

# SEEING / TIME / IN COLOUR THE CHALLENGES OF PHOTOGRAPHY

EXHIBITION FROM 13.07 TO 18.11.24

GALLERY 2

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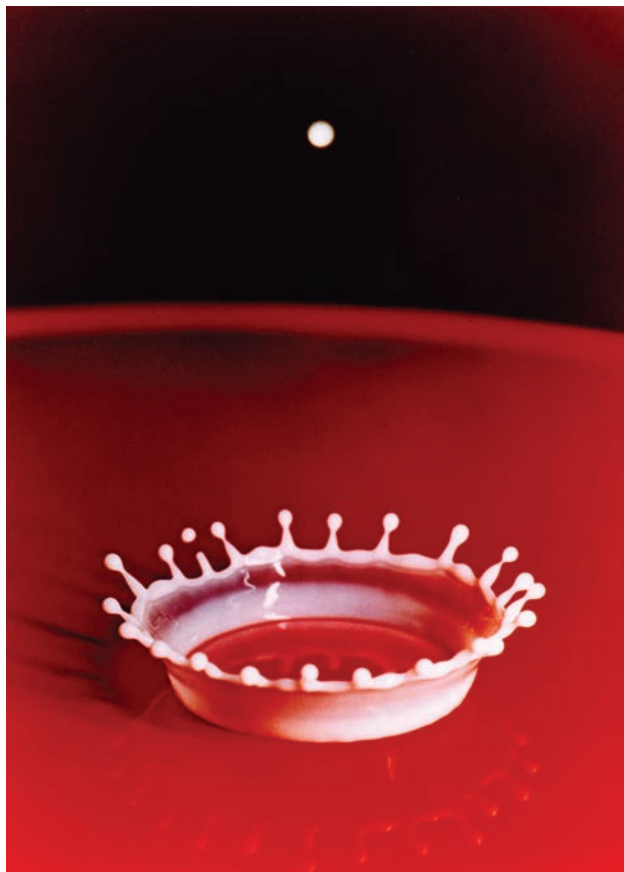
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Every day, except Tuesdays and May 1st

01.11 > 31.03  
MON. | WED. | THU. | FR. | SAT. | SUN. | 10 am – 6 pm

MON. | WED. | THU. | 10 am – 6 pm  
FR. | SAT. | SUN. | 10 am – 7 pm



Harold Edgerton, *Milk drop coronet*, 1957, 50,8 x 40,64 cm Dye-Transfer  
Collection Arlette et Gus Kayafas © Harold Edgerton/MIT, courtesy Palm Press, Inc., from the Kayafas

**SEEING / TIME / IN COLOUR  
THE CHALLENGES OF PHOTOGRAPHY**  
From 13 July to 18 November 2024 - Gallery 2  
Curator: Sam Stourdzé

From July 13 to November 18, 2024, the Centre Pompidou-Metz is featuring photography in all its forms in the exhibition *Seeing / Time / In Colour*. It is curated by leading photography specialist Sam Stourdzé, who is currently director of the Villa Médicis in Rome and was formerly director of *Les Rencontres d'Arles* from 2014 to 2020 and the *Musée de l'Élysée* in Lausanne from 2010 to 2014. The exhibition brings together around 250 works and 50 photographers, offering a unique overview of the major technical challenges that have marked the history of the discipline. It will provide an opportunity to discover exceptional works: from very rare plates showing the restoration of masterpieces from the Italian Renaissance to rarely exhibited seascapes by Gustave Le Gray and autochrome plates from the collection of Albert Kahn recreated for the exhibition.

Optical and mechanical features, chemical procedures, innovative physical properties: for a long time, technology was lumped together with the objective sciences. However, more than just a simple means of photographic production, its developments have paved the way for, or given rise to, all of its most important artistic revolutions.

Divided into three sections, the exhibition examines key issues connected with the reproduced image, the origins of photography, the rise of the snapshot, which enabled the discipline to be considered “modern”, as well as its relationship to colour, a pivotal development that led to an unprecedented democratisation of the practice. In each of these three sections, the photographic work of a particular iconic figure will be showcased: Constantin Brancusi, who hijacked the reproducible function of the image in order to produce hundreds of photographic interpretations of his sculptures; Harold Edgerton, who, in the 1950s, fixed time in the image eventually causing it to break down; and Saul Leiter and Helen Levitt, pioneers of colour photography who through their use of areas of colour transformed reality into a poetic form. Around these figures will emerge a multitude of other artists who have explored unknown facets of photography.

Interweaving periods, the exhibition will bring together the pioneering works of 19th- and 20th-century photographers and those of contemporary artists, from Hans Peter Feldmann, who revisits the camera obscura with his installation *Shadow Play* as an inaugural form of the reproduced image, to Dove Allouche, Ann Veronica Janssens, Laure Tiberghien and Hugo Deverchère, whose works highlight, throughout the exhibition, the many paths that are still being opened up, even today, by the technical manipulations of the medium.

### **Infinite reproduction**

The historic essay written by Walter Benjamin in 1935, *The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction*, laid the foundations for the great challenge posed for all of the arts of the 19th century by the emergence of photography: the possibility of immediate and infinite reproduction undermined the work of art's unique sacred status. Although the concept of reproduction is central to the photographic process, artists have continually sought to reinvent it, formally and conceptually. Constantin Brancusi, the first great figure in the exhibition, photography was not a way of documenting his works, but rather an embodiment of his thinking about his sculptures. The multiple views that he made of his works in the studio reveal his interest in *mise en scène*, in which no detail was left to chance, from the position of the base to the lighting and the choice of background colours for controlling the light.

From the outset, photography was used as a way of objectivising reality. By making accessible what had up until then eluded the realm of observation, it turned out to be a unique tool for documenting, disseminating and encouraging the great conquests of modern western history. Thanks to the Bisson brothers, who took nearly a thousand panoramic views of mountain chains between 1858 and 1862, the mountain and its peaks, previously hostile or simply unknown places, were now within reach of the image.

In parallel, astronomical views multiplied, notably under the impetus of the Henry brothers, who in 1884 produced the first map of the sky, and took numerous photographs of planets, stars and astronomical phenomena, which were widely distributed among the scientific community and the general public. In this respect, the iconic photographs of Nasa's space conquests in the 1960s, rarely shown in France, are a reminder of the extent to which photography structures our imaginations as much as it serves a political objective. Another conquest, that of the realm of the infinitely small, saw photography supplant the microscope. Little by little, it left the realm of the sciences and became a form of visual experimentation, epitomised in particular by the photographer Laure Albin Guillot who in 1931 unequivocally renamed it "decorative micrography".

### **Encapsulating time**

The most radical transformation in photography was the mastery of the snapshot, achieved for the first time in 1841 with the first negative/positive process in history. In 1856, thanks to a much shorter shutter speed, Gustave Le Gray was able to take his famous *Seascapes [Marines]*, photographic landscapes of oceans captured on the spot and whose picturesque aesthetic adopted the conventions of landscape painting. With the arrival of the snapshot, our entire relationship to the tool was transformed: photography was no longer simply a means of obtaining an image that was planned in advance, but rather an end in itself, leading to a dizzyingly infinite number of possibilities. There remained one challenge for it to overcome: in order to capture a dense, cloudy sky, the sea had to be under-exposed, thus appearing too dark; in the opposite case, the sky, over-exposed, would disappear. To get around this, Gustave Le Gray produced the first manipulated images, the first photomontages in history, by combining one negative for the sea with another for the sky. He thus obtained a perfectly density, from sea to sky.

In the context of the technical modernity of the late 19th-century, glorified by speed, the exactness and precision of these new processes paved the way for a variety of experiments. In the United States and France, the pioneering work of the physicists Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey transformed our understanding of human and animal physiology.

## ARTISTS

BERENICE ABBOTT  
LAURE ALBIN GUILLOT  
DOVE ALLOUCHE  
JAMES ANDERSON  
FRÈRES BISSON  
CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI  
BRAUN CLÉMENT & CIE  
LÉON BUSY  
PAUL CASTELNAU  
GEORGES CHEVALIER  
FERNAND CUVILLE  
GEORGES DEMENÏ  
EGDAR DEGAS  
HENRI DESLANDRES  
HUGO DEVERCHÈRE  
LOUIS DUCOS DU HAURON  
HAROLD EDGERTON  
WILLIAM EGGLESTON  
FRATELLI ALLINARI  
HANS PETER FELDMAN  
ACHILLE FERRARIO  
FRÉDÉRIC GADMER  
FERNAND VALENTIN GOSSART  
GOUPEL & CIE  
PHILIPPE HALSMAN  
FRÈRES HENRY  
ANN VERONICA JANSSENS  
GUSTAVE LE GRAY  
SAUL LEITER  
AUGUSTE LÉON  
HELEN LEVITT  
ALBERT LONDE  
ÉTIENNE-JULES MAREY  
JOËL MEYEROWITZ  
YEVONDE MIDDLETON  
ABELARDO MORELL  
EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE  
JEAN PAINLEVÉ  
STÉPHANE PASSET  
AUGUSTE PONSOT  
GERHARD RICHTER  
WILHELM RÖNTGEN  
THOMAS RUFF  
CAMILLE SAUVAGEOT  
STEPHEN SHORE  
EDWARD STEICHEN  
HIROSHI SUGIMOTO  
LAURE TIBERGHIAN

With the chronophotograph, invented by Étienne-Jules Marey in 1882, it was possible to record a series of successive images, taken at a thousandth of a second, on a single surface, thus revealing the imperceptible trajectory of bodies in movement. The revolution extended well beyond the realm of photography, serving the visual arts – it preceded by nearly 30 years the experiments of the Futurists, and opened the way to proto-cinema – as well as medicine and the physical and natural sciences.

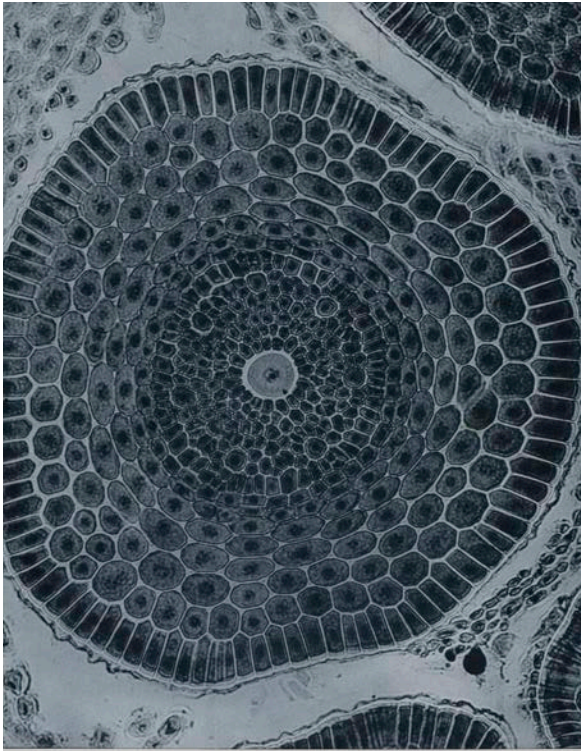
Artists and scientists worked together to push back the limits of the visible. Harold Edgerton, a professor of electrical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), used his stroboscopic flash device to push the photograph to its furthest limits. The falling drop of milk he managed to capture, at the precise second when it hit a flat surface, reflected his desire to expose the passage of time. He became obsessed with this quest, devoting two decades to it, from the first crown formed by a splash that he produced in 1936, to the brightly coloured version in 1957, which is striking in its immense visual clarity. Here, at last, was one of photography's great achievements: encapsulating time.

### Fixing colour

The ultimate challenge was to capture colour. As testified by the humanist utopia of the banker Albert Kahn, who wanted to create an archive of the planet, colour was initially the preserve of scientists, from the pioneering experiments of Louis Ducos du Hauron, who took the first colour photograph in history in 1877, to the dazzling success of autochrome plates in the first quarter of the 20th century. In the 1930s, with Yevonde Middleton, a pioneer of colour photography in England, it acquired burlesque, eccentric and, for the first time, feminist aesthetic qualities. Thanks in part to Saul Leiter, one of the greatest colour photographers, it became a photographic style in its own right. He declared: 'Painting is glorious. I love photography, but I'm not sure photography can do what painting can.' And yet, he rendered in colour what few had managed to convey before him. Playing with large areas of colour and often monochrome palettes, Leiter worked colour in a body of work that anticipated Helen Levitt, William Eggleston, Joel Meyerowitz and Stephen Shore, even though, paradoxically, he was only celebrated for his achievements after them.

Seeing / time / in colour: three periods when technological advances made it possible to capture on paper the great achievements of photography: reproducing an image, capturing time and fixing colour. Like utopias conquered anew each time, photography reminds us of its importance in the discovery of the world as we know it. It enables us to see, and asserts its political and societal subjectivity. We take it for granted, sometimes forgetting that capturing the image of the world is also a technical challenge, and above all, an infinite source of inspiration for artists.

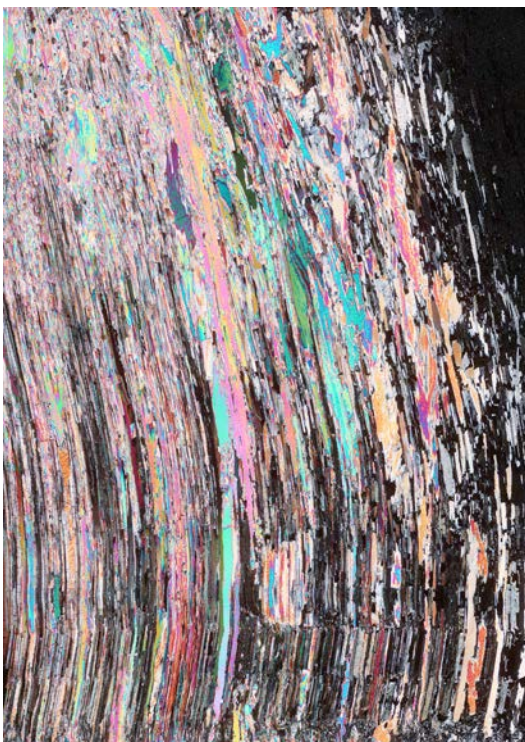
# SEEING



Laure Albin Guillot, *Untitled*, from the album  
"Micrographies décoratives", 1931, heliogravure, 41.6 x 35.9 cm  
Chalon-sur-Saône, Musée Nicéphore Niépce inv. MNN 2006.30



Goupil & Cie,  
*The Mona Lisa, reproduction of a painting*, 1864,  
albumen print, 25 x 17 cm  
Paris, Musée d'Orsay  
PHO 1991 12 274



Dove Allouche,  
*Evaporite\_19*, 2019,  
Lambda silver print  
from a thin slide taken  
from a block of gypsum, 175 x 125 cm  
Paris, private collection © Photo Dove Allouche

# TIME



Gustave Le Gray  
*The Great Wave at Sète, no. 17*  
Photograph on albumen paper, 1857  
Collection of the Musée barrois, Bar-le-Duc.  
Inv. prov. 14.01.30.1 Photo: Musée barrois / N. Leblanc

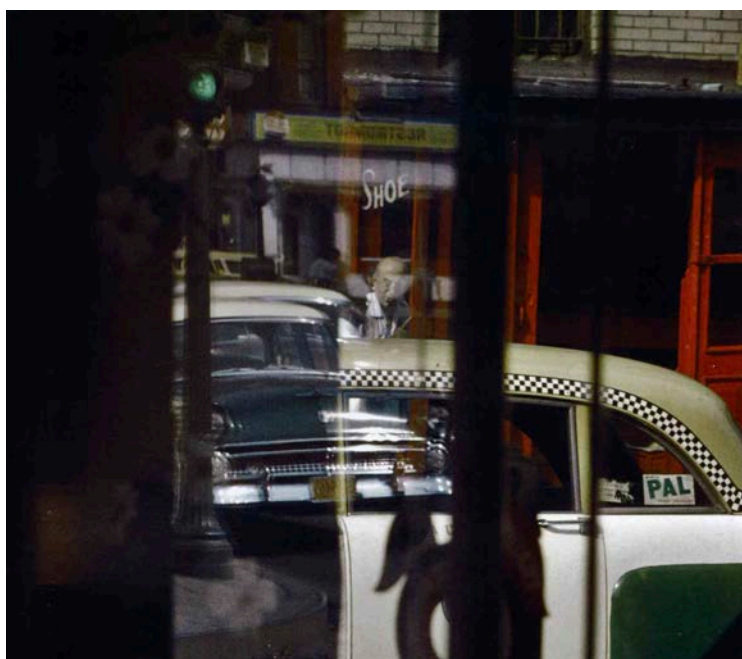


Harold Edgerton, *Batterman Dives*, 1955  
dye-transfer, 50,8 x 40,64 cm, Boston,  
Collection Arlette et Gus Kayafas  
© Harold Edgerton/MIT, courtesy Palm Press,  
Inc., from the Kayafas Collection

# IN COLOUR



Léon Busy for  
"Les Archives de la Planète", *Tonkin*, 1915  
autochrome, 12 x 9 cm  
Boulogne-Billancourt, Musée Départemental Albert-Kahn



Saul Leiter, *Untitled*, 1956  
Vintage print / ilfochrome  
35.4 x 27.8 cm  
Collection Florence & Damien Bachelot