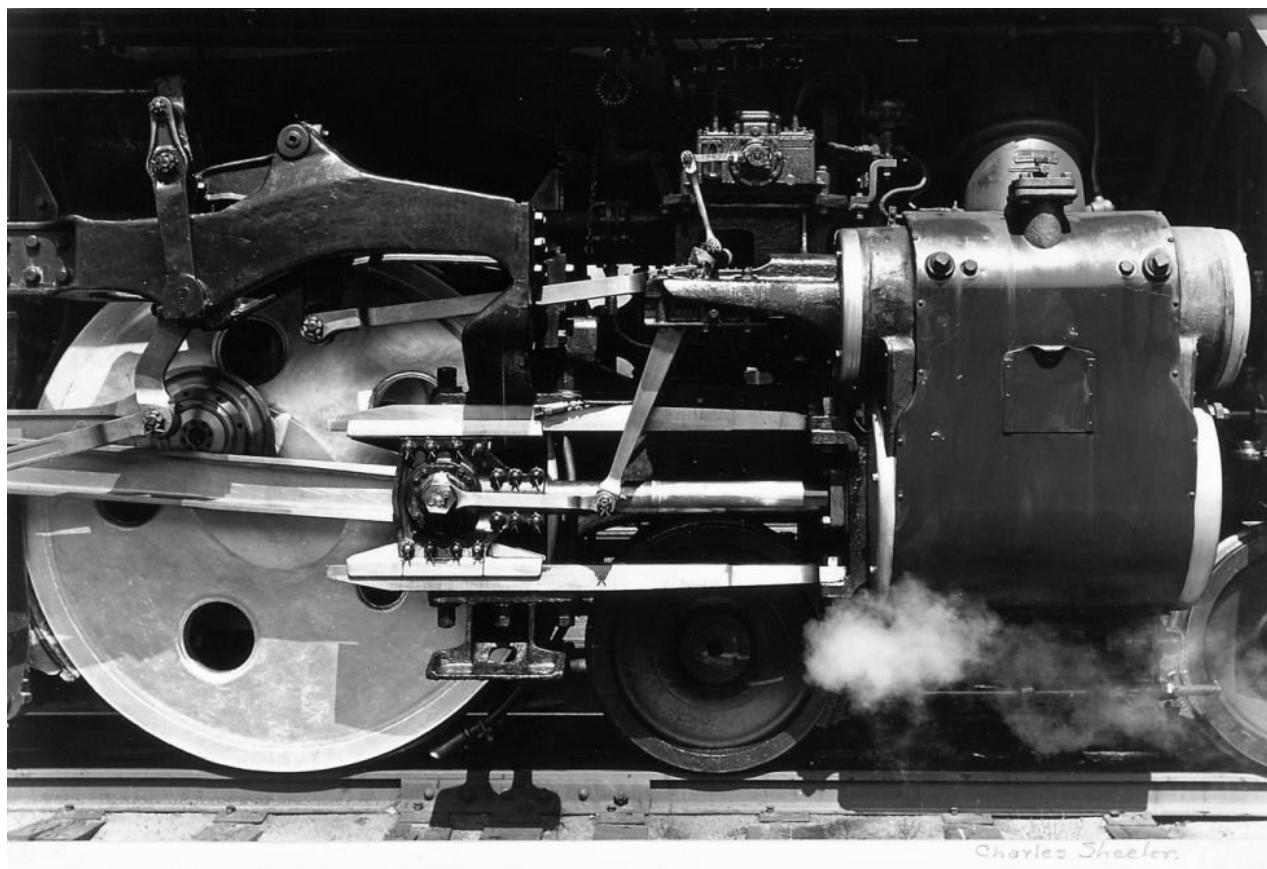
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Charles Sheeler, *Wheels*, 1939; gelatin silver print, Founders Society Purchase, John S. Newberry Fund and J. Lawrence Buell, Jr. Fund, The Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

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THE PHOTOGRAM welcomes contributions to its pages from both MiPHS members and non-members. To submit an article, review, occasional photo ad (MiPHS members only) or informational item for publication, write to:

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SUBMISSION DEADLINES:

June 1 (July-Summer issue)
August 1 (September-October issue)
October 1 (November-December issue)
January 1 (February-March issue)
March 1 (April-May issue)

The MICHIGAN PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an organization dedicated to advancing an understanding and appreciation of the history of photography through membership meetings, special events and publications, and through shared endeavors with other organizations and the general public. The MiPHS is a 501c3 non-profit corporation chartered by the State of Michigan.

The MiPHS welcomes new members. Dues are \$25 per year (January 1- December 31), \$30 outside the USA, \$15 for students with valid ID. For information and application forms, call 248.549.6026, visit us online at www.miphs.org or write to:

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THE PHOTOGRAPHICALLY ILLUSTRATED BOOK, 1860-1950

Although plans are still tentative, on Saturday, February 9, 2008, Doug Price will give a presentation on "The Photographically Illustrated Book, 1860-1950," at the William L. Clements Library, on the main campus of the University of Michigan, 909 S. University Avenue, in Ann Arbor. The lecture is co-sponsored by MiPHS and the Clements Library. Look for details in the February issue of *The Photogram*.

WE WILL DO IT AGAIN. The September 2007 "Member's Portfolio" issue of *The Photogram* was such a success that we will do it again next September. So keep this in mind and look for one photo or piece of camera equipment in your collection that you would like to share with the members of MiPHS. A call will go out in the April 2008 issue of *The Photogram*. So watch for it!

THE PHOTOGRAM. Copies of *The Photogram* are located in 8 public libraries according to online resource WorldCat: Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI; Detroit Public Library, Detroit, MI; Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI; Yale University Library, New Haven, CT; George Eastman House, Rochester, NY; Rochester Regional Library Council, Fairport, NY; Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin, TX; and the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI. No library, however, has a full run of our newsletter. We will try to fix that.

IN PRINT. Jan Schimmelman's book *The Tintype in America, 1856-1880* has just been published by the American Philosophical Society. Copies may be ordered through their website www.amphilsoc.org or call toll free 1.800.782.3833. Her article "Hamilton Smith & Peter Neff: The American Tintype Patent, 19 February 1856," *The Photogram* 33, no 4 (February-March 2006): 3-7, has been cited by Keith Davis in his new book *The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885*.

DID YOU SEE THIS TV PROGRAM? *Unsolved History: JFK—Death in Dealey Plaza* (2003). The documentary does not cover new material on the Kennedy assassination in 1963, but it does identify the still and film cameras and types of film used by amateurs that day, and the limitations of those photographic images. For those of you who used (and still own) cameras from the period, the program will be fascinating. It is available in DVD from amazon.com

IN MEMORIAM: GEORGE O'NEAL. We are sad to report the death of George O'Neal on August 18. George was a charter member of the Michigan Photographic Historical Society. He served our organization well over the years. He was Vice President for Special Events (1975-76), and for 28 years he and his wife Gene, who died in 2003, co-chaired our Trade Show (1975-2003). We will remember him for his devotion to the history of photography and for his quiet dignity. He will be sorely missed.

SEND A PHOTOGRAM TO A FRIEND. Let us send a *free* copy of *The Photogram* and an invitation to join MiPHS to a friend. Just email Jan Schimmelman at schimmel@oakland.edu or call Cindy Motzenbecker at 248.549.6026.

THE STRANGE QUESTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY AS ART

Notes on the Origins of Collecting Photographic Media at the Detroit Institute of Arts



By Nancy W. Barr

“ . . . if [photography] be allowed to impinge on the sphere of the intangible and the imaginary, on anything that has value solely because man adds something to it from his soul, then woe betide us!” *Charles Baudelaire*, 1859

“ . . . what should we do about photography as art.” *Edgar P. Richardson*, 1953

The definition of photographic art and its status as a creative medium has long been the bane of critics, artists, historians, and museum professionals. In what has perhaps become the most legendary and earliest gripe in the history of photography, French poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire attempted in 1859 to derail the cause of photography as a valid art form. Writing twenty years after the medium’s invention in 1839, Baudelaire saw photography as a mechanical rather than aesthetic process, more akin to modern industry and the masses and completely unrelated to high culture.¹ For Baudelaire, photography was a soulless medium, and not a work of art but a visual document best suited for scientific study—a tool of “factual exactitude”—for the enhancement of tourist’s albums as well as having its proper place in archives and libraries. This was certainly the case at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) where thousands of photographs languished for decades in its research library collection.

Most likely due to lingering sentiments of Monsieur Baudelaire, DIA administrators had never been proactive about establishing a formal policy regarding the acquisition and care of photographs as works of art until the 1950s, when DIA director Edgar P. Richardson began to investigate the question of photography as an art and make way for its place in the museum’s permanent collection and galleries. In his 1953 memo to Graphic Arts curator John Newberry, he contemplated, “what do we do about photography as art . . . I am not satisfied in my own mind that all photographs, whether documents or works of art should be in the library.”²

Richardson felt it was time to put the museum’s “treatment of photography on a new basis” through yearly exhibitions by photographers of historic and aesthetic significance as well as proper collection care. He requested that Graphic Arts curator John Newberry inquire with major museums across the country about their methodologies for dealing with photographs as art.³ Newberry drafted a form letter addressed to curators at major American art institutions asking how “each museum treats its collection of photographs, not those which are reproductive and used purely for reference purposes, but those which stand as distinct works of art on their own.”⁴ Letters of response followed from curators confirming that they indeed had distinguished between historical and reference photographs and art photographs at their respective museums. They indicated that art photographs were cared for in keeping with archival methods standard for works on paper (stored in archival mats and

solander boxes), and works were either incorporated into their print collections or maintained in separate collections and departments of photography.⁵

Prior to the 1950s, the DIA showed little interest in creating a formal acquisition policy for photographs, yet private collectors had deposited photographs at the museum in the early decades of the twentieth century. In rare instances, photographic works were formally accessioned. From 1900 to 1946, donations from private collections accounted for approximately 7,000 late nineteenth-century photographs, largely albumen prints, of sites throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.⁶ The works were thought of as documentary in nature, but it was later found that the collection included works by many American and European pioneers of the medium, including Carleton Watkins, Eadweard Muybridge, Francis Frith and Edouard Baldus among others (fig. 1).⁷ In addition, a group of 19 daguerreotypes and ambrotypes were given to the collection in 1927. The works were part of a larger donation, which included decorative arts pieces that were given to the museum by Mrs. Eugene Beauharnais Gibbs (fig. 2).⁸

There was little interest in 19th-century photography at the time of Richardson’s query into the state of photographic art at the DIA, but by the 1950s, Newberry, primarily a specialist in prints and drawings, had turned his attention to serious exhibitions and acquisitions of photographs from the twentieth century, albeit on modest level. He proposed an exhibition of sig-



Figure 1. Edouard Baldus, *Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile*, 1860-70; albumen print, Gift of P. L. Barter, The Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 2. Unknown photographer, *Mrs. Eugene Beauharnais Gibbs (formerly Mary Elizabeth Hoyt)*, ca. 1860-70; ambrotype with hand coloring, Bequest of Mrs. Eugene Beauharnais Gibbs, The Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 3. Brassai, “Bijou” of Montmartre, ca. 1932; gelatin silver print, Founders Society Purchase, Charles L. Freer Fund, Elliot T. Slocum Fund and Hal H. Smith Fund, The Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

nificant mid-century European photographers organized by the Art Institute of Chicago. “Four European Photographers: Brassai, Robert Doisneau, Izis, and Sabine Weiss” traveled to the DIA in 1955, and works by the artists were also acquired by the museum in the same year. This development is interesting as it signifies the type of work the museum acknowledged as photographic art. The aesthetic concept behind these photographs was documentary in nature, but far from being static visual records, the works were evidence of the photographers’ ability to bring their own personal vision and distinct observations of life to the photographic image. They used the medium to capture the essence of a time and place as it related to a particular history and culture. Brassai, for example, and his fascination with the nocturnal life and underbelly of 1930s Paris can be seen in his iconic image “Bijou” of Montmartre,

1932 (fig. 3). According to the photographer, Bijou—the French term for jewel—was a well-known fixture in the local bars in the bohemian sector of Paris and “the queen of Montmartre’s nocturnal fauna.”

Exhibitions and acquisitions of photography continued to develop at a slow pace in the late 1950s, until Ellen Sharp succeeded John Newberry as curator of Graphic Arts in 1964. Sharp undertook the management of all works on paper seeking to establish and maintain a proper storage area for the entire collection of prints, drawings and photographs. By the late 1960s, she had actively begun to acquire works for the DIA’s photograph collection, and built acquisition funds specifically dedicated to the medium.⁹ In her earliest acquisitions, Sharp sought out works by Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, but with the support of director Dr. Frederick Cummings, the collection grew measurably in the 1980s, with significant works by artists of great historical stature. Most notably from this period is a rare work by artist Charles Sheeler entitled *Wheels*, 1939 (see *Photogram* cover illustration), acquired in 1983. It is considered one of finest examples of photographic modernism in the history of the medium. Sheeler was among the earliest of American artists to embrace an aesthetic informed by the modernist principles of abstraction and experiment with this concept in his paintings, drawings, prints and photographs. In *Wheels*, he paid particular attention to the formal qualities of the subject—the wheels of a state-of-the-art locomotive engine—through an investigation of shape, line and texture in a photographic composition. Often his photographs served a dual purpose as source material for his works in other media, while maintaining their status as independent works of art as was the case with *Wheels*.¹⁰

Interestingly, *Wheels* was the first photographic work purchased at auction by the DIA and came with a record price, which drew international attention to the collection. It was a signal to collectors, dealers and other museums worldwide that the DIA was serious about its belief in and commitment to fine art photographs. Despite the Baudelairean lament that may have colored the early perception of photography as a true art, the DIA’s collection developed steadily over the years through the stewardship of some very enlightened individuals. Today, the collection has grown to over 10,000 photographs and the DIA has been the site of over 100 exhibitions since the 1950s, many organized from the permanent collection and including work by the finest photographers of international renown. It is a testament to the growing reception and appreciation of the medium by art professionals and the public at large as well as a demonstration of the DIA’s continuing commitment to art of all media.

Notes:

1. Baudelaire, Charles, “The Modern Public and Photography,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, A. Trachtenberg, ed. (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 88. This publication cites the essay’s first appearance in 1862, but it appeared as well in Baudelaire’s *Salon* of 1859, published in the *Révue Française*, 1859. Although the Baudelairean argument against photography

as an art is presented here, Trachtenberg includes numerous essays in support of photography as an art by other 19th-century figures significant to the history of the medium, including Henry Fox Talbot and Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, among others.

2. Memo from Edgar P. Richardson to John Newberry, 8 May 1953, in the archives of the department of prints, drawings and photographs, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. Richardson makes note of a decision to move forward with regular planning of exhibitions “of photography in general that the museum ought to stand for.” The issue arose as DIA annual exhibitions of work by members of the Detroit Photographic Salon were getting phased out of the museum (amateur and regional photographers were encouraged to submit to the Michigan Artists Exhibition). Richardson encouraged Newberry to organize at least one fine art photography exhibition per year.

3. Newberry wrote to curators at the Art Institute of Chicago; the Brooklyn Museum; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

4. Letter to A. Hyatt Mayor, 14 May 1953, in the archives of the department of prints, drawings and photographs, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. In 1953, Hyatt Mayor was curator in the department of prints at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Similar letters were sent to print curators at institutions cited in endnote 3.

5. Both the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York established departments of photography in 1940.

6. Memo from Ellen Sharp to Frederick Cummings and F. W. Peters, 20 June 1978, in the archives of the department of prints, drawings and photographs, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan. The memo is a request to director Frederick Cummings and F. W. Peters to approve the transfer of about 1000 photographs from the research library to the Graphic Arts department for proper cataloguing and storage.

7. Works by Edouard Baldus were accessioned in 1946.

8. Mrs. Gibbs was a San Francisco native who settled in the Detroit area with her sister after the death of her husband. The Gibbs collection includes portraits of Mrs. Gibbs, her husband as well as siblings. The collection was formally accessioned in 1927.

9. Richardson retired in 1962 and was succeeded by Willis Woods in that same year. Woods was interested in photography as well and enlisted the assistance of Detroit-area photo historian and photographer Bill Rauhauser to advise on a collection of photography at the DIA. Ellen Sharp frequently consulted with Rauhauser regarding potential acquisitions for the permanent collection. Eventually, he organized exhibitions of photography for the DIA.

10. The photograph *Wheels* was made as a study for the painting *Rolling Power* that is in the collection of Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts. The painting was originally part of a *Fortune* magazine commission on the theme of power in American industry. In addition, Sheeler valued the photograph as a work of art as well and allowed it to be reproduced along with an essay on “Photographic Art” by Edward Weston published in the 1941 *Encyclopedia Britannica*.



Nancy W. Barr is a specialist in modernist and contemporary photography. A native of Detroit, Michigan, she earned degrees in photography and art history from the College for Creative Studies, Detroit, and Wayne State University, Detroit. She worked with collections at the Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, and the Detroit Historical Museum before joining the curatorial staff at the Detroit Institute of Arts as an intern in 1993. She has worked in the department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs as an assistant curator (1996–2004) and associate curator (2005 to present). Nancy has written numerous articles and organized over twenty exhibitions for the DIA including *Images of Identity: Photographs of Native Americans* (1994), *Picturing Paris* (1996), *Women Photographers* (1999), *The Enduring Horizon: American Landscape Photography* (2000), and *Style of the Century: Selections from the DIA's Collection* (2002-03). Most recently, she organized a 2004 residency project with artist Dawoud Bey at Chadsey High School, Detroit, entitled *Dawoud Bey: Detroit Portraits* (2004). She has also organized photography exhibitions for the Center for Photography, Woodstock, and the International Center for Photography, New York City. Her published research includes contributions to the *Photography Quarterly*, *Big* magazine, and DIA's *Bulletin*, as well as entries in the three-volume edition *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Photography* published by Routledge in 2006. Future exhibitions and publications she will undertake for the DIA include Robert Frank's photographs of Detroit and portraiture by contemporary African photographers, as well as a future issue of the DIA's *Bulletin* dedicated solely to the permanent collection of photography. Nancy lives in Ferndale, MI.



C4 camera. With over 300,000 sold, the C4 proved to be a popular amateur's camera with an easy feel in the hand, brilliant viewfinder, fast lens, impressive flash and excellent recommendations from the press.

THE ARGUS C4

A CAMERA FOR THE AMATEUR

By Robert E. Kelly

Modern Photography described the Argus C4 as “. . . definitely not a camera for the professional photographer. But it does offer the amateur a good return on his investment. He gets one of the sturdiest, most rugged, simple to operate 35mm cameras available with an adequately fast lens of a quality suitable for nearly anything he may encounter.” With this kind of carefully chosen wording from the press the general public got the message and purchased over 300,000 Argus C4 cameras.

Argus made the conversion from the earlier Model 21 to the new C4 with some difficulty. A year after the C4's 1951 introduction president Robert E. Lewis stated in the company's annual Progress Report, “I have heard a number of people ask, “Why do we continue the C4 camera when it appears to have so many complications?” He goes on to say that “. . . nearly all of the problems we are currently having in the manufacture of this camera are brought about by our long range plan to further reduce the cost.” Argus faced substantial problems trying to implement new techniques in the production of castings for the case and the power shaft. Through production simplification, they hoped to lower the C4's retail price while increasing sales volume much like they had done when they lowered the price of the C3 in the spring of 1950. That move resulted in a four-fold increase in the number of units sold. In 1953, when this strategy proved successful for the C4, Argus had to rapidly increase their production capacity to meet burgeoning demand.

By 1955 Argus was referring to the C4 as their “premier product.” Premier or not, the C4 faced stiff competition from the Kodak Signet, the Graphic 35, the Ansco Super Regent and the Realist Model B. To fend off that competition, the Argus sales department provided dealers with information making feature and price comparisons that highlighted the unique and superior aspects of the C4. In the company's 1955 Progress Report, President Lewis said, “Sales of the C4 have been beyond our expectation for the past several months, and further increases in production are limited only by the supply of certain parts.” As Lahue and Bailey report, in their book *The American 35mm*, the C4 proved to be very popular with consumers who bought “400% more units per year than the Model 21.”

The design of the C4 is a logical extension of the successful post-war Model 21. There is even reference to a “Model 23 in development” in the 1948 annual Argus Progress Report. Perhaps that was the original model number for what became the

C4. *Modern Photography* magazine reported that, “The C4 is in every way a completely new camera. Examination indicates that the designers aimed at a camera that would include all the important features of a more expensive instrument plus good sturdiness. Apparently a good deal of thought went into making the camera parts do their job in the simplest possible way.”



Model 21 camera. The Argus Model 21 was based on the Argus A3 body and incorporated optics technology developed during WWII. Continuing refinement evolved to be the Argus C4.



C4R camera. The C4R incorporated “rapid” film advance and rewind, as well as an integrated light meter that mounted on the shoe seen on the right front of the camera.

Referring to the viewfinder image as being “extremely brilliant,” the magazine went on to say, “The viewing system is one of the best we have seen on any camera regardless of price.” The addition of an integrated rangefinder and viewfinder also proved popular with the public. Dr. Kenneth Tydings agreed and said in his *Argus Guide Book* that the integrated and bright viewfinder/rangefinder was “a time saver that makes

picture taking more efficient and quicker.” The three-element lens formula for the C4 was also improved to achieve an f2.8 (60% faster than the Model 21).

Issued in 1958, the C4R version incorporated improvements designed to add “rapid” features for the user. In a change from the film winding knobs on the C4, the new C4R used two easy strokes of a thumb lever film advance that also cocked the shutter. Film rewind was also “rapid,” using a pop-up-and-fold-down handle for rewinding the film. An integrated light meter option was incorporated with the CM2 Coupled Exposure Meter that attached to the right front body of the camera. It became obvious later that the short-lived C4R was essentially pre-implementing and testing many features that would be used in the new C44R the following year.



C4 Geiss lens. In 1954, Geiss-America offered wide-angle and telephoto lenses for the C4. The lever seen on the left front of the camera, next to the lens, identifies it as a Geiss modified C4.

Argus made no interchangeable lenses for the C4. However, in 1954 Geiss-America, the same marketing company that imported the Sandmar C3 lenses, announced that Lithagon telephoto and wide-angle lenses were now available for the C4. The camera modification needed, for the new non-Argus lenses, included continued use of the Argus standard 50mm lens. Eventually, Geiss offered a 35mm, 45mm, 100mm, 135mm lens and its own viewfinder. We know now that the reason Argus never adopted the Lithagon lenses, like they did the earlier Sandmar lenses, was that their own interchangeable lenses were being designed and would arrive with the C44 camera.

Collectors have identified several cosmetic variations during C4 production. The early C4 retained the coarse fluted knurling of the previous Model 21, while later models used a finer “coin” like knurling. Eyepiece shape for the viewfinder, initially round, was later converted to rectangular. Early C4’s used the circular leatherette pattern from the back of the Model 21 until supplies were exhausted, at which point a smooth lea-

therette design replaced it. Many other variations can be found. With these cosmetic features, Argus was clearly following its standard practice of exhausting an existing stock of parts and materials before replacing them with new ones.



Black C4 camera. The distinctive back body version of the C4 may have been produced to interest the military. Only a handful of these cameras are in collections today. Photo courtesy of the Phil Sterritt collection.

The most distinctive C4 is a black body version produced in very limited quantities. These may have been created to spark the interest of the U.S. military in using the camera. However, no evidence has been found indicating that the C4 was ever adopted for use by any branch of service. The black body versions used the same leatherette as the standard camera and colored the top housing and back a deep violet/black color. The lens barrel, film counter dial, rangefinder, wind and rewind knobs and shutter speed dials all resemble the standard C4 parts with white-on-black graphics. Fewer than six black body C4 are known to be in collections.

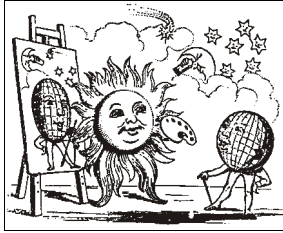
The popularity of the C4 kept it in production through 1957 even after Argus announced in the spring of 1956 that the new "C44 was now ready to replace the C4." In July of 1958, when the C4R was announced as the last gasp of the C4 line, it offered desirable new features for the consumer. Argus continued to keep their long successful marketing strategy in mind as they transitioned their production by providing the C4, C4R, C44 and C44R with increasing features and at prices for every buyer. Consumers responded by purchasing this family of cameras in ever-increasing numbers. The Argus C4 was definitely not a camera for the professional. It was a stylish, sturdy, simple and very successful camera for the amateur.

Selected References:

1. During research for the C4 the following Argus Annual Reports provided data: 1948, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1955.
2. Argus internal publications provided a great deal of information. Both editions of the owners manual (the first is blue and yellow and the second is silver and gray) were used for descriptions. Information on the cameras competition came from the Argus Dealers Newsletter of May 1953 and Argus Eyes in June 1955.
3. *US Camera* magazine covered the introduction of the C4 in its June 1951 issue, and *Modern Photography* magazine provided a review of the camera in October 1954.
4. Kalton C. Lahue and Joseph A. Bailey produced two books with Argus chapters: *Collecting Vintage Cameras, Volume 1, The American 35mm* was published in 1972, and a year later *Glass, Brass & Chrome: The American 35mm Miniature Camera* appeared.
5. Three valuable consumer guidebooks provided information: Jacob Deschin's *Picture Making with the Argus* (1954), Kenneth Tydings's *The Argus 35mm Guide* (1953), and Burt Murphy's *Argus 35mm Photography* (1959).
6. The Argus Collectors Group has conducted an online Argus C4 survey where members and the general public have input key features for over 400 cameras. This data is valuable for the identification of variations.



Bob Kelly started collecting Argus cameras over 25 years ago. When the Internet came along he became a founding member of the Argus Collectors Group and has moderated the email list as well as assisted with the development of the groups initial website and surveys. He is one of a group now writing a book about the history of the Argus Company with a focus on its people and operations as well as the extensive production of cameras, projectors and accessories. For the past 16 years Bob has displayed all facets of Argus at the annual Puget Sound Photographic Collectors Society show. More recently he has assisted with the development of displays at the Argus Museum in Ann Arbor. He is a frequent presenter at the annual Argus Collectors Group meeting in Martinsville, Virginia each May. Bob retired from Boeing two years ago and he also enjoys volunteering at museums and researching railroad history. He lives in Renton, WA.



--- **DAGUERREIAN SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM** ---

The Daguerreian Society will hold its annual symposium in Kansas City, MO, Thursday, November 1, through Sunday, November 4. The opening ceremonies begin on Thursday evening with a wine reception at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, sponsored by the museum's photography department. On exhibition will be "Developing Greatness: The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885." On Friday the symposium will consist of six topics: Keith Davis, "The Making of a History: The Origins of American Photography;" Michelle Anne Delaney & Corinne Dune, "Survey of the Hillotype Collection at the National Museum of American History;" Gary Ewer, "The Lost Children of Daguerre;" Grant Romer, "More Light: A New Understanding of the Wolcott Camera and the Life and Achievements of Alexander Wolcott and John Johnston;" Jean-Pierre Spilbauer, "Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and His Diorama;" and Ralph Wiegandt & Patrick Ravines, "The Examination and Conservation of the Cincinnati Waterfront Daguerreotype, and Exciting New Research Happening with Daguerreotypes." On Saturday will be the always excellent Trade Fair; the day will end with the annual banquet and benefit auction. The business meeting will take place on Sunday morning. The symposium will be held at the Kansas City Marriott Country Club Plaza. For more information and to make reservations, visit the Daguerreian Society website at www.daguerre.org.

KEITH DAVIS & THE EXHIBITION

The following is an excerpt from MiPHS member Leonard Walle's conversation with Keith Davis, curator of the exhibition "Developing Greatness: The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885," and its accompanying book. The full version of the in-depth interview with Keith Davis can be read in *The Daguerreian Society Newsletter* 19, no. 3 (July-September 2007): 8-13. It can also be found on the Daguerreian Society website: www.daguerre.org. Reprinted with permission.

L.W. How has the exhibition, "Developing Greatness: The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885," been received so far?

K.D. It has been received wonderfully well. People I take through who know quite a bit about the subject are impressed and pleased and excited about seeing things they haven't seen before and have been very warm and complimentary about it. The other reality is that regular folks who honestly don't know much about this history are also fascinated by the works. And in particular, they are fascinated about the daguerreotypes. On an intuitive level they are simply responding to superb pictures. They also, I think, recognize the humanity represented in those pictures—the life and the vitality that is there, the fact that every one of those things is in essence a chunk of real life. I think that's terrific! It is a little bit of a surprise that a subject that one might think of as a bit esoteric can actually have a broad appeal. And again, I think it is because the pictures are just inherently terrific as pictures; but also, the sense of real humanity there is obvious to people.

L.W. There's a common ground.

K.D. Yes. Yes.

L.W. How did you arrive with the organization of the exhibition?

K.D. With the daguerreotype, we have categories for occupations, the aesthetics of portraiture, outdoor views, the Gold Rush, a small area of postmortems and memorial images, and of course, the very beginning. We have a large section of maker-marked plates and an important grouping of artistic, comic and allegorical works. So, I'd like to think that those different categories do touch the important bases, if you will, for thinking about the period and subject.

L.W. And does the same also go for paper?

K.D. Yes, we have tried to be logical there. We have a group of pre-Civil War prints, and sections devoted to landscape and the West, portraiture, and the Civil War. Toward the end of the show is a grouping of various vernacular forms, stereos, CDV's, tintypes, and so forth. We also have a little section related to science and technology, the use of photographs in albums, and so on. There are other ways you can cut that historical pie, but I think this way is valid.

The exhibition at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City runs through December 30, 2007. Beautifully illustrated with 606 plates, Keith Davis's book *The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885, from Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate* can be purchased through amazon.com.



THE ART OF THE AMERICAN SNAPSHOT

Sabine Ocker

"A **snapshot** is a casual photograph taken without any particular pre-arrangement, often of everyday events or sightseeing excursions. Snapshots are often imperfect or considered amateurish and may be out of focus or poorly framed or composed. However, snapshots document moments in life more 'truthfully'; that is, the photos tend to be more spontaneous and unstaged." *Wikipedia*

📖 The author examines the exhibition catalog.

Although every photographic process tells us about the time in which it was popular, the new exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, called "The Art of the American Snapshot 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson," is the first to focus in a scholarly way on the history and art of the snapshot. The study of snapshots from a photo-historical perspective is still in its infancy, despite tremendous growth in popularity as a collecting area.

The exhibition is ambitious, covering a 90-year period from the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888 up to 1978. There are approximately 250 images in the exhibition, divided into four chronological segments: Photographic Amusements (1888-1919), Quick, Casual, Modern (1920-1939), Fun under the Shade of the Mushroom Cloud (1940-1959), When the Earth Was Square (1960-1978). In addition to being well organized, the exhibition shows off each image to good effect. Snapshots tend to be small, and a challenge to highlight properly. In that sense the museum has set the gold standard. Each segment appears in rooms painted a different color. Matching dark grey and medium blue walls, mats and image surrounds of the first 2 segments make the framed images appear to pop off the walls. Walking through the exhibition, the presentation compels the viewer to examine the details of each image. I overheard someone saying, "Wow, I'm going to look at my family snapshot albums in a whole new light."

Although the scope and presentation of the exhibition are both impressive, by far the most compelling feature is the images themselves. Many are beautiful, others mysterious, and some just plain magical. Some highlights and observations from each time period include a magnificent annotated early Kodak album which includes images of dogs doing tricks and people jumping over fences. Other notable early images include multiple exposures of a tangle of people appearing to fall off a cliff of grass, and pinwheel of a soldier's crossed legs. The strongest section is the one which includes the years 1920-1929, as virtually every image is outstanding. The black woman with her dark hands splayed against a stark white sheet of paper, the tiny woman daintily feeding a giant cow, and my very favorite, two hands holding a cabinet card against the black door of a period automobile against the backdrop of the dark shadow of the photographer. The 1950s period includes the iconic image of a woman covering her face with her hands which serves as the

cover to the catalog, as well as the already infamous *Mary Girow's Cadillac*, imprinted on tiny rice sugar edible "snapshots" which floated in our beverages during the reception. The catalog is available in soft/hardbound from Amazon.com and other booksellers, and in the National Gallery giftshop. I notice something new every time I open it.

In conjunction with the exhibition, which runs from October 7 to December 31, 2007 at the National Gallery West Building, there's also a free snapshot symposium from 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday, November 10. The symposium, presented in three tracks, features prominent speakers for each track: photographer, collector, and scholar. Collectors include William Hunt of New York City and Nick Osborn of Chicago. Scholars include John Ibsen, author of *Picturing Men: A Century of Male Relationships in Everyday American Photography* and Nancy Martha West, author of *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*.

Also worth mentioning is Nick Osborn's snapshot website, *Square America*. Nick curates images from his own collection into theme-based online exhibitions on the site, which recently celebrated its second anniversary. The site name is an allusion to the 3.5 x 3.5 format popular in the 1950s and 60s, but as Nick notes "... in spite of the title, not all of the photos are square, nor are they all American." The web exhibitions run from the quirky to the sublime, and with Nick's characteristic sense of humor represented in their titles. *The Pleasures and Terrors of Youth, Guns! Guns! Guns!* and *Encounters with the Other (Adventures in American Ethnography)* are examples worth checking out at www.squareamerica.com. Nick will be speaking about his website, his collection, and the trends in snapshot collecting at the November symposium at the National Gallery of Art, being held in conjunction with the "Art of the American Snapshot 1888-1978."

Sabine Ocker has been collecting snapshots and snapshot albums for 12 years. She recently traveled to Washington, DC to view "The Art of the American Snapshot 1888-1978" before it opened to the public, and to attend the opening reception gala. Sabine lives in Gloucester, MA.

OUR PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Cynthia Motzenbecker

Hello members!

Hopefully, the summer and fall have been treating you well. Summer just whizzed right on by, didn't it. I may not even know summer was here at all, except for the "farmer's tan" I have.

There are a couple of things that will interest you this fall. First, when sending out the press releases for one of our programs, an email came in reply from a local TV weather person. They're interested in doing a project on identified and dated vintage photos of outdoor views for a local southeast Michigan study of potential weather changes. So, if any of you have anything like this, please let me know. Then we can follow up with them. Sound interesting?

The second thing is that this year's election to the MiPHS board wasn't held for various reasons. So in order to stick to our by-laws, this needs to be done. So please, please, vote and return your ballots. We have several people interested in being on the board, all with various and useful talents. We also are considering having non-voting advisors to the board. And I should mention that if anyone is ever interested in attending any of our board meetings (which can become quite lively at times), they are certainly open to you. Please feel free to let me know and I'll keep you posted

Stay safe, hang up and drive and watch out for the folks that don't!

PHOTO-HISTORY CALENDAR

June 9-December 30: "Developing Greatness: The Origins of American Photography, 1839 to 1885," Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, www.nelson-atkins.org

October 7-December 31: "The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888-1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson," National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, www.nga.gov

November 1-4: Daguerreian Society Symposium & Trade Fair, Kansas City, MO, www.daguerre.org

November 4: Chicago Camera Show & Sale, Radisson Hotel, Schaumburg, IL, www.photorama.com

November 11: London Photograph Fair, Bonnington Hotel, London, www.photofair.co.uk

November 15-18: Paris Photo, Carrousel du Louvre, Paris, France, www.parisphoto.fr

December 1-2: Detroit Camera Show & Sale, Lawson Troy Elks Lodge, Troy, MI, www.photorama.com

December 4: The Photography Show Miami, Association of International Photography Art Dealers (APD), Lynwood Art District, Miami, FL, www.aipad.com

April 10-13: The Photography Show New York, Association of International Photography Art Dealers (APD), Park Avenue Armory, New York, NY, www.aipad.com

NEXT IN THE PHOTOGRAM

Tom Halsted & The Halsted Gallery
by John B. Cameron

