

Daguerreotype: "Smiling Woman," by Samuel Root, New York

(keywords: Samuel Root, Marcus A. Root, smiling woman, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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EWER ARCHIVE D0000004

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Samuel Root, *Smiling Woman*
Quarter-plate daguerreotype, ca. 1854
Collection of Gary W. Ewer

The sitter's position should be unconstrained and perfectly easy. . . . The sitter's age should also be considered. For example, the appearance of the elderly should be calm and sedate, instead of spirited. . . . The head should be easily and gracefully turned to the right or the left,—not too high or too low, but so as to express intellect or meaning in lieu of constraint. . . . The eyes should be directed a little farther to the left or right, than the face. . . . The hands of a lady may rest easily upon the lap, and should be presented edgewise neither too high nor too low, which will give them a small, delicate appearance. . . . One hand or arm may be laid upon a table. . . . I think a pretty hand is much the prettiest when empty.¹

The author's brother, Samuel Root, faultlessly applies these instructions in the art of portraiture (as would be later recorded in M. A. Root's text.) Everything about this portrait is formulaic. All details have received proper attention and nothing has been left to chance. Yet all the formulae could not have produced the striking result herein; only the lively humanity of the sitter could contribute the character such as what leaps from the surface of this quarter-plate daguerreotype.

—Gary W. Ewer

1. Marcus A. Root, "Hints Upon Sitting—Ease and Grace in a Portrait," *The Camera and the Pencil: or the Heliographic Art, its Theory and Practice in all its Various Branches* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864): 105–6.

The graphic is also available in JPG format:

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/dags/D0000004_ROOT_SMILING-WOMAN.html

EDITOR'S NOTES:

For two advertisements by Samuel Root, see *Ewer Archive A8520001: Advertisements for Gurney, Root, Brady, Morand, Brown, 30 October 1852*;¹ *Ewer Archive B8590001: Advertisements for Anson, Gurney, Root, Fredricks, 1859*.²

Samuel Root exhibited at the 1853 New York Crystal Palace a "collection of large crayon daguerreotypes, and daguerreotypes by the ordinary process."³

Samuel Root's artistic ability is also evident in a sixth-plate of a young girl now in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society, and is viewable on their web-accessible collection inventory. (Unidentified girl. Sixth plate. From the Scattering Collection. Bust length portrait of young girl in dark off shoulder dress with hand clasped to chest and head tipped slightly right. Stamp on gold liner reads: "S. Root, 363 Broadway. N.Y." [scan #003580-0218]).⁴

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/advert/A8520001_ADVERT_LANTERN_1852-10-30.pdf

2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/advert/B8590001_ADVERT_CARROLLS_1859.pdf

3. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8530003_CATALOGUE_NY-CRYSTAL_1853.pdf

4. <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Inventories/daguerreotypesu.htm>

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A high-resolution TIF-format file may be available. Contact the Archive for details.

Prepared from: original daguerreotype the collection of Gary W. Ewer.

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